

2026-04

The Effectiveness of Conflict Early Warning Systems in Ethiopia: The Case of Ataye Town, North Shewa Administrative Zone, Amhara National Regional State

Asnake, Negesse

<http://ir.bdu.edu.et/handle/123456789/17319>

Downloaded from DSpace Repository, DSpace Institution's institutional repository



BAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY
Institute of Disaster Risk Management and Food Security
Studies,
Department of Disaster Risk Management and
Sustainable Development

Dissertation on:
The Effectiveness of Conflict Early Warning Systems in
Ethiopia: The Case of Ataye Town, North Shewa
Administrative Zone, Amhara National Regional State

By: Negesse Asnake Ayalew

April 2026

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

BAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY
Institute of Disaster Risk Management and Food Security
Studies,
Department of Disaster Risk Management and
Sustainable Development

Dissertation on:
The Effectiveness of Conflict Early Warning Systems in
Ethiopia: The Case of Ataye Town, North Shewa
Administrative Zone, Amhara National Regional State

By: Negesse Asnake Ayalew

A Dissertation Submitted to Bahir Dar University, Institute of Disaster
Risk Management and Food Security Studies in the Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for a PhD Degree in Disaster Risk Sciences

Advisors: 1. Dr. Feleke Tadele (Principal Advisor)

2. Dr. Adane Tesefaye (Co- Advisor)

April 2026

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

DECLARATION

I , the undersigned declare that the Dissertation entitled “**The Effectiveness of Conflict Early Warning Systems in Ethiopia: The Case of Ataye Town, North Shewa Administrative Zone, Amhara National Regional State**” is my own original work, This research is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Disaster Risk Sciences**, Department of Disaster Risk Management and Sustainable Development, Institute of Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Studies, Bahir Dar University.

I further certify that this work has not been previously submitted, either in part or in full, to this or any other institution for the award of any degree or professional qualification. All sources of information used and contributions received during the course of this investigation have been appropriately acknowledged and cited.

Negesse Asnake Ayalew

13/4/2026

Bahir Dar,Ethiopia

Name of the candidate

Date

Place

BAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY

Institute of Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Studies,

**Department of Disaster Risk Management and Sustainable
Development**

Approval of Dissertation for Defense

I hereby certify that I have supervised, read, and evaluated this dissertation titled “**The Effectiveness of Conflict Early Warning Systems in Ethiopia: The Case of Ataye Town, North Shewa Administrative Zone, Amhara National Regional State**” by Negesse Asnake Ayalew prepared under my guidance. I recommend the dissertation be submitted for oral defense.

Dr. Feleke Tadele



16/4/ 2026

Advisor's name

Signature

Date

Dr. Adane Tesfaye



16/4/2026

Co-Advisor's name

Signature

Date

BAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY

Institute of Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Studies,

Department of Disaster Risk Management and Sustainable
Development

Approval of Dissertation for Defense Result

As members of the the board of examiners, we examined this dissertation entitled ‘**The Effectiveness of Conflict Early Warning Systems in Ethiopia: The Case of Ataye Town, North Shewa Administrative Zone, Amhara National Regional State_**’ by **Negesse Asnake Ayalew**. We hereby certify that the dissertation is accepted for fulfilling the requirements for the award of the degree of “**Doctor of Philosophy in Disaster Risk Sciences**”.

Board of Examiners

Prof. Habtamu Wondimu (Dr)

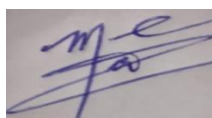
15/6/2026

External examiner’s

Signature

Date

Asso/Pro. Mossa Endris (Dr)



15/6/2026

Internal examiner’s

Signature

Date

Dr. Muluneh Getaneh

15/6/2026

Chair person’s

Signature

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Primarily, I really appreciate the genuine gratitude of my dissertation supervisors, Dr. Feleke Tadele and Dr. Adane Tesfaye. Their most precious feedback, encouragement, and technical guidance have influenced my dissertation very much. Their dedication to mentoring and their diligent critiques have profoundly influenced not only my career but also my life.

I also recognize appreciation to Bahir Dar University and Ethiopian Police University for their sponsorship, which facilitated me to carry out this dissertation. The sponsorship serves to confirm the worth of scholarly partnership and investment in research targeting critical issues in society.

I recognize institutions that provided me with access to data vital to carrying out my dissertation. I am thankful to the Federal and Regional Disaster Risk Management Commissions, Ministry of Justice, Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) Justice Bureau, the Federal and Regional Police Commissions, the House of Federation, the Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Peace, and the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS)Peace and Security Administration Bureau especially the conflict prevention and resolution department, which help me to collect relevant data. Moreover, thank you to interview, focus group discussion, questionnaire participants.

Finally, I would like to express gratitude to my colleagues, family, and friends for their ever-present support throughout my study period. Their encouraging words and patience in difficult times have been invaluable. They have been beacons of hope to me, driving me forward.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this dissertation. Their kindness to give information regarding their experience and knowledge has been very important to make this dissertation a success. It was not possible to conduct this dissertation without their contributions. Their account has added depth and realism to my research, and I am very much grateful for their time and willingness.

ARTICLE PUBLICATION AND CONFERENCE

Published Articles

1. **The Triple Nexus of Peace, Security, and Disaster Risk Management Actors for Conflict Prevention: The Case of Ataye, North Shewa, Ethiopia.** *IDRiM Journal*
DOI: [10.5595/001c.145196].
2. **Conflict Risk Monitoring for Conflict Prevention in Ethiopia: The Case of Ataye Town, North Shewa, Amhara Region** *International Journal of Disaster Risk Management* DOI: [10.18485/ijdrm.2025.7.1.10]
3. **Policing Law for Disaster Risk Response in Ethiopia: The case of COVID-19.**
International Journal of Disaster Risk Management, 7(2), 405-416.
<https://doi.org/10.18485/ijdrm.2025.7.2.22>.

Conference Presentation Certificates

1. **"Integration of Disaster Risk Management Actors in Ethiopia"**
Presented at the 5th African Graduate Student Conference, Bahir Dar University (BDU)
2. **"Conflict Early Warning System for Peacebuilding in Ethiopia"**
Presented at the School of Law, Bahir Dar University (BDU)
3. **"Early Warning for Disaster Risk Management (DRM)"**
Presented at the International Conference organized by INTERPA, India
4. **"Conflict Risk Knowledge for Conflict Prevention in Ethiopia"**
Seminar presentation at Bahir Dar University, Disaster Risk Management and Sustainable Development program

TABLES OF CONTENTS	Pages
DECLARATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ARTICLE PUBLICATION AND CONFERENCE	vii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	xiii
GLOSSARIES	xvi
ABSTRACT	xix
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Background of the Study	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem	4
1.3. Objectives of the Study	6
1.3.1. General objective	6
1.3.2. Specific Objectives	6
1.4. Research Questions	7
1.5. Scope of the Study	7
1.6. Significance of the Study	8
1.7. Organization of the Study	9
1.8. Operational Definition of Key Terms	9
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	11
2.1. Concept of Conflict Early Warning System	11
2.2. Conflict Risk Knowledge	12
2.3. Conflict Risk Monitoring	18
2.4. Conflict Risk Communication	21
2.5. Conflict Early Response Capacity	23
2.6. Theoretical and Conceptual frameworks	36
2.6.1. Theoretical Frameworks	36
2.6.2. Conceptual Framework	39
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	44
3.1. Description of the Study Area	44
3.2. Research Philosophy	50
3.3. The Research Approach and Design	51
3.4. Target Population of the Study	52
3.5. Sampling Techniques and Size	53
3.6. Data Collection Techniques	54
3.7. Presentation of Data and Analysis	58
3.8. Validity and Reliability of the Study	61
3.9. Ethical Consideration	63
3.10. Socio-Demographic Variables	64
3.11. Limitations of the Study	66
CHAPTER FOUR: CONFLICT RISK KNOWLEDGE OF ATAYE TOWN	67
4.1. Vulnerability of Ataye Town	67
4.2. Threats of Ataye Town	92

4.3. Pattern of Armed Conflict (Disaster)	102
4.4. Summary of Findings	122
CHAPTER FIVE: CONFLICT RISK MONITORING IN ATAYE TOWN	124
5.1. Conflict Indicators	124
5.2. Actors of Conflict Monitoring	129
5.3. Conflict Monitoring Process	138
5.4. Summary of Findings	149
CHAPTER SIX: CONFLICT RISK COMMUNICATION OF ATAYE TOWN	151
6.1. Conflict Communication Plan	151
6.2. Conflict Communication Tactic	153
6.3. Summary of Findings	168
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONFLICT EARLY RESPONSE ACTORS IN ATAYE TOWN	170
7.1. Disaster Risk Management Actors	170
7.2. Security Actors	173
7.3. Peace Actors	185
7.4. Summary of Findings	205
CHAPTER EIGHT: EFFECTS OF EARLY WARNING ON EARLY RESPONSE	207
8.1. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis	207
8.2. Summary of Findings	217
CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	219
9.1. Conclusion	219
9.2. Recommendations	223
REFERENCES	227
ANNEXES	238
Annex 1: Data Collection (Questionnaires & KII) tools	238
Annex 2: Profile of Interview and FGD Participants	246

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Sample Size of Questionnaires Respondents.....	55
Table 2- Distribution of Response Rate by the Number of Respondents	56
Table 3 Number of Key Informant Interview Participants	57
Table 4 : Reliability Analysis	63
Table 5 Distribution of Socio-Demographic Background of the Respondents	64
Table 6 : The Lack of a Compensation for Victims Drives Conflict.....	70
Table 7 : The Ethnic-Based Federal System Contributes to Conflict Escalation	72
Table 8 : Historical Grievances are Responsible for the Conflict	75
Table 9 : Territorial Boundary is a Factor of Conflict	79
Table 10: Manipulation of Ethnic Identity for Political Gain.....	81
Table 11: The Presence of Informal Armed Groups Escalates Violence	83
Table 12: The Increasing Militarization of Society Escalates Violence.....	86
Table 13 : Competition over Land, Water, and Grass Leads to Conflict.....	88
Table 14: Ineffective Governance or Weak Law Enforcement Causes Conflict.....	91
Table 15 : Ethnic Extremism is a Catalyst in Inter-Ethnic Conflict	95
Table 16: Firearm Trafficking Escalates the Conflict in Ataye.....	98
Table 17 : Social Media Users Escalate the Conflict.....	101
Table 18 : The 2018 Conflict was Between Pro- and Anti-Political Reform Factions.....	105
Table 19 : The 2019 Conflict was an Amhara and Oromo Inter-Ethnic Conflict.....	109
Table 20 : The 2020 Conflict Had Involved the Amhara Regional Special Police Force and Ethnic Oromo Groups	111
Table 21 : The 2021 Conflict Was between Inter-Religious Groups rather than Inter-Ethnic Groups.....	116
Table 22 : 2022 Was a 'No War and No Peace' Year in Ataye.....	118
Table 23 : In 2023, the Conflict Was an Inter-Ethnic Conflict.....	120
Table 24: The Peace Committee Effectively Monitors Indicators of Conflict	130
Table 25 : The Inter-Religion Council Effectively Monitors Indicators of Conflict.....	132
Table 26 : The Field Monitor Effectively Monitors Indicators of Inter-Ethnic Conflict.....	137
Table 27 : Data Collected From Multi Sources	140
Table 28 : Scientifically Mixed Methods Are Effective For Conflict Analysis	144
Table 29 : Scientific Data Analysis Tools Are Effective For Monitoring.....	146
Table 30 : Warnings Guidance is Issued on Time	149
Table 31 : Ethiopia Peace Actors Communicate Based On a Formal Communication Plan	152

Table 32 : Information Disseminated Through Multiple Channels and Languages	156
Table 33: Conflict Communicated Clearly, Credibly, and Accurately to the Public	162
Table 34 : The Media Framing of Conflict Issues De-Escalates the Conflict	165
Table 35 : A Two-Way Communication System Used for Verifying Conflict Information .	167
Table 36: Distribution of Participants' Views on the DRM Council	172
Table 37 : The Security Council Effectiveness to Respond the Conflict	175
Table 38 : Security Task Force Effectiveness in Conflict Response	177
Table 39 : <i>De Facto</i> Command Post Effectiveness in Conflict Management	181
Table 40 : De Jure Command Post Effectiveness in Conflict Response	184
Table 41 : Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms were Effective	189
Table 42 : House of Federation's Effectiveness in Conflict Resolution	191
Table 43 : Assessment of Ministry of Peace's for Inter-Ethnic Conflict in Ataye.....	195
Table 44 : The Criminal Justice System Ensures Rule of Law.....	199
Table 45 Friedman Test Results	200
Table 46 Comparison of the 9 Conflict Early Response Actors.....	201
Table 47 : Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test with Bonferroni Correction	202
Table 48 Friedman Test Results for Early Response.....	202
Table 49 Model Summary	212
Table 50 : ANOVA.....	212
Table 51 : Coefficients.....	214
Table 52 : Key Informant Interview Participants Demography.....	246
Table 53 : FGD 1 Participant Demographics.....	247
Table 54 : FGD 2 Participant Demographics.....	247
Table 55 : FGD 3 Participant Demographics.....	247
Table 56 : FGD 4 Participant Demographics.....	247

LIST OF FIGUERS

Figure 1 Pattern of Political Conflict in Ethiopia	13
Figure 2 Amhara Ethnic Group Attacking Outside Amhara Region in Ethiopia	16
Figure 3 Organizational Structure of Ministry of Peace in Ethiopia	32
Figure 4 : Amhara Regional Government Conflict Early Warning System	33
Figure 5 Conceptual Framework of Effective Conflict Early Warning System	43
Figure 6 Map of the Study Area	50
Figure 7: Pattern of Ataye town conflict from 2018 to 2023.....	122

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AOR	Adjusted Odds Ratio
Art	Article
AT	Ataye Town
ATV	Amhara Television
AU	African Union
B	Unstandardized Beta Coefficient
BG	Breusch-Godfrey Test
BP	Breusch-Pagan Test
CEW	Conflict Early Warning
CEWARN	Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism
CER	Conflict Early Response
CI	Confidence Interval
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CJSE	Criminal Justice System of Ethiopia
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CRM	Conflict Resolution Mechanisms
CSA	Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia
DCP	De Facto Command Post
DJCP	De Jure Command Post
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committees
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRMC	Disaster Risk Management Council
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DW	Durbin-Watson Test
EBC	Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation
ECC	Emergency Coordination Center
EF	Ethnic Federalism
EPCO	Ethiopian Peace Council
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ER	Early Response
EW	Early Warning
EWS	Early Warning System
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FM	Feedback Mechanisms

GADAA	Gadaa Traditional Governance System
GQ	Goldfeld-Quandt Test
HOF	House of Federation
HPR	House of Peoples' Representatives
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
ICPs	Incident Command Posts
ICRM	Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IDRM	Integrated Disaster Risk Management
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	Inter-Religious Council
KII	Key Informant Interview
KS	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test
LB	Ljung-Box Test
LRRD	Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development
MAC	Multi-Agency Coordination
MIRA	The Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment
MOP	Ministry of Peace
MRG	Monitoring-Response Gap
NDRMC	National Disaster Risk Management Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service
NSC	Ethiopian National Security Council
OCHA	Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OMN	Oromo Media Network
PC	Peace Committees and Clubs
QQ	Quantile-Quantile Plot
SC	Security Council
SD	Standard Deviation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SF	Security Forces

SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
STF	Security Task Force
SW	Shapiro-Wilk Test
TCRM	Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms
TPLF	Tigray People Liberation Front
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISDRR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WB	World Bank
WRG	Warning-Response Gap
WT	White Test
β	Standardized Beta Coefficient
χ^2	Chi-Square Statistic

GLOSSARIES'

Term	Definition
Abba Gadaa	Traditional leader (head, president) in the Oromo community according to the Gadaa system, the age and generation set governance system of the Oromo.
Abuna	Head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.
Anja	Faction .
Abyotawi Saddam	Revolutionary Fire.
Askari	Indigenous troops in the service of Europeans (orig. Swahili term) .
Awurājā gezāte	Sub-province governorate (under the Imperial Ethiopia administration; provincial governorate under the Derg administration) .
Azemāče	During Imperial Ethiopia, a vanguard leader or military commander acting as the Monarch's representative in different parts of the country .
Bālābāte	Local noble man (nobility) who acts as an intermediary of the central Imperial government.
Bāhere-zāfe	Eucalyptus tree (Amharic: ባሕር ዳታ) .
Česañā	Tenant farmer, sharecropper .
Derg	The military committee formed in 1974 in Ethiopia which ended imperial rule; by extension, the socialist government in power from 1974 to 1991. Also referred to as the junta or 'committee' .
‘Edere	Mutual aid association of a neighborhood for burial and mourning.
’Eqube	Mutual aid/credit association in which members meet at stated intervals and contribute a fixed sum, after which a member selected by drawing lots receives the total contributions (less the chair's fee) .
Fano	(In Amhara community) an individual or group of individuals who volunteer to give time and exert effort for a community cause, especially in the form of fighting off a threat to the community.
Fukara	Traditional war chant .
Gabāre	Tribute-paying local farmer who provide to the Bālābāte and the nafetañā-turned-privileged hereditary class with determined amounts of services and produce .
Kebele (Qabalé)	The lowest administrative unit of the state in Ethiopia, similar to a ward or a localized and delimited group of people. It is part of a woreda (district) and consists of at least five hundred families .
Kelele	The Regional administration or federating units of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Kebra Nagast	The book of the Glory of Kings (Ge'ez) .
Leyu Qabalé	(Under the current state structure) Special Kebele, a Kebele given autonomous status as part of the exercise of self-determination right of territorially concentrated minorities within a district (waradā) .
Leyu Waradā	(Under the current state structure) Special District, a district given autonomous status as part of the exercise of self-determination right of territorially concentrated minorities within a Zonal administration (Zone).
Leyu Zone	(Under the current state structure) Special Zone, a Zonal administration given autonomous status for territorially concentrated minorities within a Regional State (Region) .
Ma'ikal	Centre .
Ma'ison/Meison	Amharic acronym for the 'All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement' party .
Makwanent	Nobility .
Madamare	Literally translates as 'addition' or 'coming together'; represents the political philosophy emphasizing synergy, unity, collaboration, pulling resources together, love, forgiveness, reconciliation and teamwork .
Nafetañā	Literally meaning 'gunslinger', denotes settler-soldiers during the imperial government of Ethiopia.
Natsa Ermeja	Summary execution.
Negus	Emperor .
OroMara/Oro-Mara	A recently coined term to denote the alliance between political elites in ANDM and OPDO that brought Abiy Ahmed to the premiership in April 2018, ending decades of TPLF's hegemonic place .
Qay Fana	Red Flame .
Qeerroo	(In Afan Oromo) literally means a young or unmarried person. In the post-2014 political movement it symbolizes the Oromo youth movement for increased political freedom and greater ethnic representation in the federal government .
Shamma	Traditional cloth.
Sheger	Pop name for the city of Addis Ababa.
Shemgelena (Shimgilina)	The process of mediation and reconciliation to resolve conflicts between different parties, from the word 'elder' (Shimagele) - one might translate as 'eldering' .
Shengo	Ethiopian parliament under the Derg .
Tabot	A sacred replica of the Ark of the Covenant .
Taraba Buden	Killing squad.

Tewahedo	In 'Orthodox Tewahedo Christianity', Miaphysitism, the dogma asserting that Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human in one 'nature' .
Tur	Wrong done to someone which also may befall the wrongdoer; a revolting action [which God will punish]; unrighteous action toward another person(s) .
Waradā gezāte	District-governorate.
Wereda (Wonedā)	Administrative district or lower level of administration .
Ya’asetadādare wasane	Administrative boundary.
Zamana mesafinet (Zamana masāfenete)	The Era of Princes, a period in Ethiopian history between the mid-18th and mid-19th centuries when the country was divided into several de facto autonomous regions with no effective central authority .
Zone	The second administrative division of a regional state under the current Ethiopian state structure

ABSTRACT

Early warning systems serve as the eyes and ears in conflict risk management. This study examines the effectiveness of the Ethiopia Conflict Early Warning System (CEWS), with a specific focus on conflicts in Ataye Town, located in the North Shewa Zone of the Amhara Region. Using a mixed-methods research approach and a sequential exploratory design, the study targeted several groups, including peace actors, security personnel, disaster risk management officials, and the communities within Ataye Town. Data were collected from 385 respondents who completed questionnaires using stratified simple random sampling. In addition, the study engaged 39 purposively selected interviewees and 32 focus group discussion participants. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, while quantitative data were processed using percentages, means, standard deviations, the Friedman Test, and linear regression. The findings indicate that first, regarding conflict risk knowledge, vulnerability factors including unresolved victimization (90%), ethnic federalism (75.8%), informal armed groups (66.6%), resource competition (66.3%), poor law enforcement and boundary disputes (63.7%), and historical grievances (61.1%) significantly contribute to conflict, with ethnic extremism (86.1%) and firearm trafficking (58.4%) identified as primary threats. Second, concerning conflict monitoring, the study reveals a significant lack of uniform indicators among monitoring actors, with varying agreement levels across inter-religious councils (76%), peace committees (61%), peace clubs (53%), and field monitors (55%), and while data were scientifically analyzed, warning mechanisms proved very weak. Third, with respect to conflict communication, the study found that communication exacerbates rather than mitigates tensions due to inaccessibility (73.7%), low media coverage (64.7%), lack of planning (54.7%), insufficient credibility (40.3%), inadequate two-way communication (45%), and polarized narratives that deepen inter-ethnic mistrust. Fourth, regarding early response actors, effectiveness varied considerably, with traditional conflict resolution mechanisms scoring highest (6.82), followed by De Jure Command Post (6.54), Security Council (6.21), Ministry of Peace (5.87), DRM Council (4.95), Security Task Force (4.78), Criminal Justice System (4.12), House of Federation (3.45), and De Facto Command Post (3.26). Fifth, concerning the effect of early warning on early response, regression analysis revealed that conflict communication, monitoring, and risk knowledge collectively account for 69% of response effectiveness, yet a persistent gap between warning and response remains, indicating that early warning does not consistently translate into timely and effective early response due to structural, institutional, and political barriers. Therefore, the Ministry of Peace should establish a dedicated Conflict Communication Department, and the criminal justice system must ensure the rule of law on the masterminds behind these conflicts. The House of People's Representatives should also pass legislation that integrates peace, security, and disaster risk management actors during armed conflict responses. Finally, the Police Commission, Disaster Risk Management Commission, and Ministry of Peace should collaboratively develop a conflict risk profile, a conflict mitigation strategy, and a contingency plan for Ataye Town.

Key Words; Conflict, Knowledge, Monitoring, Communication, Early Warning, Response

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The conceptual foundation of Early Warning Systems is influenced by different definitions that reflect various institutional priorities and historical contexts. The United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs defined "warning" as "the communication of information about a hazard likely to occur," but it did not address Early Warning Systems (Sufri et al., 2020). This perspective treated warnings as a one-way message rather than a systemic process (Rød et al., 2024).

In contrast, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) expanded on this idea by defining an Early Warning System as a set of capacities needed to generate and disseminate timely and meaningful information for preparedness and appropriate action against hazards (UNISDR, 2015). However, this definition lacks clarity regarding the specific components necessary for operationalizing such capacities.

The Ethiopia Disaster Risk Management Policy and Strategy (2013) addresses this gap by adopting the UNISDR definition while specifying that a people-centered Early Warning System must include knowledge of risks, monitoring and forecasting hazards, communication of alerts, and local response capabilities to manage disasters (Abebe, 2021).

An effective Early Warning System (EWS) consists of four essential components that must work together to transform hazard information into actionable responses (Grasso & Singh, 2011). The first component, Disaster Risk Knowledge, involves gathering data and conducting risk assessments to identify vulnerable populations (Gebrehiwot *et al.*, 2020). The second component focuses on monitoring disaster risks to predict hazards and their potential impacts (Adebayo, 2015). The third component, Dissemination and Communication, ensures that timely and accurate warnings reach affected communities through reliable channels, addressing the critical "last mile" of communication (Adebayo, 2015). Finally, Response Capabilities equip individuals and organizations to effectively act upon receiving warnings, highlighting the importance of established protocols. Failing to adequately address any of these components can compromise the entire EWS, emphasizing the necessity for a comprehensive approach (Graham et al., 2012).

The United Nations conflict early warning framework operates through specialized entities, including the Department of Political and Peace-building Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations. However, its primary weakness is the persistent "warning-response gap," where failures, such as those observed in Ethiopia and Darfur, arise not from insufficient warnings but from a lack of political will and predetermined response protocols (Cammaert, 2018 and UNISDR, 2015). The UN's credibility is reinforced by initiatives like the "Early Warning for All" framework, which focuses on multi-hazard approaches and key pillars of risk knowledge, monitoring, dissemination, and response capability (Opiyo, 2023).

The African Union's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) was established to monitor conflicts through a robust flow of information. However, it faced setbacks following its restructuring in 2020, which compromised its effectiveness and capacity to respond to emerging threats (Bonareri, 2022). In contrast, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) is the most integrated Early Warning System in Africa. It is characterized by grassroots engagement and decentralized data collection. Yet, CEWARN struggles with challenges related to expanding community monitoring and maintaining effective research partnerships (Seble and Kewir, 2023).

Despite efforts to incorporate climate indicators within the systems of IGAD, the AU and the UN, there are ongoing issues stemming from political constraints in member states. These states are often unwilling to act on warnings that might infringe upon their sovereignty. Ultimately, the main challenge for these systems is not just developing better tools but rather fostering the political will needed to translate foresight into preventive action (Bonareri, 2022).

Ethiopia's Federal Government has made significant investments in formal infrastructure for Early Warning Systems (CEWS), aligned with a four-component model. The former Minister of Federal Affairs, now part of the Ministry of Peace, established the primary early warning coordination mandate, which cascades through Regional Peace and Security Administration Bureaus to Woreda (district) and Kebele (sub-district) levels (Bersunega, 2019).

Additionally, the Federal Police Commission uses community policing and intelligence systems to generate alerts regarding crime and conflict (Beshir and Kassa, 2024). This

vertical integration aims to facilitate the upward transmission of community-level risk information and the downward dissemination of analyzed warnings and response directives.

The Disaster Risk Management Commission also has early warning infrastructure in place to manage agricultural and environmental disasters, as well as to coordinate humanitarian aid for communities affected by these disasters (Gebrehiwot et al., 2020).

Despite the existence of an institutional framework and a clear definition of an Early Warning System, Ethiopia continues to experience recurrent, large-scale inter-ethnic and inter-communal violence. Examples include the Guji-Gedeo conflict in 2018, the Oromia-Somali regional border clashes from 2017 to 2020, and various conflicts involving the Gumuz, Amhara, and Afar communities (Abbink, 2021; Mengistu, 2015; Teshome, 2021). The occurrence of these outbreaks, despite established systems for risk identification, indicator monitoring, and warning communication, highlights a paradox: the systems are in place, but they fail to prevent violence.

Several factors contribute to the failure of early responses. First, there is the politicization of security institutions, which means that early warning personnel operate under political authorities. This creates a disincentive to escalate tensions to the level of a response-triggering alert. Second, there are severe resource deficits that hinder the ability of Woreda and Kebele levels to maintain any effective response capacity. Lastly, there is a coordination failure among parallel systems that operate without integrated response protocols, leading to confusion about mandates precisely when preventive action is needed (Alemneh, 2025).

Ataye Town, the administrative center of the North Shewa Administration Zone in the Amhara Region and the focus of this study, serves as a critical case for examining the effectiveness of the Early Warning System designed to prevent conflict in the area. Ataye exemplifies the complexities that arise from ethnic federalism and the operational challenges of Conflict Early Warning Systems (CEWS).

In 2018, political reforms led to demonstrations that turned into riots, resulting in the deaths of police officers and the destruction and theft of government office equipment. The situation escalated in 2019 into inter-ethnic conflict between the Amhara and Oromo communities, which was managed by command posts led by federal security forces (Jemal, 2020). Furthermore, in 2021, armed groups forced the displacement of communities and completely destroyed Ataye Town.

The repeated attacks highlight significant empirical and theoretical questions regarding the current Early Warning System's effectiveness in preventing these frequent incidents. It is against this background that this study aims to systematically assess the effectiveness of Ethiopia's conflict Early Warning System in Ataye Town. Specifically, it will examine the elements of conflict risk knowledge, monitoring, communication, and early response within the system.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Ethiopia's Conflict Early Warning System (CEWs) is widely acknowledged as one of the most robust prevention frameworks on the continent, functioning from the federal Ministry of Peace to Regional, Woreda, and Kebele levels of government (Moges, 2017). Objective of Early Warning System is to identify emerging threats and prevent violent conflict (Beshir and Kassa, 2024). Despite this well-established framework, Ataye town in the North Shewa Administration Zone of the Amhara National Region State experienced five years' significant cycles of escalating ethnic violence between 2018 and 2023. These incidents resulted in considerable casualties, extensive displacement, and widespread destruction of property. This situation raises a critical scholarly, policy and practical question such as why does large-scale ethnic violence persist and intensify despite the presence of a conflict Early Warning System.

The studies on the conflict between the Amhara and Oromo communities, especially in Ataye Town, have different levels of analysis. The 2019 Ataye conflict indicates that ethnic entrepreneurs, poor local governance, and the trade of illegal weapons were the immediate causes of the conflict, although it is also stated that traditional methods such as Shimgillina could have halted the conflict but failed to rebuild trust (Jemal, 2020; Tesfaye et al., 2020). However, these studies conducted in 2020 and fails to reflect the trend of conflict and reconciliation in Ataye between 2020 and 2023, whether mistrust increased or improved over the years. Moreover, studies have mainly concentrated on causes of conflict and communication without properly considering Ethiopian Early Warning System (Jemal, 2020; Tesfaye et al., 2020). Yusuf (2019) and Teshome (2021) reported that more macro-structural approaches, showing how constitutional asymmetries, particularly in the preamble of Oromia Regional State that lacks an explicit mention of other ethnic groups including Amhara people, produce institutionalized grievances and prejudices that sustain conflict. The competing historical narratives and the lack of national reconciliation sustain cycles of violence,

requiring a deep constitutional and federal transformation that goes beyond local peace-making initiatives(Teshome, 2021).

Over the course of these five years, the CEWS demonstrated a repeated inability to anticipate, communicate, or respond to clear warning signs. Prior to the onset of the 2019 conflict, traditional conflict resolution mechanism resolve escalating tensions and propaganda; however, this local intelligence was neither incorporated into the system nor utilized for preventive measures(Jemal, 2020). Moreover, armed mobilization, an increase in weapon proliferation, and public administrative disputes, yet no effective monitoring preceded the incidents occurring in 2020 and 2021 or preemptive actions were implemented. Communication channels among federal, regional, and zonal authorities frequently exhibited contradictions, blockages, or periods of inactivity, and in several instances, warnings seemed to have been suppressed. The deterioration of response mechanisms ranged from delayed actions in 2019 to near-total inaction in 2021 and 2023, with investigations consistently resulting in a lack of accountability(Jemal, 2020; M. Tesfaye et al., 2020). These patterns indicate not only operational shortcomings but also deeper structural and political constraints that undermine the effective functioning of the system.

The above studies are fragmented and reveal the following significant gaps. Evidence gaps: there are no longitudinal documentation of CEWS operations during 2018-2023. Knowledge gap: past studies focused on conflict resolution mechanisms and did not explain in terms of conflict early warning elements. Practical gap: There has been a gap between early warning institutional design and actual practice has not been empirically traced. Methodological gap: The existing single-incident qualitative studies prevent comparative or process-tracing studies. Empirical gap: There is no direct study of decision-making, information flows, and warning dissemination within peace and security institutions were unstudied. Population gap: The affected communities are treated as homogeneous ethnic groups so that community heterogeneity, subgroup risk perceptions, and participation in warning system remain unexamined.

While previous studies on conflicts in Ethiopia have been conducted from either the grievance approach or institutional failure perspectives, seldom have they been conducted from conflict Early Warning System. This study fills the theoretical gap by using an integrated approach that draws on the Relative Deprivation Theory, the Basic Human Needs Theory, and the Anomie Theory. This integrated approach is important because the conflict

in the study area cannot be explained by any of the theories on their own. In fact, the escalation of the conflict and the failure of the Early Warning System can only be explained by the combined effects of all the three theories, a phenomenon that this study set to explore.

The existing gaps have led to an inadequate understanding of the systemic failures of the Conflict Early Warning and Response System (CEWRS) in Ataye. Despite the severity of these events, no systematic study has examined CEWRS performance in Ataye or traced how risk knowledge, monitoring, communication, and response interacted or failed across multiple cycles of violence. This study, therefore, investigates the operational effectiveness of Ethiopia's CEWS in Ataye town from 2018 to 2023 by examining its conflict risk knowledge, monitoring, communication and early response elements.

1.3. Objectives' of the Study

This study has the following general and specific objectives.

1.3.1. General objective

The overall objective of the study is to critically examine the effectiveness of Ethiopia Conflict Early Warning Systems (CEWS) in the context of conflict risk management in Ataye Town, North Shewa Administration Zone, by analyzing its risk knowledge, monitoring, communication, and early response capacity components.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- I. Analyze conflict risk knowledge of Ataye Town residents' with particular attention to their awareness of conflict vulnerability, threat perception and pattern of conflict.
- II. Assess the functional capability of conflict monitoring institutions by assessing community perception of monitoring effectiveness, the extent of standardized indicators uses and the reliability of feedback and reporting mechanisms.
- III. Examine the level of effectiveness of conflict warning communication systems by measuring levels of community consensus regarding institutional communication practices, the role of media in de-escalation, and the performance of two-way verification and information sharing channels.
- IV. Compare differences in perceived level of effectiveness among key identified conflict response actors (security actors, peace actors and DRM actors).

- V. Determine the predictive influence of early warning components (risk knowledge, monitoring capacity, and warning communication) on the effectiveness of early response

1.4. Research Questions

The following questions are outlined to address statement of problems and the stated objectives:

- 1) What is the level of conflict risk knowledge of Ataye Town and what factors shape variations in their awareness of conflict vulnerability, threats, and pattern of conflict?
- 2) To what extent do monitoring institutions demonstrate functional capacity in detecting and reporting conflict related risks, and how do communities perceive the effectiveness and responsiveness of these monitoring mechanisms?
- 3) How effective are the formal and informal communication channels used for conflict warning dissemination in Ataye Town, and what levels of community awareness exist regarding institutional communication practices, , media de-escalation roles, and two-way verification systems?
- 4) How do levels of perceived effectiveness differ among key conflict response actors in peace, security and disaster risk management institutions and DRM actors in Ataye Town?
- 5) To what extent do the core components of the Early Warning System (conflict risk knowledge, monitoring capacity, and warning communication influence the effectiveness of early response actions in Ataye Town?

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study outlines its scope through three dimensions: geographical, conceptual, and temporal. Geographically, it focuses on the Ataye town administration, located in the North Shewa Zone of Ethiopia's Amhara Region, which has experienced frequent armed conflicts over the past five years.

Conceptually, the research examines the effectiveness of Ethiopia's Conflict Early Warning System (EWS) in mitigating inter-ethnic conflicts within Ataye. The analysis covers four critical dimensions of the system: Risk Knowledge, Monitoring, Communication, and Early Response.

Temporally, this study covers the period from 2018 to 2023. This timeframe is significant for Ethiopia's political landscape, coinciding with the appointment of Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed and the introduction of various reform measures, alongside a rise in armed conflicts in Ataye. As a result, this five-year period offers a comprehensive framework for assessing the performance of the EWS during a time of considerable upheaval and provides valuable insights into conflict prevention strategies.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study possesses significant relevance for policy and practice in conflict early warning management. It provides a framework for the development of targeted early warning and response interventions that are congruent with the distinctive socio-political context of Ataye and other regions characterized by high tension and conflict. By examining the intricate dynamics of social, economic, and historical grievances, as well as the complexities of ethnic relations, policymakers can advance beyond traditional "one-size-fits-all" strategies. Such a context-specific approach is essential for promoting cooperation and trust among diverse ethnic groups, which is fundamental to the attainment of conflict prevention, preparedness and sustainable conflict resolutions.

Furthermore, this study underscores the necessity for collaboration between government entities and civil society organizations in order to effectively address existing conflict issues that may provoke violence and to facilitate the establishment of a peaceful society.

Within the academic arena, this study constitutes a substantial contribution to the disciplines of conflict Early Warning Systems, conflict management and resolution. It addresses a significant gap in the current literature by emphasizing the practical implementation of Early Warning Systems rather than focusing solely on theoretical frameworks.

Through the integration of theoretical models and comprehensive field research, this study provides a multidimensional analysis of the interplay between ethnic identity, historical context, and political dynamics for effective conflict Early Warning System. This work not only enhances the existing body of scholarship but also lays the groundwork for future interdisciplinary discourse within the fields of conflict Early Warning Systems, security studies, and disaster risk management.

1.7. Organization of the Study

This study is organized into nine chapters. Chapter One provides the introduction of the research work and presents the background, problem statement, objectives, and scope of the study. Chapter Two discusses the review of related literatures in relation to the core components of the Conflict Early Warning System, namely risk knowledge, monitoring, communication, and responses. Within the same chapter, the conceptual and theoretical frameworks are discussed. Chapter Three discusses the methodology of the dissertation.

Furthermore, Chapter Four presents a viable analysis focusing on illustrating the conflict risk knowledge of the study area. This is followed by Chapter Five, which concentrates on a diagnostic analysis of the monitoring system, focusing on early warning indicators, actors, and processes involved in detecting threats. Chapter Six examines risk communication organs, methods, and pathways defined with a focus on revealing potential distortions. Chapter Seven is dedicated to evaluating effectiveness of early response actors. Chapter Eight presents a statistical evaluation regarding the impact of early warning on early response. Finally, Chapter Nine draws conclusions and provides recommendations.

1.8. Operational Definition of Key Terms

It refers to particular words or practices adopted in this dissertation to explain various elements of interest, along with their relationships. The operational concepts of this dissertation:

- 1) **Conflict Early Warning System (CEWS)** means the observation of a latent conflict, using conflict prediction tools. The objective is to detect the signs of conflict escalation in due time (early warning) in order to initiate preventive measures (early response, early action) (AU, 2018).
- 2) **Conflict Victims:** refers to residents' of Ataye town, who have been victims of direct harm or injury, either physically or mentally, because of the inter-ethnic conflict in the Ataye town from 2018 to 2023.
- 3) **Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Actors** refers to the National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC) itself, its regional and Woreda structures, Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committees, technical committees, and humanitarian aid providers.
- 4) **Early response** refers to activists for preventing, mitigating, preparedness and responding to the escalation of conflict into violence and armed conflict based on early warning.

- 5) **Inter-Ethnic Conflict** entails violent inter-group conflicts between the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups in Ataye Town Administration from 2018 to 2023.
- 6) **Peace Actors** refers to institution responsible for conflict resolution includes house of federation, Ministry of Peace, Regional peace and security administration bureau, peace council. Peace forum, inter religious council, filed monitoring officer.
- 7) **Security Actors** are the legally empowered bodies involved in conflict early response include the police commission, national security, security task force, state of emergency command post members’.
- 8) **Threats** mean a dangerous human activity or condition that armed conflict in Ataye Town.
- 9) **Vulnerability** means the characteristics and circumstances of a community, system or asset that make it susceptible/ influenced to the damaging effects of a threat.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews relevant literature with regard to conflict Early Warning Systems. To this end, it first clarifies what the concept of Early Warning Systems is. Then, it discusses conflict risk knowledge, conflict monitoring, conflict communication, and conflict early response chronologically. Finally, it outlines relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks that give depth to the dynamics surrounding conflict Early Warning Systems, which are helpful to set a robust base for the following analysis and discussion.

2.1. Concept of Conflict Early Warning System

An Early Warning System for conflict (CEWS) is a preemptive process that seeks to identify and monitor the potential sources of a conflict before it escalates into violence. CEWS frequently involves the collection and assessment of data on social, political, and economic indicators that may be a sign of rising tensions in a region or society (Rød *et al.*, 2024). Early Warning Systems, the United Nations suggests, play a crucial role in conflict prevention as they offer early warning that can be used in preventing violence and enabling diplomatic intervention. A CEWS is only as effective as it gets timely and credible data and can convert findings to useful recommendations that address deep-seated grievances and enable dialogue between opposing parties (Grasso and Singh, 2011). Early Warning Systems for conflict (CEWS) has no single definition due to a reflection of the complexities surrounding conflict processes and differences in contexts under which the systems are being rolled out. CEWS aiming to prevent conflict by using early warning and response, their conceptual and operational designs must be developed in accordance with the given challenges of different geopolitical contexts. Differing from traditional models of intelligence, CEWS are open in operation promoting stakeholder and community confidence, a key to effective conflict prevention (Opiyo, 2023).

Development of Conflict Early Warning System (CEWS) can be categorized into five generations (Bonareri, 2022). The first generation (1995-2000) was prediction-oriented and centralized with a focus on identifying and predicting conflict based on political, social, and economic indicators. Though it tried, this generation was bound by data availability, reliability, and the ability for Northern Ireland's conflict dynamics complexity capture. The second generation (2000-2005) was qualitative and decentralized, consisting of contextual analysis with the objective for practical recommendations production. The third generation (2005-2015) was hyper-localized, with technology and local knowledge being used to collect and analyze vast amounts of real-time data. The fourth generation (2015-2020) shifted towards quantitative

methods, employing multi-spatial layers and deep machine learning for analysis. Finally, the fifth generation employs advanced technology, including artificial intelligence, to develop assessments and real-time decision alternatives. The same trend applies to Early Warning Systems for disasters internationally, in which technology allows for more accurate forecasting and timely action in natural disasters(Frimpong, 2020).

Conflict Early Warning Systems (CEWS) confronted with a myriad of challenges that act against their ability to prevent violent conflict. The "warning-response gap" is one such challenge where early warnings fail to trigger on time and appropriate responses due to low political will, institutional resistance, and dispersed accountability(Bonareri, 2022; Grasso and Singh, 2011). Studies have proved that despite timely and accurate information, decision-makers delay until the urge to act is overwhelming, sacrificing earlier, less costly solutions for conflict prevention(Jallow, 2021) .

CEWS are also unable to respond to drivers of violence such as inequality, food price shocks, and state institution disputes, and thus action finds its way to the underlying causes of conflict too late(Rød et al., 2024). Second, there is the serious issue of operational aspects of CEWS implementation, especially in fragile and conflict-affected environments. Weak governance structures, limited financial resources, security concerns, and complex socio-political relations characterize these settings(Amamkpa and Mbakwe, 2015). Additionally, ethical considerations relating to privacy of data, abuse of information by criminal groups, and protection of local sources pose significant challenges(Grasso and Singh, 2011).

2.2. Conflict Risk Knowledge

The ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia are results of land disputes and boundaries between ethnic groups in the country, as discussed by Abbink, (2011). The main ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia emanate from localized claims along regional boundaries, competition over political leadership and control mainly at the local levels across regions or zones, (Aalen *et al.*, 2019). There exists a major political leadership contest in Ethiopia between the Nuer and Anwak in Gambella, and Berta and Gumuz in Benishangul-Gumuz respectively. Clan-based ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts persist in both the Somali and Afar regions of Ethiopia, implying that inter-ethnic competition is not restricted to ethnic groups(Alamineh et al., 2021). These ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia persist, and as a result, there is a loss of lives(Abbink, 2021).

Figure 1 below shows conflict events and deaths within Ethiopia from May 2018 to March 2023, showing a clear pattern of increasing conflict, then a steady decline. The level of conflict was steady but persistent from mid-2018 until mid-2020, then suddenly spiked enormously, peaking from late 2020 until 2021 with extremely high figures (e.g., 160 events/75 deaths in Jan '21, 175/150 deaths in Aug '21). This was the time frame during which the Tigray war was most intense, as was the time frame for inter-communal violence. The steady decline from late 2022 into early 2023 shows that figures have dropped back to pre-2020 levels, suggesting that a significant decline in conflict level and violence has taken place. The mention of delayed reporting suggests that these figures are a minimum.

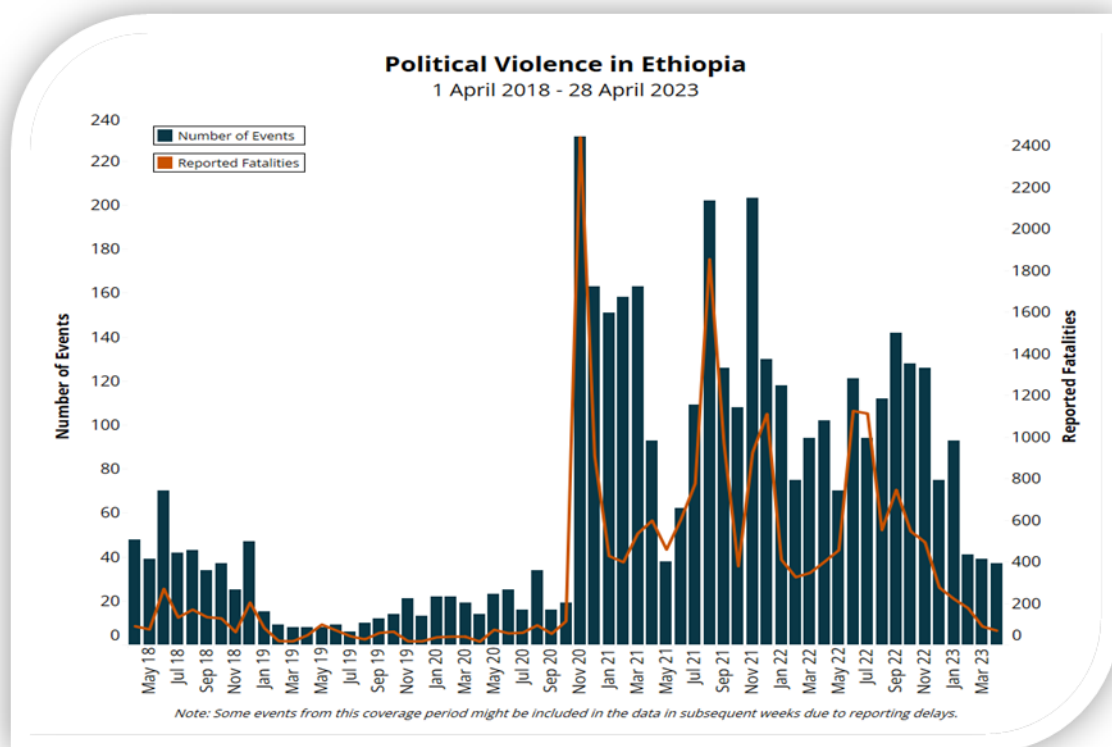


Figure 1 Pattern of Political Conflict in Ethiopia

(Adopted from <https://acleddata.com>)

To fully comprehend the elements of instability in the North Shewa Administration Zone, one first needs to consider the difference between threats to Ataye town. It essentially pertains to the actors with the potential to attack the ethnic group known as the Amhara, with threats ranging from the historical, such as the strategies used by the Italians to divide and steer the ethnic groups. The currently active threats ranging from ethno-nationalist armed groups to religious extremists as well as social media, with vulnerability meaning the conditions with the potential to expose the Amhara ethnic group to threats, which include historical issues

such as the role of the ethnic group being described as an "oppressor" in Ethiopia (Teshome, 2021).

The first source of risk lies within the history of the Ethiopian territorial layouts. The history of Amhara involvement in creating a modern central-state structure has often been waged around their conquest of other nations and peoples. The history has taken on a new form of meta-narrative in which they have been cast as the historic oppressors. What is critical, however, is that this history does not factor in the fact that the majority of them were, by modern history, impoverished peasants with no political clout (Alamineh et al., 2021; Amare & Alamineh, 2023; Jemal, 2020; Teshome, 2021). The ethno-national elite, comprising members of Tigray people liberation front (TPLF), Oromo Liberation Front(OLF), and their ethno-nationalists, have capitalized on this grievance in conjuring voter support in post-1991 politics, often going so far as to make them scapegoats in Ethiopian society . History has, in this instance, become a source of risk in itself, leading to scapegoating on ethno-national identity on issues in which they had no hand (Alemu, 2022).

Another significant factor of vulnerability embedded in the institutional architecture of ethnicity-based federal systems established in 1991, with an objective of rectifying what was seen as an acute form of marginalization of other groups in society. Though it has facilitated empowerment in certain quarters, it has resulted in an indirect form of marginalization of Amhara groups outside of their historically defined territories in Ethiopia. Millions of them are today living outside of their native territories in regions such as Oromiya or Benishangul-Gumuz without political or any other form of recognition or protection (Abbink, 2011; Yusuf, 2019). Characterized as "colonizers" or "settlers" in an exclusionary narrative pushed forward by Ethiopia ethno-nationalists, they have come in for particularly acute violence and even expulsion in Ethiopia(Amare and Alamineh, 2023) . There is also the setting ablaze of violent conflicts relating to Ethio- Eritrea territory such as in Welkait, where control of land itself can be seen as an issue of political life or death, thereby putting Amhara nationals in such areas in acute danger of violence(Amare and Alamineh, 2023).

In this respect, the demographics of the Amhara, spread out in different parts of Ethiopia together with major urban centers such as Addis Ababa; coincide very badly with the territoriality of nation-states. They therefore become an easily noticeable 'other' in any region, making their presence a point of concern, especially in situations of scarce resource competitions and failed governments. From a political point of view, there is a cyclical nature

of threats, since threats against their minority status in other ethnic groups, such as the Oromo, resulted in the emergence of nationalist groups such as Fano, but this is in turn considered a return of 'Amhara hegemony' by other groups. Thus, there is a cycle of further attacks due to such actions(Erba, 2024; Haileyes and Leta, 2023; Teshome, 2021) .

However, recent military developments, particularly the Tigray War (2020-2022), have profoundly exacerbated these underpinning cracks. This is due to the fact that the alliance with the federal state forced Amhara civilians to face proscribed retaliation attacks and thereby get dragged into an armed conflict, thereby experiencing massive casualties(Abbink, 2021). This is particularly evident in Ataye, given its complexity as it juxtaposes ethnic associations of Amhara and Oromo, thereby providing a constant friction. Although past eras saw society bring social cohesion, recent shifts in state policy in adopting ethnic federalism in 1991 dismantled these social links, thereby fragmenting society. By being discriminatory towards other social elements beyond their designated ethnic zones, recent state factors have endowed the stage in exacerbating social vulnerability and conflict, as is evident in the Ataye case (Jemal, 2020).

Figure 2 shows a trend of violence perpetrated against the ethnic group by informal armed groups, not from their regional state, with the highest number of events and fatalities occurring in the Oromia region (51 fatalities, 105 events) and Benishangul/Gumuz (15 fatalities, 49 events), where the Amhara ethnic group has been noted to be victims of ethnic and cross-border attacks. The high number of fatalities in the Benishangul/Gumuz region indicates a high lethal rate of the attacks. The lack of reported events in the Gambela region may suggest a lack of presence of the ethnic group or that the region was not a focal point of the ethnically driven violence. This illustrates the precarious nature of the Amhara ethnic group in certain neighboring regions due to the attacks by informal armed groups.

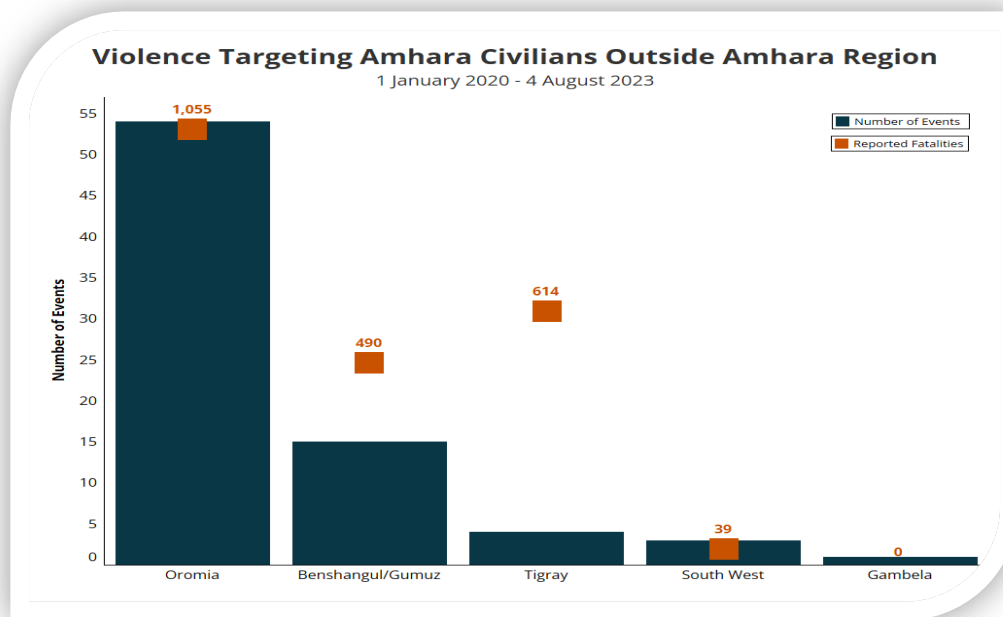


Figure 2 Amhara Ethnic Group Attacking Outside Amhara Region in Ethiopia

(Adopted from <https://acleddata.com/brief/fact-sheet-crisis-ethiopia-amhara-region>)

The Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) is a beholder of a deep-seated paradox at its broadest level. It is a system burdened with collective historical blame, but internally, diversity serves as a source of instability. Far from being homogeneous, the region has significant minority populations, such as the Oromo (2.62%), and it created systems that protect the rights of minorities, like the Oromo Special Zone (Amare and Alamineh, 2023; Haileyes and Leta, 2023). Ironically, these zones, which were supposed to protect them, more often than not turn into hotbeds of border and administrative disputes. This is a reflection of political rights linked to a territorial "home land" constitutionally place inter-regional minorities in jeopardy (Fiseha, 2019). This internal tension just gets compounded by existential boundary issues with its neighbors, such as Oromia, or Tigray-the dispute over adjustment of borders is less about the right to borders but more about the right to belong. This local climate of insecurity provides the background against which the community of the North Shewa Administrative Zone lives. From a demographic perspective, it should be noted that the North Shewa Administrative Zone is a border region inhabited by a predominantly Amhara population of 90.73%, combined with a notable Oromo minority population of 7.14% (Jemal, 2020; Zeyede et al., 2024).

Therefore, given their position at the frontline of a longstanding Amhara-Oromo border dispute, it is apparent that local administrators at both zonal and local levels, particularly in relation to cases in Yifat cluster administration and Ataye town, are over-whelmed by a situation that requires them to balance a particularly volatile situation that is at once both a border dispute of un-demarcated territories and a local population that faces a good measure of politicization with their regular movements. This point underscores one of the key vulnerabilities facing administration; thus, at a critical level, local administration becomes a space for conflict where state conflicts run at a local scale(Tronvoll, 2022).

The above-listed systemic influences come together with the greatest destructive potential in Ataye Town. The unique configuration of the town, with some of the population groups categorized by their respective Kebeles as majority Amhara, others categorized by their respective Kebeles as majority Oromo, combined with its unique positioning relative to the corridor connecting Addis Ababa to Dessie a region prone to national tension itself makes it a hotspot of tension (Jemal, 2020). This transition to conflict was no accident for the region, which witnessed its historic coexistence come to an end in 2018. This was owing to the increasingly politicized nature of ethnic identity, the lack of governance, and the corresponding claims to the region itself.

The threat that is being waged today on the Amhara people classified into four groups. The first colonial Legacies, where the root of the threat today is an external intervention that has resulted from colonialism (Bitew, 2024). The Italian Fascist occupation from 1935 to 1941 employed divides policies, where it sought to splinter the Amhara elites from other resistance forces within Ethiopia. This was also when the modern political vocabulary was born, where Amhara people were classified monolithically as the ‘colonizer’ category the trope that has today been incorporated into recent politics since 1991 to justify Amhara's marginalization today. Secondly, The Ethno-Nationalist Militancy, on one hand, "provides the ideological fuel for today's violence. Here, forces such as Oromo liberation Army (OLA) and militia forces engage today directly in targeted violence, expulsions, and killings, referring directly to Amhara people as settlers (Erba, 2024). Thirdly, Religious extremist a religious distinction, religious difference, is often weaponized too. The communities in Amhara, who largely profess Orthodox Christianity, have seen their religious places and personnel attacked with the aim of turning natural resource conflicts into "existential holy wars"(Østebø, 2023; Tilahun et al., 2019), Fourthly, Social media has functioned as a multiplier of impacts of the

preceding threats. Social media has been used to spread dehumanizing communications to the group, referring to them in terms such as "cancer" and "weed," and to mobilize armed groups in real time (Chekol et al., 2023; Haile, 2024).

However, the above literatures that analyzes the history, politics, and demographics of risk in Ethiopian conflict and the North Shewa Administration Zone in particular, there are important information gaps in the operationalization of current risk domain knowledge in terms of effective early warning action. First, there appears to be a "descriptiveness" problem with the current research literature in that in spite of in-depth evaluations of grievances, history, and politics in Ethiopian society, there has not been a defined body of locally specific, dynamic risk measure development. Second, there appears to be a disconnect in the relevant research literature between the "macro" level in terms of evaluation of "ethno-national" politics and "micro" level evaluation specifics in a particular "flashpoint" like Ataye Town due to its unique border configuration and complexity. Thirdly, formal and informal systems of governance tend to be examined as a background condition rather than as an active aspect of the risk picture, subject to variation in its contribution to risk mitigation and amplification. Finally, although a broad understanding exists that acknowledges social media weaponization as a major driver in risk amplification. These issues indicate a deficiency in developing a precise risk knowledge base, which is essential for an effective Conflict Early Warning System.

2.3. Conflict Risk Monitoring

At its most basic level, conflicts risk monitoring is merely a constant and scientific "heartbeat" of data and its interpretative functions. The purpose behind conflicts risk monitor is to gauge the probability of violence occurring both when it will occur and possibly its severity prior to its onset(Adebayo, 2015). In recognizing growing quantities of threat indicators, such as underlying tensions within governments, depleting resources, or polarizing societies, conflicts risk monitoring can proactively prevent problems rather than merely responding to damage control situations(Lehtonen, 2015). The balancing acts between long-term problems and short-term triggers, coupled with "hard data" and "human-interest stories" to produce information for those "in power" to use.

Effective monitoring depends on a diverse set of "tripwires" or indicators (Gibbs and Goldbach, 2015). These are typically grouped into three categories: First, Socio-Economic indicators are severe inequalities in poverty and unemployment often provides the "fuel" for

mobilization based on shared grievances (Ali et al., 2021). Secondly, political indicators include governance failures, corruption, and crucially in the Ethiopian context the friction points created by ethnic federalism and inflammatory elite rhetoric (Walther et al., 2023). Thirdly, lack of social cohesion, which measure the erosion of trust, the resurgence of old historical wounds, and the rise of hate speech. As evident from the social-ecological framework, these indicators are highly interdependent (Aldino et al., 2025). When competition for land combines with political marginalization, communal fragmentation is accelerated. An effective system thus needs to combine quantitative data, such as market closures or numbers of displacements, with qualitative information on local rumor mills and community perceptions.

The monitoring process involves a variety of players. On a large scale, organizations like the UN and African Union look into general security issues, while external verification agencies like Human Rights Watch monitor human rights abuse (Cammaert, 2018). The Ministry of Peace in Ethiopia has its own formal role in monitoring (Bersunega, 2019). But on a small level, it is possibly the most important, especially with monitoring agencies like Peace Council, Interreligious Council, and Peace Forums utilizing their grassroots support to track insecurity (Gebrehiwot et al., 2020). And especially in places like North Shewa Administration Zone, which is hotbed material, field monitors of security issues like petty violence will be instrumental in "ground truths" with their own observations (Jemal, 2020). Overall, it is a balancing act between cooperation between government and non-government agencies (Adebayo, 2015).

The process involved in this monitoring is a continuous process involving collection, analyzing, and communicating; a process where "context-specific" indicators, most often created by the communities themselves to relate to their distinctive risks and needs, provide a foundation on which to begin the process (Biber, 2013). Modern methods, as opposed to traditional methods, have been enhanced by the integration and collection of information through advanced technology, including tracking hate speech on social media to capture its flow and reach in real-time (Abebe, 2018). The second part is analyzing, which is conducted through applications involving models which can "move beyond reporting" and "forecast probability" through utilizing a "Pressure and Release" model to gauge the reach and level involved (Awal, 2015). The final part involves dissemination and communicating the information; a process which involves communicating and creating diverse forms and styles

of dissemination to provide appropriate information to policymakers, law enforcement officers, and communities themselves: a process which must "relay messages" to each group - policymakers, security individuals, and communities to promote tolerance and calmness (Abas and Beyene, 2025; M. Tesfaye et al., 2020).

Despite these technological improvements, many obstacles still need to be addressed (Brenner, 2024). First conflict may outpace "the reporting chain used to process information". Secondly, information can "become securitized, meaning that inconvenient reports for governments will sometimes filter out." Lastly, although computer programs can improve speed for threat detection, they will still fail to address "the cultural complexities appropriately unless human oversight is employed." The end goal is "not merely producing information but ensuring that an alert actually leads to social and political action to save lives" (Hase and Tafara, 2022; Vuorelma and Lehtonen, 2025).

The gaps of the above literatures are the on-the-ground-level interaction, or rather the total absence of interaction, between state monitors such as regional Peace Councils and local-level monitors like the Field Monitors and the local-level Peace Clubs. Moreover, "the political economy" involving the circulation of early warnings also remains to be examined. Of course, one can easily get that a warning was sent out, but how this information was actually received by authorities at different territorial levels across Ethiopia also begs an empirical evaluation. There exists a dire need to examine if political sensitivities/considerations result in the dismissal of credible threats merely on strategic grounds. This chasm highlights the pressing need to conduct studies with the aim of breaking away from predetermined "top-down" prescriptions. In order to understand the reasons behind the occurrence of devastating violence despite the existence of monitoring structures, it is important to prove the practical limitations of the current monitoring system. The main aim of the study is to bridge the gap, as it endeavors to produce the pragmatic knowledge required to rethink the formulation of guidelines in "early action" packages that are flexible, politically conscious, and, more so, owned by the community. By turning monitoring data into potent preventative action, we will be in a position to provide important lessons in the field of conflict prevention, not only in the case of Ataye Town but also in comparable flashpoints located in Ethiopia's contested frontier region.

2.4. Conflict Risk Communication

Effective conflict warning communication is the key linking pin which transforms raw risk analysis into life-saving preventive action. As the key third component in an effective warning system, it not only calls for more than merely sending off a warning, but actually developing strategic ways to manage pertinent information, generate trust, stimulate de-escalatory tendencies, and provide communities with empowerment tools(Bersunega, 2019). Success in this field is based on several factors: developing a strategic approach, dissemination, media involvement in appropriate ways, source credibility, but perhaps most important, developing two-way feedback loops(Coombs, 2010).

Formal and active strategy formulation appears to be an essential but minimalist groundwork for any effective coordinated warning drive. Nonetheless, all literature points out an immense gap that exists in theory in contrast with actual events' scenarios worldwide. Situational analyses concerning the Ethiopian Federal Peace Ministry have documented an array of critical strategic barriers in theory and practice. The absence of even the "most basic tools" necessary for effective implementation or even assessing its communication plans identified the Ethiopian Federal Peace Ministry's communication strategy(Bersunega, 2019). Gebeyehu (2023) studied the Ethiopian Crisis in Northern Ethiopia and found how the Ethiopian government's communication strategy focused solely on "image building" in pursuit of "pro-development" themes instead of acting proactively in conflict resolution(Gebeyehu, 2023).

In addition, effective dissemination would mean that this message would reach various stakeholders and sections of society, especially those living in linguistically distinct communities and those residing outside cities and towns. Theoretically, this would mean a 'symbiotic ecosystem' involving various mediums, including radio, social media, mobile devices, and 'gatherings.' As noted elsewhere, local FM radio is a source of life and survival information in Ethiopia, especially considering it is transmitted locally through mediums such as Afaan Oromo and Amharic to reach nations and peoples beyond the source and target areas(Moges, 2017). However, this is easily interfered with and destroyed through a government monopoly over communications networks and other telecommunication utilities as a way to control information flow and address unrest(Yoel et al., 2023). On the other hand, although information on social media is up-to-speed, there is a focus on hate speech over

information from authorities and clusters lacking digital knowledge and awareness(Chekol et al., 2023).

The mass media is not merely a messenger but an actual "framer" of this conflict. In Ethiopia, this medias cape is highly polarized, with government-affiliated media indulging in framing aligned with government positions, while non-governmental outlets assume positions aligned with ethnic positions(Moges and Skjerdal, 2024). Such a polarized scenario leads to multiple ("multiple" refers to multiple in their character, but in this context, it refers to multiple in quantity or amount, in turn standing in for multiple in number) 'information spaces.' Thus, it becomes impossible for people in the nation to access a united, actual base of facts relating to the conflict(Tesfaye et al., 2020). Such a scenario clearly leads to a distinct and profound crisis of trust. In effect, when, in such a scenario, government positions and communications are considered by citizens as merely disseminators of propaganda, denouncing crises, and casting blame upon "foreign forces" or others, citizens' trust drops precipitously(Gebeyehu, 2023). Such a scenario shows lack of clear message about the conflict.

The way a risk is framed is equally important as the risk itself. Many "us-them" stories, where differences are framed by ethnicity and/or religious communities, are common and pernicious. The studies exemplified how media messaging dehumanizes the "other," transforming potential struggles for resource allocations into struggles for survival(Zikargae, 2022). In contrast, communication with a focus on shared risk and shared human identity is imperatively "conflict-sensitive framing," which is a rare and imperiled phenomenon across Ethiopia's civic (Adera et al., 2022).

Lastly, for the warning system to work, it cannot work in monologues. It has to have an ear to listen. Feedback is essential to validate ground truths and develop community-owned approaches(Hase and Tafara, 2022). Currently, peace efforts in Ethiopia take an entirely top-down approach. Interestingly, successful peace efforts from locals suggest those where elderly, religion, and youth forum structures serve both as receivers and disseminators of information, such as those observed by Ethiopian Peace Observatory (2022)(HORN, 2025). These structures would be effective approaches to building resilience for peace but remain marginalized from mainstream state structures, an overly unfortunate example where peace dialogue has been ignored, including from state structures(Abebe, 2018; Moges, 2017).

The gaps of the above existing literatures include the 'micro-level reception gap,' as there are limited scholarly contributions that examine in detail how locals in conflict-prone areas, such as Ataye, respond to conflict messages. Second the Institutional 'Black Box,' as there are limitations in terms of analysis of different state challenges that have resulted in limitations in terms of conflict resolution. Thirdly the feedback loop deficit, as there are limitations in terms of testing different communication models that are capable of converting gathered incidences of conflict into data that can form part of a new wave of peace-building. Finally, the longitudinal void, as there are limitations in terms of understanding how communication must change over time in relation to different conflict phases.

2.5. Conflict Early Response Capacity

The recurring cycle of conflict in Ethiopian society underscores the possibility that there may be a flaw in the system. It resulted in early alert systems being ignored in decision-making processes at all levels in the Government of Ethiopia or in the ability of decision-makers at all levels in the government to take early warnings seriously enough so as to intervene in a timely fashion in conflict-prone areas in the country (Beshir and Kassa, 2024; Moges, 2017). The flaw in the early conflict response system in the Government of Ethiopia stems from the operational interface or gap that exists between the peace architecture in the Ministry of Peace; the coercive force in the security sector; and the multiple hazards in Disaster Risk Management(Sisay et al., 2025). The way forward in resolving the conflict lies in joining the parted gaps in conflict response in Ethiopia by mandating "a triple nexus" in one cohesive entity with the ability'.'. The Ethiopian system is critically underdeveloped and reactive, operating under a “fire-brigade” approach due to the absence of a thorough institutionalization process, technology. This indicates that the systems differ significantly due to variations in political will and transformation, with Kenya’s decentralized and technology-based system providing valuable lessons for the development of an effective for Ethiopia (Damtie and Asmare, 2020; Temesegan, 2020).

The architecture of the existing Ethiopia DRM system should preferably provide the procedural base upon which this system may exist, given the uniqueness of its multi-stakeholder coordination architecture(Abebe, 2021). Under this re-engineered system, a unified situational awareness platform would exist within the National Emergency Coordination Center (ECC) that will look for the presence of thresholds(Abbink, 2021; Graham et al., 2012; Haile, 2024). The activation of this response, consequently, will

immediately engage the proposed system of Triple Nexus Response Teams that exist at the woreda levels. Building off this framework, a Legally Mandated Cell comprised of the police commander, the committee chairperson representing the Ministry of Peace, and the DRM officer will exist and act as a body providing intervention and recommendations informed by the existence of a body of elder response (Tora et al., 2025). The overall purpose and utility of this cell will exist as a means by which pre-negotiated contingency plans are implemented with immediate mediating and sharing efforts. Thus, the presence of security should never exist independently of efforts that build peace.

2.5.1. National Security Council

At the very pinnacle of Ethiopian's security system is the National Security Council. This council's main objective, based on proclamation number 257/2001, is to act exclusively in a supervisory capacity over the Ethiopian government's prime minister. Perhaps more noteworthy is their wide-ranging authority vis-à-vis their legislature. The council's main aim is to craft a framing mechanism for governmental security, to conduct a thorough, "in-depth" analysis pertaining to potential threats both politically and economically, and to ensure that all governmental institutions within Ethiopian's system are "strategically aligned" with one another (Gebrewahd, 2019).

Ideally, in a perfect world, the NSC should be a country's final deterrent, a means of response that should "spot" the "slow-burn" causes of violence, such as a lack of resources or politically charged "rhetoric," thus acting before a single shot is ever fired (Weldemariam, 2009).

However, it is during this last step from theory to practice that problems for the system sometimes arise. In fact, most assessments of students undertaking theory courses often cite one glaring weakness associated with the NSC. That weakness is an extremely high degree of vulnerability to interference on a strongly political level. In fact, considerations for safety needs may sometimes even play a secondary role to considerations for partisan needs as far as matters of civic well-being are concerned within Ethiopian politics (Workneh, 2019). In fact, this can even result in a "selective" response to conflicts escalating across different parts of a given state. The result for those feeling most disenfranchised is that it is sometimes circumstances like these that see governments becoming inadvertent contributors to conflicts.

Moreover, the NSC is usually too much focused exclusively upon crises which, when they occur, burst into the headlines of the nation's press, or upon crises which, if they do not threaten the very core of national government, at least challenge a critical aspect of it. Such a focus can lead to a failure in understanding the local tensions, which ultimately contribute to mass violence. Studies of patterns of conflict suggest that early warnings of such violence in local towns tend too often not to penetrate the rarefied atmosphere of the National Security Council until much too late in the process (Berhe, 2017). A noticeable phenomenon, therefore, is a lack of legitimacy at the local level, which flows, at least in part, out of this top-down, unsympathetic posture. Finally, the National Security Council, despite being structured appropriately at a very high level, tends too often to be impeded by political barriers in effectively preventing conflicts before they begin.

2.5.2. Security Task Force

Operating at the level just below the strategic guidance of the NSC, the actual management of an active conflict is the responsibility of joint Security and Intelligence Task Forces (Odinga, 2017). These are the State's emergency response forces, gathering the best of the Federal Police, the National Defense Force, and the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). Their task is purely tactical. They are the "boots on the ground," deployed into the heart of the crisis to stem the flow of blood i.e., to quell the violence, disarm the combatants, and re-establish a semblance of order on the streets (Workneh, 2019).

When these Task Forces are well-resourced and follow clear protocols, they can be remarkably effective at their narrow goal of stopping immediate destruction (Belete, 2018). Nevertheless, the academic consensus suggests that there is a glaring flaw in this 'firefighter' strategy, and that is the complete lack of community legitimacy. This is because, as Workneh (2019) points out, the external actor often comes into the community as a force of coercion and does not understand the local nuances of the conflict, the grievances that sparked the 'fire' to begin with. This heavy-handed intervention may alienate the very people the government is trying to protect and may drive them further into the arms of non-state armed groups.

The problem here lies in the fact that this model focuses on the symptom of the problem, which is the violence, without ever treating the disease, which is the grievance. A Task Force may well manage to separate the two warring groups, but if the underlying issues of the land or political grievances that led to the conflict are not addressed, then the conflict will simply

resume as soon as the trucks depart. This is the "securitization trap," i.e., reducing socio-political problems into law and order issues (Mengistu and Adamu, 2023).

Additionally, the "integrated" nature of these units might prove to be double-edged. On one hand, it is meant to be a balanced force, but on the other hand, it might be dominated by military culture, leading to a militaristic approach to what might have started as a civilian mediation problem. Even in the intelligence-gathering role, this might prove to be counterproductive, as Task Forces might end up only focusing on hunting down the "ringleaders" and end up ignoring the social networks and community concerns that need to be addressed (Gebrewahd, 2019).

2.5.3. State of Emergency Command Post

The most extreme measure that the state can use is the State of Emergency coupled with the establishment of the Command Post to manage it. This premised on Article 93 of the FDRE Constitution. The state can declare this in response to external invasion, the total breakdown of law and order, as well as natural calamities (Bekele, 2020). When the Command Post is established, it vested with broad powers to control all aspects of the government, restrict particular rights enshrined in the constitution, establish curfews, and deploy the military to maintain law and order. It is, in essence, the most extreme centralization of power, whereby a particular region or the entire nation is brought under martial law managed by a committee that is usually comprised of senior military officers (Abbink, 2022).

Proponents of this model claim that the Command Posts are unavoidable that is needed to address existential threats and create order when conventional systems of governance have completely broken down. There are indications that they are capable of creating a form of temporary and tactical stability through the simple expedient of overwhelming the forces of violence and attaining a monopoly of violence (Bayeh, 2022). There is, however, a large body of literature that indicates the negative long-term consequences of this strategy. First, it creates a dangerous governance vacuum. By essentially ignoring the regional governments and civilian agencies that are elected to manage the conflict zones, the Command Posts dismantle, the very agencies that are needed to manage the recovery of the affected regions. This is essentially a negation of the very principles of federalism (Abbink, 2022).

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, these structures are often linked to serious human rights abuses. The broad powers, which are vaguely defined, have created an environment in which military forces act with impunity, leading to serious human rights abuses, including

extrajudicial killings, mass arrests, and torture(Salemot, 2021). Such abuses do not end the conflict; they spread it. They create wounds that are generational in nature, and in many cases, serve as the catalyst for continued resistance against the state.

Lastly, there is a developing concern that there is a "normalization" of Emergency Rule. In the case of Ethiopia, the use of Emergency Rule has become so pervasive that it is almost a standard part of the government's toolkit, rather than a last resort under the Constitution(J. Abbink, 2021). This is problematic in terms of the rule of law and social acceptance of the idea of militarized rule as the "new normal." From a conflict management perspective, the existence of a Command Post is the opposite of early intervention and prevention. It is the moment when all other options have failed, and the implication is that a situation has become so bad that the only solution that the state can see is massive coercion. It is a solution of suppression, not prevention, and the legacy of a Command Post is a more polarized and traumatized society than the one that existed before the intervention.

2.5.4. Disaster Risk Management Council

In contrast to the reactive, force-centric approaches of traditional security agencies, the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) system of Ethiopia is reflective of an alternative philosophy of governance(Graham *et al.*, 2012). Underpinned by the provisions of Article 89(3) of the FDRE Constitution, which requires the state to protect its citizens from the risk of disasters, the system has developed through the incorporation of international best practices such as the Hyogo and Sendai Frameworks. The 2013 DRM Policy and Strategy take this a step further by recognizing conflict as a "Human-made disaster," thereby removing the sole focus on military suppression. Its design is all-encompassing, with the DRM Council, led by the Prime Minister, responsible for overall policy; the DRM Commission, which acts as the operational secretariat; and lead agencies, such as the Ministry of Peace, responsible for the socio-political fallout of conflict-related crises(Abebe, 2021).

The strength of the DRM system in terms of operations is the use of standardized guides that are procedure-driven in nature, with the aim of eliminating the chaos that is likely to occur in the process of coordination(Wako and Shen, 2021). The Multi-Agency Coordination Group Guide creates a strategic platform for the alignment of the efforts of various ministries, UN agencies, and NGOs. On the other hand, the Emergency Coordination Center Guide creates a physical hub that is likely to facilitate the fusion of information in the process of responding to emergencies. In terms of operations, the Incident Command System creates a template that

is likely to facilitate the management of the scene of the incident through the creation of the Incident Command Post, with the aim of creating a unified command system that is independent of the level of the emergency that is being addressed(Ayalew, 2025). The use of the principle of subsidiarity is likely to push the management of emergencies to the lowest level of government, with the aim of empowering the level that is closest to the conflict to manage the situation.

For conflict management, this model provides several theoretical advantages that are not available under traditional security approaches. First, it is inclusive, bringing the humanitarian and development actors to the same table as the security forces(Wako and Shen, 2021). Second, it is protocol-driven, with the "disaster declaration" serving as a transparent trigger for action. This eliminates political hesitation and replaces it with procedural obligation(Beshir and Kassa, 2024). Third, it is people-centered, as the local DRM councils are mandated to undertake the risk assessment(Gebrehiwot et al., 2020). This provides the local legitimacy that is necessary for sustainable peace. This model is designed to close the "action gap" between the availability of early warning data and the response to it.

However, despite such a complex design, the application of the system in ethnic conflicts is marred by many challenges in the field(Aldino et al., 2025; Haile, 2024; Moges, 2017). These situations have shown that there is a marginalization of the DRM structures in the midst of active conflicts, as Command Posts, being military-led, often disregards the ECC and MAC groups, perceiving them as obstacles to successful military operations. There is also a major capacity gap in the field, as many Woreda DRM committees lack the necessary training in conflict mediation, budgetary independence, and political support to be effective first responders. Finally, although the system is designed to be multi-hazard, it is institutionally predisposed to climatic disasters such as drought, making the shift to the complex dynamics of ethnic conflicts a major challenge(Ayalew, 2025).

Building on this foundation, the 2023-2030 roadmaps, developed by the Ethiopian Disaster Risk Management Commission (EDRMC) with international support, represents a strategic move towards a unified multi-hazard impact-based early warning and early action system(*A Roadmap for Multi Hazard Impact Based Early Warning and Early Action System(2023-30, 2022)*). This is a bold initiative to address systemic failures, such as the 'action gap' where warnings were issued but failed to prompt timely action, and a lack of ownership at the community level. To create a disaster-resilient society, four critical areas have been

identified: improving disaster risk knowledge through digitalized data and risk profiles; applying technology to enhance detection and forecasting; ensuring effective communication to reach 'last mile' communities; and developing early action capacity through pre-agreed financing instruments to ensure timely availability of resources when a disaster is detected.

2.5.5. The House of Federation

The House of Federation (HoF) plays a very unique and crucial role in the Ethiopian landscape as the final arbiter in the country has most politically charged constitutional disputes. The HoF's mandate is clearly defined in the FDRE Constitution under Articles 48 and 62, as well as in Proclamation No. 251/2001, which requires the HoF to interpret the constitution, deal with identity and boundary questions, and resolve disputes between regional states or between a state and the federal government (Mengie, 2022). In order to discharge this weighty responsibility, the HoF has developed a range of specialized instruments that include mediation, constitutional interpretation, and the conduct of referenda.

In a bid to resolve the systemic delays and lack of transparency that enabled local issues to boil over into national crises, the HoF issued a landmark directive in 2021 on issues of identity, administrative boundaries, and conflict resolution (Afesha, 2022). This directive serves as both a reactive mechanism for disputes and a system for the early detection of conflicts, codifying a definitive six-stage pipeline that seeks to resolve disputes in a manner that is legally enforceable. It commences with the registration of a complaint, followed by a triage phase where the Speaker refers the case to a specialized Standing Committee. The most critical phase of the process is a mandatory expert investigation carried out by the Directorate to arrive at a "Professional Opinion." Finally, the House renders a legally binding adjudication on the case after observations, and implementation monitoring is carried out to ensure compliance (HoF Directive, 2021).

In theory, this arrangement situates the HoF as the highest dispute resolution authority for foundational fissures within the federation. In reality, however, academic analyses have been very disapproving. A study pointed out that this constitutional arrangement does not have clear dispute resolution mechanisms between the federal government and regional governments, thus making it difficult to ascertain the role of the HoF as a dispute resolver (Fiseha, 2019). In fact, the very existence of this court, composed of representatives of regional states, makes it difficult to resolve disputes because these representatives may not

have the interest of the nation at heart but rather that of their respective regions(Regassa, 2010). In fact, analyses of boundary conflicts between regions such as Tigray and Amhara, or Oromia and Somali, have shown that this court has not done a good job of resolving such conflicts, thus leading to violent conflicts (Birhanu and Kebu, 2019).

Though some scholars have commended the House for its attempts at building consensus in particular situations, the consensus remains that the HoF remains a reactive and politicized body. It has failed to proactively address the centrifugal forces that are embedded in the ethnic federal structure of the Ethiopian state (Taye, 2017). Despite the procedural improvements introduced by the 2021 Directive, political maneuvering often bogs down the House of Federation. It therefore remains an unreliable tool for managing the very conflicts it was meant to manage, and does so only after the crisis has reached a breaking point and not at the early warning stage.

2.5.6. The Ministry of Peace

The Ministry of Peace (MoP), which was created through Proclamation No. 1097/2018, is a specialized organ of the executive branch of government responsible for the management and resolution of conflicts in Ethiopia. The MoP's scope of work is expansive in nature, with the Ministry charged with developing and establishing Conflict Early Warning Systems (CEWS), coordinating peace interventions, and managing peace committees and forums at all levels of government, from federal to Woreda(Teshale, 2023). In theory, the MoP is the guardian of Ethiopia's "soft power," but a critical analysis of this Ministry suggests a number of operational challenges affecting its functionality and effectiveness in managing conflicts in Ethiopia. The first of these challenges is a gap between design and implementation, a problem that has been identified that while this Ministry is good at designing strategic plans, it is unable to implement these plans at the grassroots level because of a lack of funds and an overwhelming number of conflicts to manage (Bersunega, 2019; Gebeyehu, 2023).

A second, and perhaps even more damaging, problem is the fragmentation, which is both vertical and horizontal, which is experienced in the work of the Ministry. A study indicates that there is inconsistency in the application of the Early Warning Systems. For example, while the system used in the Amhara Region may not be synchronized with the federal system, communication between the federal, zonal, and *Woreda* levels is often ineffective. This lack of synchronization is creating dangerous information silos that are either insufficient or come too late(Beshir and Kassa, 2024).

Furthermore, Mengistu, (2021), described the work of the Ministry is often undermined by its position in the overall governance structure. While the MoP supports a participatory and community-based approach that has been hailed as one of the most successful ways of engaging local populations and promoting ownership of peace processes the peace committees are made instantly redundant if the security sector chooses to take over. In many regional crises, it has been observed that Security Task Forces or Command Posts have been known to single-out the state's response, choosing to ignore the olive branch in favor of the gun. The overall impact of the MoP's work is undermined by this inconsistency, and it struggles to find its position as the main peace actor in a system that seems to value the gun above the olive branch.

Figure 3 outlines the organizational structure of the Ministry of Peace, highlighting its various sections and their specific functions related to conflict management and peace-building. At the top is the Ministry of Peace, which includes a Federalism and Conflict Administration Section focused on overseeing federal and intergovernmental relations, as well as a Conflict Management Executive responsible for addressing conflict-related issues. Various executive units focused on peace-building, national consensus and volunteerism support these frameworks. Moreover, there are specialized desks for research and analysis of conflicts, warning and response, and religious tolerance, underscoring the holistic approach to enhancing peace and stability. This structure supports collaborative work in managing conflicts and promoting social cohesion.

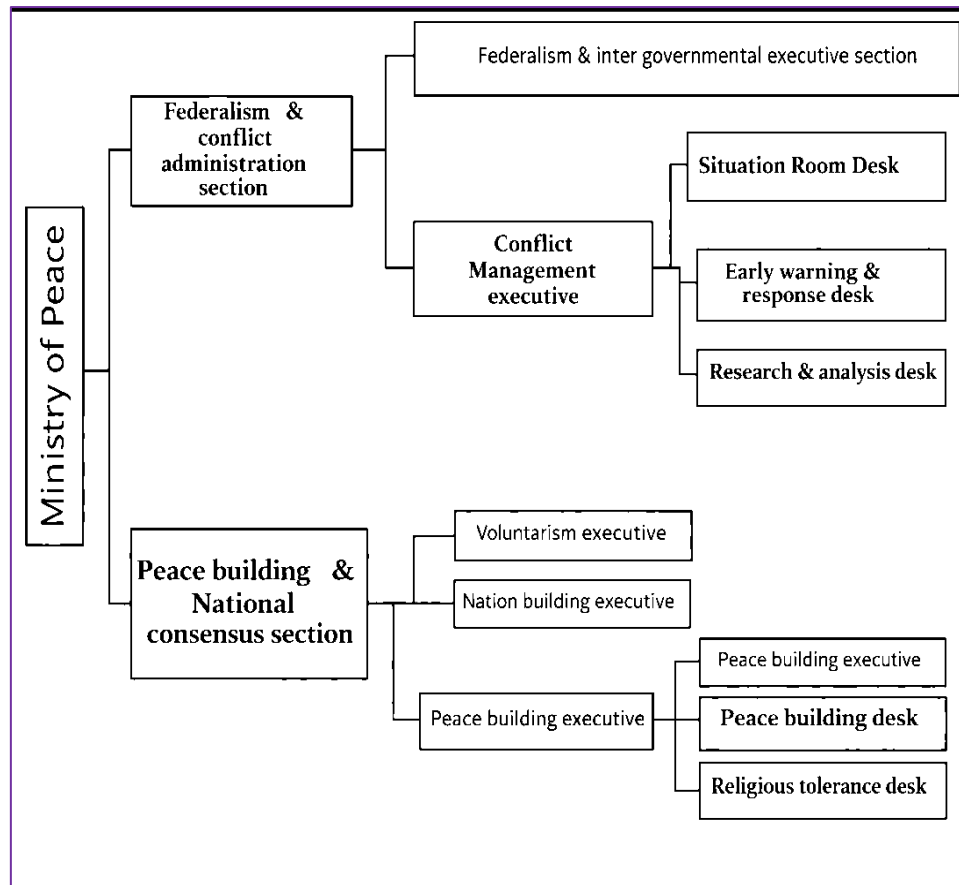


Figure 3 Organizational Structure of Ministry of Peace in Ethiopia
Source: Ministry of Peace website

Diagram 4 below represents the organizational structure of the Amhara Regional Early Warning System under the Ministry of Peace. The organizational structure is composed of the Amhara Region Peace and Security Administration Bureau, which oversees various teams and departments. The Conflict Prevention and Resolution Department is the main component of the organizational structure, focusing on proactive approaches in managing and resolving conflicts. The department has the Early Warning Team that focuses on the monitoring of potential indicators of conflict and the Peace Value Building Team that focuses on peace clubs and forums in the communities. Under this department is the Zonal Peace and Security Administration department, which has the Woreda PSA that focuses on conflict management in the communities.

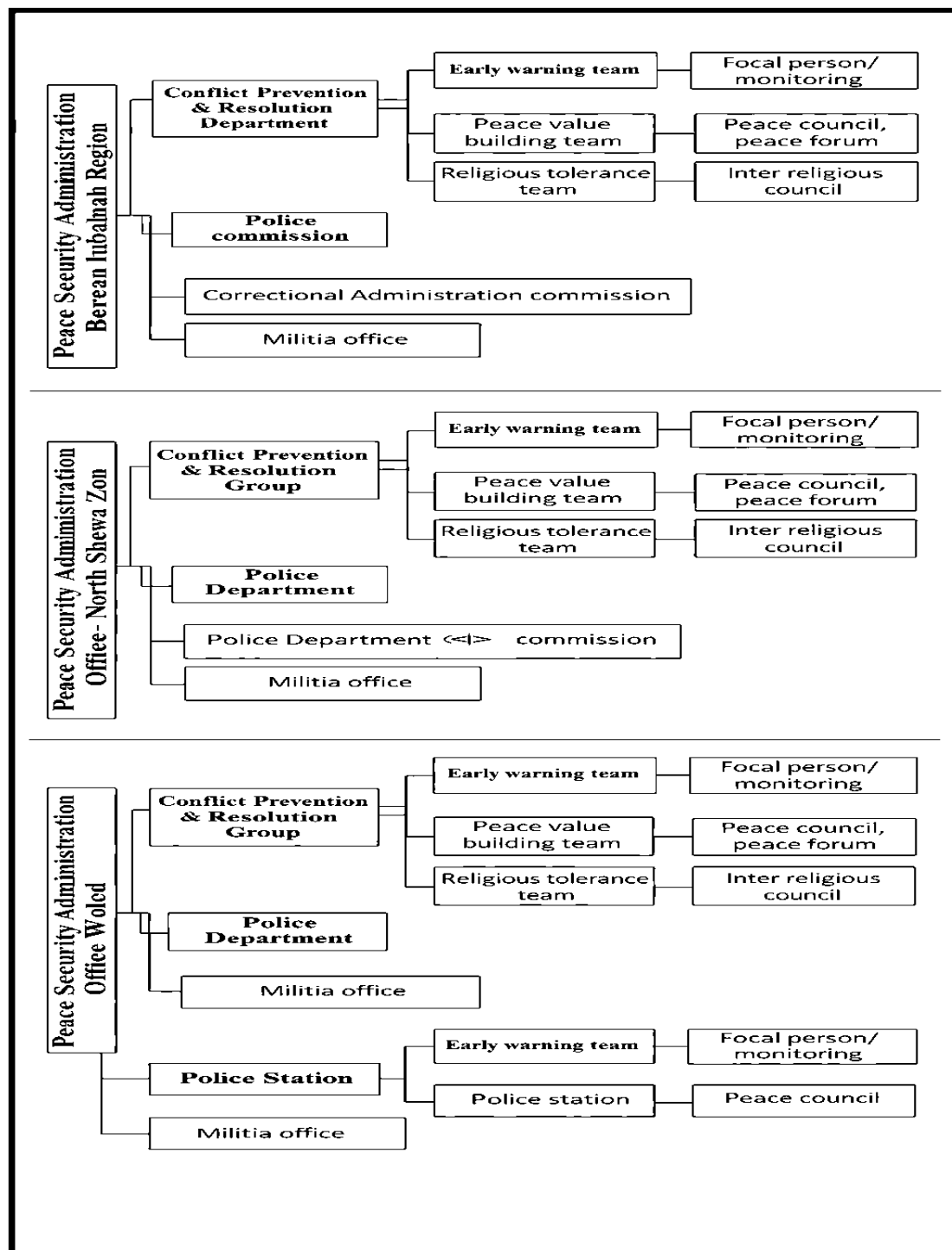


Figure 4 : Amhara Regional Government Conflict Early Warning System

Source: Researcher's, 2024

The organizational structure is composed of the Peace and Security Committees and the Religious Tolerance Teams that help in mediating and coordinating the activities of various groups in the communities. It provides space for the implementation of concerted conflict prevention and building peace strategy in the communities using participatory local knowledge (Bersunega, 2019).

2.5.7. Criminal Justice System

The established Criminal Justice System, including the police, public prosecutors, and correctional services, represents the state's most significant means of enforcing law and order and settling disputes arising from criminal acts (Ayalew, 2020). The Criminal Justice System is supposed to represent a pillar of unbiased and rights-oriented conflict resolution, holding perpetrators of violence accountable for their actions and, through the consistent application of the rule of law, preventing future criminal acts from germinating. However, the existing literature indicates that the Criminal Justice System is currently facing a crisis, especially in dealing with ethnically charged conflicts (Enyew, 2013). The most damaging indictment of the Criminal Justice System is the lack of trust, arising from both the perceived and actual presence of political and ethnic bias. Study shows the police and the judicial system are often perceived as nothing more than tools of the dominant party or ethnic group in a particular region. This lack of trust has led to a catastrophic situation, whereby once the public perceives the Criminal Justice System as an active participant in the conflict, the system ceases to represent a deterrent and instead becomes a source of grievance (Dana, 2016).

For many, this is a symptom of a systemic failure, which further cements the idea that "justice" is simply reserved for those in power, and this cycle of violence will continue as those who have been oppressed will continue to look for their own forms of retribution. Though legal protections are undoubtedly important, they also have the potential for further conflict if they do not address the social, cultural, and political factors that are leading to ethnic strife. Therefore, an integrative approach, which combines the criminal justice system with indigenous conflict resolution, is crucial for creating a lasting peace (Enyew, 2013). By utilizing these customs, stories, and perspectives, stakeholders are able to create the understanding and cooperation necessary for creating a lasting peace, as they have the flexibility and responsiveness that more traditional methods do not (Halefom, 2022).

At the end of it all, this research advocates for a paradigm shift in the use of legal processes. For instance, there is a need to adopt holistic approaches that encourage coexistence and address the root causes of ethnic conflicts rather than sticking to strict rights-based approaches. The adoption of restorative justice approaches, which seek to heal and restore relationships rather than punishing offenders, can provide an effective solution to conflict resolution and reconciliation. These approaches can work effectively in diverse societies like Ethiopia, which has cultural values that promote community involvement and restoration.

(Ayalew, 2020; Enyew, 2013). Such an approach can provide an effective solution towards building a cohesive and peaceful society (Halefom, 2022).

2.5.8. Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism

Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms (ICRM) constitutes the most ancient and culturally embedded level of the Ethiopian conflict resolution landscape. Rather than a monolithic entity, these are various systems, each uniquely designed for the distinct cultural values of various ethnic groups. The Amhara rely on the Shimgelina process, in which conflict is mediated by elder statesmen, or Shimagile, who emphasize harmony and compensation for wrongdoing, not punishment, and who are motivated by ancestral values like Yabat Hager Hig (Bamlak, 2013; Fikeryohannes et al., 2023). In contrast, the Oromo have their highly structured Gada process, as well as other methods like Jarsumma, or arbitration, and Luba Basa, or inclusive peacemaking, which is well-known for their formality and relatively higher rates of women's participation (Tuso, 2000; Yohannes and Mengistu, 2021; Zeleke, 2010) .

The strength of these indigenous systems is of great importance. These systems have a level of legitimacy and accessibility that the formal courts may not attain. This is because they are conducted at the local level and are therefore conducted in the local language and culture. Their ultimate objective is restorative, seeking to mend the social fabric and reintegrate the offenders into the fold (Halefom, 2022). Moreover, they are faster, cheaper, and more attuned to local political realities.

The recent incorporation of these mechanisms in legal codes, such as Proclamation 679/2025 in the Amhara Region, represents an important form of official recognition of their continuing importance. On the other hand, the academic literature points to a series of important weaknesses. Most ICRM deal only with civil matters or petty crimes, often proving inadequate to deal with homicides or extensive politically motivated crimes. There is, of course, the problem that ICRM may perpetuate patriarchal structures, as male elders, which may marginalize women, youth, and minority voices (Bamlak, 2013), often run them. In addition, there is the "parochial" problem, which may be particularly relevant in a contemporary, multi-ethnic state. An Oromo party in a cross-border conflict may not see an ICRM originating in the Amhara Region as legitimate. The impact of urbanization and migration, however, has been to undermine the traditional social structures that ICRMs rely upon, particularly in a diverse urban center like Ataye (Halefom, 2022).

2.6. Theoretical and Conceptual frameworks

This study adopts various theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are relevant to theorize conflict and conflict Early Warning System.

2.6.1. Theoretical Frameworks

This study draws its theoretical frameworks from Theory of Relative Deprivation, Basic Human Needs Theory, and the Theory of Anomie. These theoretical underpinnings together provide the foundation for examining the effectiveness of conflict Early Warning System.

The Theory of Relative Deprivation provides the key lens through which collective action and conflict can be understood as a component of conflict risk knowledge. This theory posits that conflict occurs when there is a perceived discrepancy between what people believe they are entitled to and what they are capable of attaining. Conflict Early Warning Systems monitor for these gaps such as rising inequality, economic decline, or political repression as precursors to social unrest. It implies that collective action results not from absolute adversity but from a feeling of relative deprivation arising between what is known as value expectations (i.e., what a group is entitled to according to a belief system) and what is known as value capabilities. This relative deprivation theory underlines that people's satisfaction does not depend on whether the material conditions of objective life are good or bad but on whether these conditions are "better" or "worse" relative to those of the reference group and the situation becomes more applicable in the context of multi-ethnic societies (Power et al., 2020). For instance, a research which was conducted to study conflict in Nigeria inspired by this theory of relative deprivation revealed how the perceptions of relative political and economic exclusion of certain groups in Nigeria directly led to insurgent conflict (Aaron, 2015). Similarly, a longitudinal analysis of Southeast Asia illustrates that rising inequality, when framed as group-based discrimination, greatly raises the risk of communal conflict (Kim & Park, 2023). In the context of the study of conflict and Early Warning System in Ataye, this theory becomes relevant to explain how competing historical narratives, political marginalization, and competition over resources and administrative control between Amhara and Oromo communities constitute perceived, and the importance of how the Early Warning System needs to detect and monitor the trends of the deprivations and its contributions to conflict.

Complementing this approach, Basic Human Needs Theory, as conceptualized by conflict resolution theorists, who argue that conflicts are not simply disputes over resources or interests that can be compromised. Instead, deep-seated conflicts arise because fundamental needs are denied or threatened (Bradshaw and Lötter, 2019). The underlying reason for violent conflicts comes from the denial of essential human needs such as security, identity, recognition, and participation (Väyrynen, 2018). Thus, this theoretical approach raises the level of understanding to a more existential level beyond basic interests. Indeed, recent empirical studies have confirmed this; for example, a study on conflicts among pastoralists in East Africa found that an intervention strategy that ignored the need for recognition and participation in governance only managed to temporarily hold conflicts at bay (Jellason et al., 2022). Additionally, sustained long-term conflicts remain unresolved because the interventions, by institutions, are addressing the surface-level positions and not the underlying, non-negotiable needs (Bradshaw and Lötter, 2019). When this theory is applied to the study, it highlights that the failure of the security-oriented reactions by the Command Posts in Ethiopia lies in the fact that they are merely addressing a symptom rather than addressing the non-negotiable needs of the community, such as their need for security, identities, and recognition.

The most relevant theoretical background upon which the diagnosis of social instability and the systemic and communicational failure in the institutional response apparatus can be explained by the Theory of Anomie, both in its original formulation by Durkheim (Yan and Peng, 2025), who saw it as a temporary state of "normlessness" caused by rapid social change and its modifications by Merton's anomie theory, who focused on Structural-functional, arguing that anomie is built into the social structure, specifically when a culture emphasizes success goals but restricts access to the means for certain groups, (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2017). "Merton's anomie perspective posits that anomie is a condition of normlessness that arises from a lack of congruence between socially defined goals and legitimate access to means for achieving these goals. Anomie in an institutional sense implies conditions of institutional fragmentation and a lack of legitimate action procedures. The latter directly leads to explaining the 'warning-response gap' (Faizi & Nayeibi, 2023). The research into disaster management systems has already established that in anomic conditions, when roles and norms are in a state of conflict, coordinated efforts can be highly impaired, resulting in "silo" information set and slowing down the institutional response. In a related analysis, Cardwell et al. employ anomie to understand policing by demonstrating how the absence of

meaningful institutional norms leads to discretionary behavior that can corrode public trust (Attoh, 2017; Robinson & Rogers, 2018). Applying anomie theory in the analysis of Ethiopia's CEWS uncovers the shattered landscape of operation for the Ministry of Peace, security agencies, and DRM councils as this work under misaligned mandates without a clear normative protocol that defines how a warning would be transformed into a coordinated and legitimate response.

The three theories employed in this study operate at distinct yet interconnected levels of analysis, together offering a multi-layered explanation of conflict emergence, persistence and systemic failure. Relative Deprivation Theory functions primarily at the macro-meso level by illuminating the broader structural and societal conditions that generate group-based grievances. It explains why collective discontent arises by focusing on perceived inequalities between groups and the resulting mobilization potential. Through this lens, conflict is rooted in comparative injustice and the social psychology of unmet expectations. Basic Human Needs Theory, by contrast, operates at the micro-meso level. It interrogates the deeper individual and communal drivers that render certain conflicts resistant to negotiation or compromise. By emphasizing non-negotiable needs such as identity, security, recognition, and participation, this theory clarifies the intensity and intractability of conflicts. It demonstrates why disputes grounded in unmet existential needs cannot be resolved through material concessions alone and remain non-responsive to superficial or technocratic solutions.

Complementing these perspectives, Anomie Theory-as a socio-economic and institutional theory functions at the meso-macro level. It examines the structural and institutional environment in which societal responses to emerging tensions are expected to occur. However, this theory explains the failure of the system by highlighting how institutional breakdown and procedural incoherence undermine the state's ability to respond effectively. In this context, the anomic character of governance processes suppresses early warning signals, discourages accountability and prevents timely or preventive interventions. Taken together, these theories form a coherent analytical framework.

The symbiosis of Relative Deprivation and Basic Needs theories explain the formation of collective grievances and the depth of unmet demands that fuel social instability. The Anomie Theory explains why these social instabilities escalate rather than being mitigated. The interaction of widespread grievances with an anomic state apparatus often leads to the

creation of a mutually reinforcing dynamic in which conflict drivers intensify while systemic safeguards fail.

The drawing of these interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the study of conflicts was observed in contemporary studies that stress the need for a multi-theoretical approach to the understanding of conflict complexity. The civil conflict in contemporary societies needs to be understood through hybrid frameworks that tend to integrate grievance theories (such as Relative Deprivation) and institutional theories (such as Anomie)(Chadefaux, 2023).

This study, therefore, uses this very comprehensive and integrated theory model. Relative Deprivation theory and Basic Needs theory are applied to assess the quality and relevance of conflict risk knowledge as well as the legitimacy of response mechanisms. Anomie theory is also predominantly used to explain the problem of monitoring coordination and risk communication failure, specifically looking into how institutionalized normlessness results in lethal bottlenecks in information flows. They shall then offer a more comprehensive theoretical ground for explaining the ineffectiveness of the CEWS in conflict-ridden Ataye Town by bridging the link between the social foundation of conflict and the political-institutional failure of its eruption.

2.6.2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study emphasizes the interaction between the independent variables (Conflict Risk Knowledge, Conflict Monitoring, and Conflict Communication) and the dependent variable of Conflict Early Response in establishing an effective Early Warning System in Ethiopia.

This framework is based on the fundamental assumption that an effective Early Warning System operates as a holistic and integrated cycle, wherein all components must work harmoniously and in sync with one another. If any component fails or operates in isolation, the entire system can become ineffective.

Focusing specifically on Ataye from 2018 to 2023, this framework can aid in analyzing why violence persisted despite the presence of an Early Warning System. This analysis will assess the performance of each variable during critical periods, including the significant violence that occurred in March 2019.

The framework is guided by the premise that understanding the failures of the Early Warning System to respond adequately to conflicts requires moving beyond mere description to engage with theoretical perspectives and the complex, multi-dimensional nature of conflicts.

The conceptual framework furthermore integrates three theories across four dimensions. The Relative Deprivation Theory primarily highlights Conflict Risk Knowledge by uncovering the nature and dynamics of grievances that arise from perceived inequalities between social groups. When social groups perceive unjust inequalities compared to others, the resulting frustration creates structural vulnerabilities that extremists can exploit.

Basic Human Needs Theory contributes to both Conflict Risk Knowledge and Conflict Response Design by illustrating the importance of fundamental human needs, such as identity, recognition, security, and participation. When these needs are not met, conflicts can become intractable and resistant to superficial solutions.

Anomie Theory focuses on failures in Monitoring and Communication by exposing issues like institutional fragmentation, mandate confusion, and a lack of norms. It is important to note that these theories do not function independently; instead, they work together to illuminate the dynamics and nature of grievances, explaining why they can be so volatile and why institutional solutions aimed at resolving these grievances often fail.

Conflict Risk Knowledge makes up the foundational independent variable, which comprises the system's capability to detect, analyze, and comprehend the structural features, proximate causes, and dynamic factors that increase the possibility of conflict in a given area. In the case of Ataye, this comprises profound knowledge of the Amhara-Oromo relationship, as analyzed in Jemal (2020), the constitutional imbalances, as analyzed in Yusuf (2019), the detrimental effects of ethnic entrepreneurs, the prolonged land conflicts, the illegal arms trade, and the community-level factors that increase the risk of violence. Therefore, the risk knowledge must not only comprise the technical analysis of the situation, but the system must also connect with the community to acquire the diverse risk perceptions of different sub-groups among the Amhara and Oromo communities. This aspect has been remarkably neglected in the literature, which has predominantly focused on the two communities as homogeneous entities with uniform interests and perceptions. Between 2018 and 2023, the extent to which Early Warning Systems in the region had accurate, diverse, and constantly updated risk knowledge remains an unanswered question that this framework addresses.

Relative Deprivation Theory is the fundamental theory on which Conflict Risk Knowledge is built. This is because the theory explains the role of perceived inequalities between social groups and their implications for creating vulnerabilities to social conflicts. According to Gurr (1970), conflicts do not arise from deprivation per se but from the perceived gap between what social groups feel they deserve and what they can achieve. In Ataye, the theory has been used to analyze the formation of differing value expectations between Amhara and Oromo social groups on the basis of their understanding of political developments in 2018. Basic Human Needs Theory, developed by Burton (1990) and expanded by Väyrynen (2018), provides a significant level of depth with the identification that the strongest forms of vulnerability are those, which challenge issues of identity, recognition, and security needs which cannot be met through material compromise. When the very existence of a group is at stake, conflict is not a choice; it is a necessity. The integrated theoretical approach requires that the overall risk knowledge be comprehensive with regard to both objective inequalities and perceptions of need deprivations.

Conflict Monitoring makes up the second independent variable and this concept entails the observation of risk indicators, the monitoring of escalation processes, and the identification of early warning signs before the occurrence of violence. This concept, therefore, not only entails the technical procedures for the collection of information, such as the reporting networks, the process of conducting field research, and the use of community informants, among others, but also the institutional procedures for validation, analysis, and interpretation.

In the case of the Ataye community, the effective monitoring of the situation would have identified the proliferation of hate speeches, the movements of armed groups, the issues of land disputes, the mobilization of the political class along ethnic lines, and the gradual loss of trust between different ethnic communities following the 2018 political reforms. The existing literature shows a significant gap: no longitudinal evidence exists on how monitoring actually worked during 2018-2023, such as whether monitoring increased during tension periods, which indicators were emphasized or downplayed, and how data from various sources was triangulated. This variable directly fills the gaps by looking at what monitoring actually did rather than at what it was supposed to do.

For effective monitoring, indicators of different aspects of conflict risk need to be identified, and different theoretical lenses suggest different categories of indicator development. Relative Deprivation Theory emphasizes the need for monitoring the aspects of economic inequality, political exclusion, and discrimination, which create grievances among people. In the case of Basic Human Needs Theory, identity politics, cultural recognition, and security perceptions of the community also need to be considered for effective monitoring, but Anomie Theory brings a new dimension by emphasizing the need for the monitoring system itself to be monitored. Thus, the fragmentation creates a situation where information is collected but cannot be utilized because there is a lack of coordination, conflicting mandates, and a lack of normative protocols (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2017). In the Ataye case, this theoretical concept leads us to inquire whether the actors who conducted the monitoring did so in isolation from one another, whether there was information flow between the actors, and whether the system had any form of validation protocols for the variety of information sources. Without this 'meta-monitoring' level, EWSs do not perceive their own failures.

Conflict Communication, the third independent variable, "involves the process of transmitting early warning information from those who have identified it to those who can act on it." This variable comprises various dimensions. First, there is vertical communication between local monitors and district, zone, and federal decision-makers. Second, there is horizontal communication among peace, security, and development actors in Ataye. Lastly, there is feedback communication, which "completes the information loop by communicating responses back to the source of the warning." The theoretical and methodological gaps in the literature reviewed have been particularly critical in this case. In fact, "no previous study has actually mapped the information flows and decision-making procedures within peace and security institutions operating in and around Ataye." Some of the critical issues to explore in this case include whether the information regarding rising tensions was conveyed to relevant authorities prior to March 2019, whether the information was suppressed, altered, and/or ignored, and whether the communication channels were open to all communities or only to certain ethnic and/or political groups. Anomie Theory offers the theoretical framework to understand the communication breakdown. This theory proposes that institutional normlessness results in siloes in which each actor possesses partial information but there is no way to integrate this information.

Conflict Early Response is the dependent variable that captures the end result of system effectiveness in translating warnings into preventive actions through mediation, security interventions, resource allocation, or political mobilization to counter threats before the outbreak of violent conflict. Response effectiveness also depends on the quality of the early warnings, system capacity, political will, coordination among actors, and the appropriateness of the response strategy to the particular conflict situation. The variable response effectiveness in Ataye from 2018 to 2023 in periods of controlled tension and catastrophic violence suggests that response effectiveness was variable, although the reasons for this remain unknown.

This framework proposes that the quality of early response is a product of the combined functionality of the three variables that preceded it, through the lens of the integrated theory. An effective response requires an understanding of the grievance drivers through the lens of Relative Deprivation Theory, the need drivers through the lens of Basic Human Needs Theory, which proposes that these drivers cannot be neglected, and finally the need to transcend the fragmented nature of the institution through the lens of Anomie Theory, which proposes this as the fundamental barrier to effective action. The conceptual framework situates the three theories not only as abstract constructs but also as vital tools for understanding the failure of the CEWS in Ataye and how they can be integrated into an effective response.

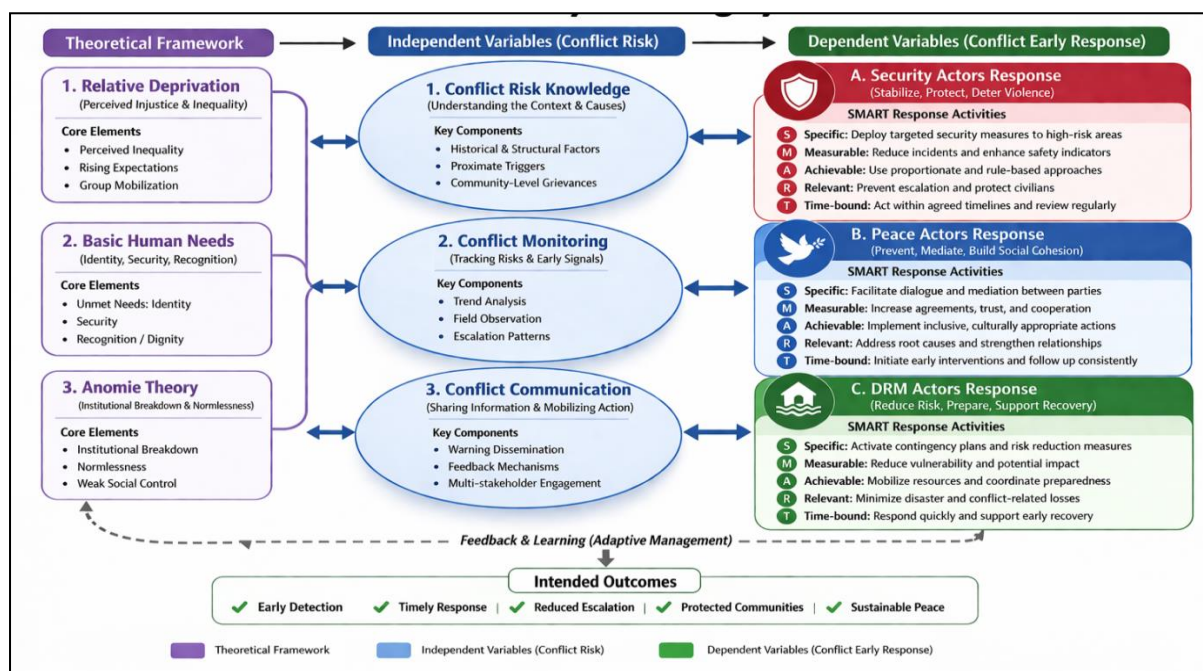


Figure 5 Conceptual Framework of Effective Conflict Early Warning System

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with the description of the study area, research philosophy, research approach and design, the population and sampling techniques, sources of data and data collection tools, and analysis methods. Additionally, the chapter outlines the ethical considerations, and the limitation of the study along with issues of validity and reliability.

3.1. Description of the Study Area

Ethiopia, as a landlocked country in the Horn of Africa, bordered by South Sudan, Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia, and Eritrea, is referred to as the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia constitutionally. Ethiopia is the home country of over 80 different ethnic groups (Shaw, 2007). Among these groups, Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups constitute more than half of the total Ethiopian population. The history of the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups reveals the uniqueness and socio-political realities of both groups (Fikeryohannes, 2023).

Amhara, traditionally linked to the Kingdom of Abyssinia, has gone through tremendous transformations in terms of their identity, as historians provide different interpretations for the term, which is linked to different ideas such as "free people" and "people dwelling below the mountain" (Shiferaw Chanie and Ishiyama, 2021). This is clear example of the complexity of the Amhara identity, which has been constructed through different political and social processes such as migration, intermarriage, and mixing between different ethnicities, most notably through the Solomonic dynasty since the 13th century. Amhara, traditionally identified with the concept of the Ethiopian state, is now under threat through the emergence of ethnic federalism, which has reshaped ethnic boundaries and structures (Amare and Alamineh, 2023).

On the other hand, the Oromo, being the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, has its own identity in terms of culture and society, particularly in the Gada system, which was described by Tuso (2000). This system primarily deals with their Gada, which pertains to their process of governing and their social structure, which instigates egalitarian government. The rise of the Oromo in Ethiopia, which took place in the 16th century, was brought about by socio-political factors and cultural associations, hence their complex identity, which comprises different sub-groups and dialects, as asserted by Alemu (2022). Despite the fact that earlier Oromo people migrated and became Islamic and Christian adherents, their culture remained almost the same, evident in their language, customs, and beliefs. The Oromo, to date, are still

trying to cope with the complexities of modern Ethiopian politics in search of their proper role in the face of recent socio-political developments in their country, particularly after they contributed significantly to the revolution that led to the overthrow of the earlier government, as described by Yohannes and Mengistu (2021).

That tradition of dense tapestry of cooperation and competition between historical inter-ethnic relations by the Amhara and Oromo people is thus driven by the socio-political dynamics of Ethiopia. In the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie I, the two people co-existed in general peace with one another, practicing farming and marrying between their groups (Jemal, 2020). The establishment of Ataye Town during the 1960s was the focus of this interaction where the two communities worked together to build it and reaped the rewards of mutual exchanges of labor and resources. Although there was hospitality, sometimes tension occurred regarding grazing and land use rights, particularly when drought struck, with issues of competition for resources at its peak. These hostilities were settled by normal channels with regard to elders from the two groups, after which there was a reliance on conventional approaches in a bid to foster social solidarity (Teshome, 2021).

This subsequent Derg regime (1974-1991) was one of greater harmony between the Amhara and Oromo people in that they united against the feudal government that had previously set them against one another (Haileyes and Leta, 2023). The policies of land reform by the Derg to uproot the feudal system allowed both communities to acquire land, hence propagating equality and shared purpose. Additionally, the efforts by the Derg to consolidate kebeles into large administrative units facilitated social integration because both communities participated in communal activities as well as development campaigns (Amare and Alamineh, 2023). This was a period of diminishment of ethnic-based violence, as conflicts between individuals regarding cattle theft and grazing were increasingly viewed as criminal activity rather than ethnic clashes, a sign of greater cohesion in community identification.

The advent of the EPRDF government in 1991 precipitated significant change in the political landscape that would ultimately result in renewed tensions. Federalism along ethnic lines adopted by the EPRDF re-drew administrative boundaries and emphasized ethnic identity, leading to the fragmentation of previously integrated Amhara and Oromo people (Jemal, 2020). The separating and creating of kebeles and ethnic zones politically marginalized a significant majority of the community members, reinforcing feelings of marginalization and creating the re-emerging inter-ethnic tensions. Though they have since maintained social and

economic relations, politicization of ethnicity has created a schism that has grown since 2018, with both groups needing to contend with the legacy of past resentments and new political realignments. The early Amhara-Oromo youth alliances amid the political reforms have since broken down, leading to renewed conflicts between them over governance and territory, which captures the tenuous nature of inter-ethnic relationships in Ataye Town.

3.1.1. Amhara Regional State

It is one of the most significant regional administrations in Ethiopia, bordered by Tigray to the north, Afar to the east, Benishangul-Gumuz to the west and southwest, and Oromia to the south (Amare and Alamineh, 2023). It also shares a northwest and western border with Sudan. Amharic is the official language, and the region has a heterogeneous population 91.48% of whom identify as Amhara. The remaining ethnic groups include Agew-Awi (3.46%), Agew Hamyra (1.39%), Oromo (2.62%), and Argoba (0.41%), among others. The most observed religions in the Amhara region are Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, which accounts for 82.5%, and Islam, accounting for 17.2% (Census, 2007). Despite having a large population, the share of the nation's population by the Amhara Region has continued to reduce from 25.9% in 1994 to 23.3% in 2007. This means that it lost about 2.5 million people; this is believed to be because of underreporting, poor health care, and political suppression (Adugna et al., 2014).

There are four special zones or nationality administrations created by the Amhara Region to assert the rights of minority groups such as the Agew Himra, Awi, Qemant, and Oromo special Woredas as stipulated by Article 45(2) of the Revised Amhara National Regional Constitution. There is a constant outbreak of conflicts characterized by border and administration disputes between the people of the Oromo special zones (Jemal, 2020). This is mostly due to accumulated grievances and is extremely volatile and violent (Alemu, 2022). This shows the presence of underlying tensions that require the application of conflict management mechanisms geared towards resolving both inter-ethnic and local government issues.

The intra-Amhara regional dynamics are core in the building of effective conflict Early Warning Systems for Ataye. Given the ethnic composition and past experience with interethnic violence, especially between the Amhara and Oromo, recognition of these complexities is paramount for conflict trigger identification. A well-functioning CEWS needs to have comprehensive demographic analysis and historical grievances as part of its

forecasting ability of surges in conflict. By addressing the general socio-political context and the specific grievance relating to territorial demarcation, the system can inform early warnings and allow preventive action to diffuse tensions.

In general, the population composition of Amhara region, its past, and its conflict-generating issues do put into weight the applicability of an Early Warning System for conflict, specifically crafted for Ataye. Drawing from the regional specificity, CEWS will then become a strong actor in conflict prevention and finally contribute to the increase of peace and stability in several communities.

3.1.2. North Shewa Administration Zone

It is an Amhara Regional State zone administration in Ethiopia, surrounded by South Wollo to the north, the Oromia Region to the south and west, the Afar Region to the east, and the Oromo Special Zone to the northeast (M. Tesfaye et al., 2020). It has a population of approximately 1,837,490 and has undergone a growth in population of 17.72% since the 1994 census (Mekonnen and Mekonen, 2024). The population density of the area is 115.30, with 11.66% living in urban areas and only 0.01% listed as pastoralists. The dominant ethnic group in North Shewa is Amhara (90.73%), followed by Oromo (7.14%) and Argobba (1.71%), and the most widely spoken language by 92.97% of the people is Amharic. The zone's religious diversity portrays a vast majority of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians (94.71%), accompanied by a minority Muslim population (4.91%) (Jemal, 2020).

The North Shewa administration Zone especially the Yifat cluster (Efereata Gedom Woreda, Antsokia Gemza Woreda, Ataye Town administration, Shewarobet town, and Kewet Woreda) has increasingly become the focal point of armed conflicts over the past five years; this has posed massive humanitarian crises. These armed groups have continued attacking the zone, leading to numerous casualties and massive displacement (Muhyie et al., 2025). This is an actual reflection of the need for effective conflict resolution strategies and mechanisms that will stop these causes of violence in the zone. This zone has an administration composed of 22 Woredas and 9 Town administrations; among these Town administrations is Ataye Town.

3.1.3. Ataye Town Administration

The Ataye Town administration, under the North Shewa Zone, has specifically been chosen for conflict analysis work owing to its repeated exposure to armed conflict. Oromia Special Zone to the north and east, and Ephrata Gidim Woreda to the west and south, surrounds Ataye Town. This town found about 267 kilometers from Addis Ababa to Dessie Highway and holds an old history dating back to its formation as Yifatna Timuga Awaraja administration seats in 1964/65. In July 2009, Ataye Town was upgraded to city administration, and its area is made up of three kebeles, namely 01, 02, and 03. This town is found geographically at an altitude of 1,530 meters above sea level and ranges attitudinally from 1,486 to 1,530 meters above sea level (Jemal, 2020).

Based on the 2007 Ethiopian census base population of 27,458 for Ataye Town, applying the national annual growth rate range of 2.5% to 2.7% over the 18-year period from 2007 to 2025 yields a projected population between approximately 41,800 and 44,000, with the mid-range estimate at 2.6% growth producing a figure of roughly 42,900 persons (Ethiopian Statistical Service, 2025; World Economics, 2023). The 2007 census data, which serves as the foundational source for this projection, was collected and published by Ethiopia's Central Statistical Agency (now the Ethiopian Statistical Service) in their official census reports following the third National Population and Housing Census conducted in May and November 2007 (Central Statistical Agency, 2010; Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Population Census Commission, 2010). For Efratana Gidim Woreda, where Ataye Town serves as the administrative center, the 2007 census recorded a total woreda population of 110,493, with 15,319 (13.86%) living in urban areas, consistent with the town's role as the primary urban center for approximately 95,000 surrounding rural inhabitants (Central Statistical Agency, 2007). The growth rate of 2.6% used for the mid-range projection is supported by multiple sources, including United Nations estimates and the World Economics demographic database, which report Ethiopia's recent population growth rate at approximately 2.6% annually (World Economics, 2023; Macrotrends, 2025). These estimates assume steady compounding growth without major disruptions and rely solely on the 2007 benchmark given that no new national census has been conducted since that time, meaning the most reasonable range for planning and research purposes is 41,800 to 44,000, with the central estimate of 42,900 serving as the most practical figure for Ataye Town in 2025.

Ataye town is based in a hot lowland Kolla zone, which affects its agriculture and vulnerability to environmental risks (Mesfin, 2019). Ataye town acts as a focal point in agrarian and trade centres with most employment associated with farming different crops such as teff, maize, and onions, rearing livestock, trade, and catering services. Ataye town was established in the year 1964/65 after the Karakore earthquake in 1961. The town was founded by feudal lords from the Balabat locals in an area previously covered by forest. The town grew rapidly and became the capital of Awuraja associated with growth (Jemal, 2020). Its position has made it a focal point in Ataye that is essential in territorial politics in North Shewa, making it have a unique risk in connection with conflict risks.

It also known as Efeson, which boasts a rich variety of localities such as Sudan Sefer, Zigiba Sefer, and Hamus Gebeya, among others. The town is also equipped with schools, of which three are primary schools, one secondary and preparatory school, and a technical vocational training school, alongside health centers and a hospital (Getachew, 2021). The population of Ataye is also ethnically diverse and consists of more than eight ethnic groups residing in the area. The majority of the population belongs to the Amhara ethnic group, which is predominant in kebeles 02 and 03, with the Oromo community being prevalent in kebele 01. Data from historical census reveal that the population of Ataye grew from 5,491 in 1984 to 9,782 in 1994, indicating a shift in population over the years (Jemal, 2020; Gebretsadik, D., Ahmed, N., Kebede, E., Gebremicheal, S., Belete, M. A., and Adane, M. , 2021).

Before 1991, Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups in Ataye coexisted peacefully. In the year 2018, ethnic federalism was practiced, but tensions began rising, and there has been conflict occurring with armed battle. Explanatory factors include politicization of ethnicity, incapacity of local governance, ex-local authority manipulation, illegal weapons trade, and competing claims over the town. The increased conflict underscores the need for a quality conflict Early Warning System (CEWS) to monitor and act on the root causes of violence in Ataye (Jemal, 2020). With a CEWS that is informed by the local context and long-term interfaces between ethnic groups, stakeholders can more successfully anticipate flashpoints and promote dialogue that finds resolution, and thereby foster stability in this volatile region.

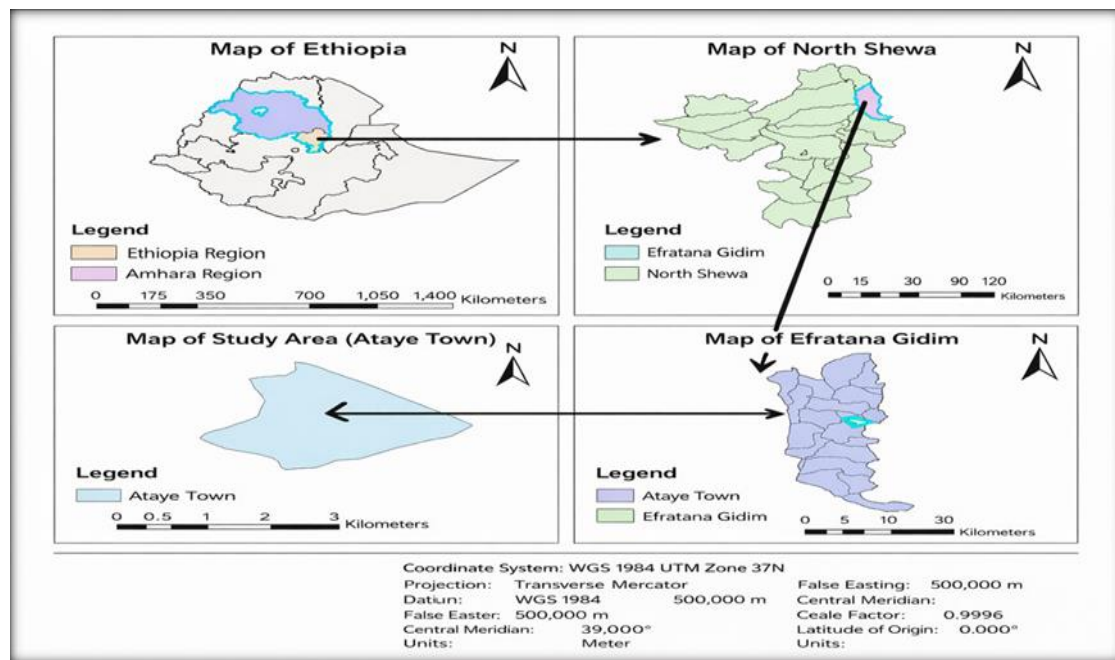


Figure 6 Map of the Study Area (Researcher, 2024)

3.2. Research Philosophy

The paradigm adopted for the study is pragmatist, which places the research question above the underlying philosophy. It has been observed that the pragmatist approach is based on four components, which are closely interconnected with each other. From the ontological perspective, the approach recognizes the reality as being both singular and multiple, and the consequences of such realities are significant. From the epistemological perspective, the approach recognizes the knowledge as being both constructed and based on the phenomena, and the legitimacy of the knowledge is based on its practical utility. From the methodological perspective, the approach combines the qualitative and quantitative methods to address the research question and to produce useful knowledge, which is context-dependent. It has been observed that the approach is highly significant for the conflict Early Warning System, as it allows for the investigation of the underlying causes of the conflict to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Maarouf, 2019; Alberstein, 2017).

By using the best of both worlds through the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods, pragmatism provides reliable results that show what, why, and how things are functioning within a given setting (Hatch, 2013). In this case, the axiological component of pragmatism recognizes the impact of the researcher's values, and at the same time, it aims at providing results, making it useful for the Early Warning System for the conflict in Ataye to be tailored and address issues within the community. This allows for diverse perspectives and

stakeholders to be involved for effective results, making it useful for the improvement of conflict prevention through the utility and relevance of the findings.

3.3. The Research Approach and Design

The research utilized a mixed-methods research approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to fully understand the dynamics involved in conflicts (Sharma et al., 2023). This approach highlights the complexity of conflicts by identifying patterns and relationships within large data sets through quantitative methods, while qualitative methods allow for a deeper analysis of the underlying factors and motivations influencing individuals.

Using a mixed methods approach enhances the precision of forecasting future conflicts, as relying solely on quantitative research may overlook certain factors. Additionally, this approach improves the validity of the research outcomes and is beneficial for developing and implementing Early Warning Systems. Its effectiveness in addressing the multifaceted nature of conflict has been demonstrated in conflict early warning studies (Dawadi et al., 2021).

Research also emphasizes the importance of integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to achieve a comprehensive understanding of conflicts. This need is further highlighted in a report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2018), which reinforces the value of mixed methods in conflict analysis, particularly for humanitarian agencies (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, a sequential exploratory research design was employed, involving an initial phase of data collection and analysis followed by further data acquisition and both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The approach for a conflict Early Warning System typically consists of two phases: an initial in-depth qualitative phase that informs and lays the groundwork for a subsequent, broader quantitative phase. The insights and variables gathered during this exploratory phase are then systematically operationalized and tested in a second quantitative phase, using statistical models and machine learning techniques to develop scalable and predictive early warning models. This integrated approach, as validated by recent literature, ensures that the resulting system is both contextually grounded and empirically robust (Maarouf, 2019).

This particular design offers significant advantages, particularly in studying conflict Early Warning Systems (EWS). Adopting this approach can broaden an individual's understanding of conflicts, ultimately leading to the development of effective warning systems. This method is especially valuable in Ataye, an area marked by high levels of ethnic conflict and warfare. It is useful for identifying reliable warning signs and implementing targeted interventions that address specific issues and their complexities. Furthermore, due to its ability to analyze the intricacies of complex environments, this approach facilitates predictions and measures aimed at reducing conflicts and promoting peace.

3.4. Target Population of the Study

This dissertation focuses on four key populations: peace actors, security actors, disaster risk management (DRM) actors, and victims of conflict.

Peace Actors: This group includes institutions and individuals actively engaged in conflict resolution and management. Notable members are interreligious council, Field Monitors, the House of Federation, 'traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, Peace Clubs/Forums, Peace Councils, and Ministry of Peace. Their responsibilities encompass conflict communication, management, resolution, and monitoring conflict risks.

Security Actors: This group consists of individuals and organizations focused on upholding the rule of law. It includes entities such as Security Councils, Security Task Forces, Police Commissions, the Ministry of Justice, and state of emergency Command Posts. They are responsible for monitoring conflicts and enforcing criminal laws in Ethiopia against suspects involved crimes.

Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Actors: This group conducts multi-hazard Early Warning Systems, develops disaster risk profiles and coordinates humanitarian aid for victims of conflict or internally displaced persons. It includes disaster risk management commission of from federal government down to Ataye town administration, disaster prevention and preparedness committee (አመዝካ) and its technique committee.

Victims of Conflict: This group comprises individuals who have been forced to flee their homes and have lost property or family members due to Ataye town conflict include government officials and businessmen. By analyzing the dynamics among these groups, this study aims to enhance understanding of the Early Warning System in Ataye Town.

3.5. Sampling Techniques and Size

The study utilized the techniques of both multistage stratified simple random sampling and purposive sampling in order to come up with a comprehensive population representation. To calculate the sample size, the researcher utilized a formula that required a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence interval, as represented by the equation:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{E^2} \quad n = \frac{3.8416 \cdot 0.25}{0.0025} = 385$$

In this calculation, n- represents the sample to be collected, Z is the Z-score at a specific level of confidence (approximately 1.96 for a level of 95%), and P represents the proportion of the population that is estimated to possess a specific attribute of interest (0.5), while (1 - p) represents the corresponding proportion of the population that does not possess the attribute of interest (Adam, 2020; Creswell, 2014). On the other hand, the parameter of error, denoted by E, represents the amount of deviation from the actual parameter of the sample (0.05) (Oribhabor and Anyanwu, 2019). This computed a sample of 385 participants.

This present study adopts multistage stratified simple random sampling to analyze perspectives from different categories within the conflict context: peace actors, disaster risk management actors, security actors, and conflict victims. The peace actors are providing insights into effective strategies in fostering peace and the challenges involved. Security actors are those who are in charge of managing the conflicts and ensuring public safety; they give, among other things, crucial perspectives on the effectiveness of security measures and the level of trust communities have in law enforcement. DRM actors focus on humanitarian aid during crises, their input helping to evaluate the alignment of aid mechanisms with peace-building efforts. Finally, the victims serve as a survival instinct and foster community solidarity and empowerment. By mobilizing for self-defense, victims can take control of their situations, possibly informing responses to violence and pointing out lapses in protection services. In stratifying the population in this manner, this study hopes to provide a nuanced analysis of the interactions between peace, security, and humanitarian efforts, further enhancing the robustness of the findings and promoting inclusivity in capturing diverse voices.

Sampling was done proportionate to the number of elements in the population under the specific stratum. The Peace actors had a population of 216, with a sample size of 56; security actors totaled 308, with a sample size of 80; victims comprised 770, with a sample size of 200; and Disaster Risk Management (DRM) respondents totaled 189, with a sample size of 49. In total, the study sampled 385 respondents from an overall population of 1,483. In addition to stratified sampling, purposive sampling employed to select the Ataye town Administration in the North Shewa Zone of the Amhara region, chosen due to its frequent exposure to armed conflict and interview participants. The 39 interviewees from police Commission, Ministry of peace, Disaster Management Commission, Public Prosecutors selected from Federal, Regional, Zonal, and Ataye town administration level of governments' and communities selected via purposive sampling. Moreover, data were collected from 32 FGD participants selected purposely from Ataye town's 3 kebeles.

3.6. Data Collection Techniques

The questionnaire, key informant interview, Focus group discussion, and document review were used in this dissertation in line with its particular goals.

3.6.1. Questionnaires

The utility of Likert-scale questionnaires for gauging perceptions and attitudes in conflict settings, as affirmed by this study, is well-supported in the literature. The quantitative surveys are vital for systematically mapping the "conflict landscape" of perceptions, trust levels, and acceptance of institutions. The high engagement from Peace and Security Actors suggests the Likert items effectively captured professional assessments of system performance, inter-agency coordination, and resource adequacy. This, in turn, would validate the conclusions of similar studies conducted elsewhere, which aimed to assess attitudes to reconciliation through surveys(Williams and Gordon-Gibson, 2024).

Table 1 shows the number of 385 participants in the questionnaires based centrally on the core logic of a sequential exploratory mixed method design. The number of questionnaires is significantly high and dominated by victims (200 participants), 80 security actors, 56 peace actors, and 49 DRM actors. This aligns with the quantitative generalizing purpose of the later stage of the study. This number permits the statistical capability to spot trends, prominent attitudes, and significant elements connected to the knowledge of the conflict and crucial indicators in a large and representative sample size, which communicates a wide breadth and potential (Chadefaux, 2023).

Table 1 Sample Size of Questionnaires Respondents

Participants	Number of Respondents'
Security actors	Federal police Rapid force 30 Amhara police..... 50
Peace actors	56 people
DRM actors	49 people
Ataye town communities members'	Kebele 01.....67 people Kebele 02..... 67 people Kebele 03-.....66 people
Total	385

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2024

The information sought in this questionnaire arranged in a manner that assisted in fully evaluating the success of the EWS in Ethiopia in preventing the Ataye conflict. The various questions in this document were sectioned to focus on different dimensions of concern in searching for a better understanding and working to improve the EWS. The initial questions elicited pertinent demographic information, including but not limited to, data such as sex, age, marital status, level of education, personal experience of the Ataye conflict, and employment type. The Likert-scale items successive questions focused on knowledge of conflict risks, conflict monitoring, effective communication, and early response action indicators developed and pretest conducted. These questions required respondents to state their level of agreement with different statements regarding these identified categories.

The response rate table 2 shows four categories or strata (Peace actors, Security actors, conflict Victims, DRM), 1,483 people comprise the population with a sample proportion and 385 distributed surveys, of which 380 were completed in the sample, yielding a response rate of 89.8%. The sampling proportions for each category are roughly equivalent: Peace actors 56 of 216 (25.9%), Security actors 80 of 308 (26.0%), Victims 200 of 770 (26.0%), DRM 49 of 189 (25.9%). The distribution and response rates in Ataye town in 2024 indicate high levels of cooperation in all groups, with completed surveys returned for each category: Peace actors 55 of 56 distributed (98.0%), Security actors 78 of 80 (97.5%), Victims 199 of 200 (99.5%), DRM 48 of 49 (98.0%). These results are favorable in comparison to other Ethiopian research efforts, such as South Gondar at 92.2% (Erega et al., 2025) and post-war Tigray at 99.9% (Asgedom et al., 2025), indicating that affected communities remain eager participants despite trauma.

Table 2- Distribution of Response Rate by the Number of Respondents

Category / Strata	Population	Sample size	% of Population	Distributed	Returned	Response Rate
Peace actors	216	56	25.9%	56	55	98.2%
Security actors	308	80	26.0%	80	78	97.5%
Victims	770	200	26.0%	200	199	99.5%
DRM	189	49	25.9%	49	48	98.0%
Total	1483	385	26.0%	385	380	98.7%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

3.6.2. Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are a good qualitative method of researching the views, experiences, and assumptions of a group concerning a specific issue. In conflict early warning research, FGDs can determine how communities perceive conflict risk; recognize conflict indicators, conflict communication, and early response in Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023.

In this study, four Focus Group Discussions (FGD) sessions were conducted to capture the full spectrum of conflict experiences across gender and ethnic lines, with 32 participants. FGD 1 consists of eight male participants from Amhara ethnic group. Their ages vary from 18 up to 60 years old. Similarly, the second FGD session composed of eight male participants from Oromo ethnic group. Their ages vary from 18 up to 60 years old and different livelihoods’.

Moreover, the third FGD session conducted with eight women participants from Amhara ethnic group. Their ages vary from 18 up to 60 years old. They are victims of this conflict. Similarly, the fourth FGD session conducted with 8 women’s participants’ from Oromo ethnic group. Therefore, these 4 FGD sessions enable to evaluate the effectiveness of Ataye town conflict Early Warning System to prevent the recurrent conflict.

3.6.3. Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews conducted to generate in-depth information from 39 people with high knowledge or expertise about conflict Early Warning Systems based on developed interview guide annexed.

Table 3 shows at the federal government level, the participants included members from the Federal Police Commission, federal prosecutors, the House of Federation, an early warning

desk officer from the Ministry of Peace, and officials from the IDP protection section in the Human Rights Commission. There were also members from the disaster management early warning and response section in the Disaster Management Commission that oversaw the Early Warning System. At a regional government level, the study included participants from the Amhara Police Commission, specifically crime investigators involved in the Ataye conflict investigation, the head of operations for the Amhara Special Police Force Department, and public prosecutors. Officers from the Amhara Disaster Management Commission's Early Warning Directorate provided valuable perspectives.

Similarly, at the North Shewa zonal and Ataye town administration levels, interviews were conducted with heads of the police department for crime prevention and investigation, the conflict early warning department, and the special police force, alongside leaders in disaster prevention and preparedness. Moreover, interviews were conducted with three community representatives' from each Kebeles of Ataye town administration.

Table 3 Number of Key Informant Interview Participants

Participants	Sectors'	KII
Federal Government	Police commission	2
	Human right commission	1
	Disaster risk Management commission	2
	Ministry of Peace	2
	Ministry of Justice	2
Regional government	House of Federation	1
	Police Commission	2
	Justice Bureau	2
	Peace & Security Administration	2
	DRM commission	1
North Shewa zone Administration	Police Department	2
	Disaster Risk management group	2
	Peace & Security office	2
	Justice Department	1
Ataye Town Administration	Police Station	1
	DRM Unit	1
	Peace& Security Administration	1
	Ataye kebel 01 community	4
	kebel 02	4
	kebel 03	4
Total		39

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2024

This Table proves that the participants are persons, who have high experience on conflict early warning system in Ethiopia.

3) Document Review

The process of documents review was also followed systematically in this dissertation for acquiring relevant information on conflict historical patterns, early warnings, policy, and lessons learned on conflict early warning studies. In this respect, the process was initiated by identifying various different types of documents in the field of conflict studies, such as academic journals, crime investigation docket, plan, report, news, laws, policy documents, and historical documents. Once the relevant documents in the field were identified, a detailed understanding was sought on the major aspects of the documents in order to acquire the appropriate and relevant data on the subject issue such as conflict early warnings and conflicts in general.

The information acquired, as highlighted above, was also divided into categories and analyzed systematically in order to pursue various patterns and trends that might be followed in the future on the same issues. This process of documentation also helped us in validating our research and the relevant information acquired through questionnaires, interviews in the same field.

3.7. Presentation of Data and Analysis

In this dissertation, the qualitative data collected through interviews and FGD are analyzed thematically. In this respect, the themes coded deductively in terms of the three theoretical lenses. These are expressions of perceived deprivation and injustice, as informed by Relative Deprivation Theory; expressions of threatened identity, security, and recognition, as informed by Basic Human Needs Theory; and expressions of institutional confusion, mandate conflicts, and coordination failures, as informed by Anomie Theory. For quantitative data collected through surveys, multiple regressions are employed. In this respect, the independent and dependent variables are operationalized to reflect the theoretical constructs. The significance of this study is that, through the integrated theoretical framework, the interactions between grievance formation, need deprivation, and institutional failure are established. The analysis proceeded across five objectives, each employing distinct statistical and thematic techniques followed by systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative findings.

Objective 1: Assess Conflict Risk Knowledge

For the first objective, the data collected through key informant interviews and FGD were transcribed verbatim, and the themes were identified through open coding. The transcripts were coded, and the themes were validated through member checking to ensure the accuracy

of the findings. The document review of the historical records, constitutional provisions, and conflict reports provided background information on the structural vulnerabilities. The findings from the qualitative study were used to develop questions for the survey to measure the level of awareness of the identified conflict drivers using a five-point Likert scale. The data collected from 380 questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to determine the level of conflict risk knowledge among the respondents. The combination of the themes from the qualitative study and the descriptive statistics from the quantitative study provided a complete understanding of the extent and nature of conflict risk knowledge in the study area.

Objective 2: Evaluate Conflict Monitoring Capacity

For evaluating conflict-monitoring capacity, the thematic analysis of qualitative data collected from interviews and FGD were conducted to evaluate community experiences with monitoring institutions, views on different monitoring entities, and recorded cases of warning reception. Document analysis evaluated the availability of monitoring procedures, indicator systems, and institutional mandates at the local and regional levels. The findings from qualitative analysis were used to design questions on the Likert scale to measure the perceived effectiveness of monitoring institutions and the availability of feedback systems. The quantitative data collected from 380 respondents was analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the mean scores and percentage agreement on different statements related to monitoring. The frequencies were calculated to determine the proportion of respondents who viewed monitoring institutions as effective and reported the availability of mechanisms to acknowledge and respond to community warnings. Both qualitative and quantitative results were combined to offer a comprehensive assessment of monitoring capacity and its limitations.

Objective 3: Conflict Communication Effectiveness Analysis

For the third objective, thematic analysis of the interview and FGD transcripts was conducted to examine community stories of institutional communication failures, media coverage, issue framing, accuracy, and reliability and communication trends. Document analysis examined media coverage trends and communication procedures of the ministry to determine the communication framework. Thematic analysis of the transcripts was used to develop Likert scale items for survey research to measure the community's perception of institutional communication plans, media adequacy, conflict de-escalation role of media, and the presence

of two-way verification systems. The quantitative data collected from 380 questionnaires was analyzed using frequency distribution to determine the percentage of respondents agreeing or disagreeing with each statement related to communication. The results were explored for perceptual differences among various characteristics of the respondents. Integration was done by using the thematic findings related to communication failures to explain the quantitative findings related to the community's dissatisfaction with communication systems.

Objective 4: Compare Perceived Effectiveness of Nine Response Actors

To compare the perceived effectiveness of nine conflict early response actors, the initial qualitative interviews and FGD helped identify the actors that communities perceived as relevant for comparison and the criteria that communities use to assess the effectiveness of institutions. Document analysis reviewed the legal mandate and operational structures of the identified institutions. This initial qualitative study helped ensure that the quantitative assessment of effectiveness included community-relevant aspects. Survey respondents were asked to rate each of the nine actors on five-point Likert scales, and mean rank scores were determined for all nine institutions. The Friedman test, a non-parametric test equivalent to one-way ANOVA with repeated measures, was used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of the nine actors. Post-hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were done to determine which pairs of institutions had significantly different levels of effectiveness. The results of the qualitative study on the criteria that communities use to assess effectiveness were incorporated to explain the observed patterns in the quantitative assessment of effectiveness.

Objective 5: Determine the Effect of Early Warning Elements on Early Response

The results of the qualitative interviews and FGD on institutional dynamics, coordination, and response barriers helped inform the selection of variables for quantitative modeling and interpretation. Document analysis helped identify policy frameworks and institutions shaping the process of warning and response. Quantitative analysis was done using multiple linear regression, with early response effectiveness as the dependent variable and conflict risk knowledge, conflict monitoring effectiveness, and conflict communication effectiveness as the independent variables. Each variable was scored as a composite score based on multiple five-point Likert scale items. Before performing regression analysis, all assumptions of multiple linear regressions were tested including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and absence of perfect multicollinearity. The regression analysis

yielded unstandardized and standardized beta coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values, as well as the coefficient of determination, which measures the proportion of variance explained by the predictors. The standardized coefficients were compared to identify the contribution of each component of early warning. The results of the regression analysis were combined with the qualitative findings to present a holistic understanding of the role of components of early warning in the context of institutions and structures.

The sequential exploratory design allowed for the integration of qualitative findings from 39 in-depth interviews with the explanation of quantitative findings from 380 questionnaires, and document analysis offered contextual triangulation for all the objectives. This integration of methodology ensured that the statistical findings were interpreted from the perspective of the community and the context, offering findings that are both robust and contextual.

3.8. Validity and Reliability of the Study

To ensure validity and reliability in this mixed-methods study with a sequential exploratory design, the procedures undertaken in both the qualitative and quantitative components of the study were rigorous. In the qualitative component of the study that used key informant interviews of 39 and FGD 32 participants, and document review, the trustworthiness of the findings was ensured by the use of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Credibility was ensured by prolonged engagement with the Ataye community, use of triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. The issues of transferability were considered through the use of thick description of the context of the study, the participants, and the methods of data collection. This helped ensure that the study was applicable to other contexts. Dependability was ensured through the use of an audit trail that documented all the decisions made in the course of the study. Conformability was ensured using reflexivity techniques.

For the quantitative component with 380 survey participants using five-point Likert scales in questionnaires, validity was considered in terms of content, construct, internal, and external validity. Content validity was ensured by basing survey questions on qualitative findings from the exploratory component and existing literature, with expert validation by three academic supervisors and two conflict research specialists to ensure that all constructs were adequately covered. Construct validity was ensured by factor analysis to ensure that items used to measure each construct were loading on separate factors as expected, and by

analyzing correlation matrices to ensure that they conformed to theoretical expectations. Internal validity was ensured by proper research design, statistical control, and testing for violations of regression assumptions, while external validity was enhanced by stratified random sampling based on Kebele administrative divisions, with sample size calculated using Cochran formula at 95% confidence level.

Reliability of the study was ensured by the use of different methods for each stage. In the qualitative study, all interviews were carried out using standardized semi-structured guides, and transcripts were validated against audio recordings for accuracy. Systematic coding with inter-coder reliability validated by having a second researcher independently code 20% of the transcripts, with acceptable levels of agreement attained through discussion of discrepancies. In the quantitative study, a pilot study involving 50 respondents pre-tested the clarity and understanding of the questionnaire before the main data was collected.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed by Cronbach's alpha, where all scales had values above the acceptable level of 0.70 (Bonett & Wright, 2015). Split-half reliability with Spearman-Brown correction gave values ranging from 0.76 to 0.84, and test-retest reliability with 50 respondents two weeks apart gave intra-class correlation coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.88. Enumerators were trained for two days to ensure standardized procedures.

The design itself increased overall validity by triangulation, as results from interviews, FGD, document analysis, and surveys were systematically compared to determine convergence and divergence. The sequential exploratory design ensured that results from the qualitative component influenced the quantitative measurement, thus improving the validity of the instrument, whereas the results were interpreted in the light of qualitative understanding of context, thus avoiding decontextualized interpretations. Notwithstanding the robust methods employed, some limitations exist that impact validity and reliability, including the cross-sectional nature of the design, which captures perceptions at a point in time, the possibility of recall bias in the retrospective reporting of conflict experiences, the possibility of social desirability bias in sensitive questions despite anonymity, and the focus on one town, which restricts generalizability to other settings in Ethiopia. These limitations were taken into consideration in the interpretation of results, as conclusions were presented as context-specific while also pointing to patterns that may be applicable in similar contexts. The attention to validity and reliability ensures that the results offer a sound basis for interpreting

conflict early warning and response systems in Ataye Town and developing evidence-informed recommendations for policy and practice.

The reliability analysis of Table 4 reveals that the survey instrument is highly reliable, with all the Cronbach's Alpha values meeting the recommended threshold of .70 (Bonett and Wright, 2015). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the Ataye conflict study, Conflict Risk Knowledge ($\alpha = .782$, 19 items), Conflict Monitoring ($\alpha = .838$, 9 items), Risk Communication ($\alpha = .878$, 7 items), and Rapid Response ($\alpha = .79$, 9 items), show very high internal consistency reliability for all four constructs of the Early Warning System, as all values are well above the widely accepted threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ for good reliability.

Table 4 : Reliability Analysis

Items	Cronbach alpha	No of items
Conflict Risk knowledge	.782	19
Conflict monitoring	.838	9
Risk communication	.878	7
Early Response	.79	9

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2024

3.9. Ethical Consideration

Before commencing data collection in Ataye town, research permits were obtained from Bahir Dar University, and Ethiopian Police University. Informed consent was obtained from all 380-survey participants, 39 key informants' interview and 32 FGD participants in Amharic, with a focus on voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study. Confidentiality was ensured with codes instead of names, with names and direct quotes removed from transcripts and coded using generic descriptions to safeguard participants against possible attacks by ethnic extremists or armed groups.

Since many of the participants were displaced, lost family members, and destroyed property during the study period, trauma-informed interviewing methods were used, including recognizing the signs of distress, taking breaks, and allowing participants to opt out of questions about traumatic events. The study used both Amhara and Oromo language speaker enumerators, which allowed the participants to choose the interviewers they were most comfortable with, considering the composition of Ataye.

3.10. Socio-Demographic Variables

Socio-demographic factors offer essential, disaggregated information to conflict Early Warning Systems (CEWS), going beyond the average national data to pinpoint particular groups at risk. Here, the sex, age, educational level, conflict lived experience, job the questionnaires participants discussed.

Table 5 Distribution of Socio-Demographic Background of the Respondents

Demographic variables	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	253	66.6
	Female	127	33.4
Age	18 to 29	88	23.2
	30 -40	216	56.8
	41-59	44	11.6
	above 60	32	8.4
Educational Level	Certificate &	149	39.2
	College diploma	186	48.9
	University degree	45	11.8
Conflict lived Experience	twice & less	181	47.6
	three times	144	37.9
	four times	28	7.4
	five & above	27	7.1
	Peace actors	55	14.7%
Strata	Security actors	78	21.1%
	DRM actors	48	12.9
	Victims'	199	52.6%
	Total	380	100%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

As shown in Table 5, the demographic profile of study participants provides a strategically justified sample for an effective conflict Early Warning System Study.

Gender composition in Ataye town conflict showed a large predominance of male participants, with 66.6% (N = 253) male and 33.4% (N = 127) female respondents. In the context of the conflict, the experiences of men play a great role because “men are the main combatants, the direct victims of violence, and the key decision-makers for communal security. It is supported by women and children have particular risks, such as rape and displacement, and their protection indicators are essential warnings of societal

failure(Bendavid et al., 2021). Their perceptions of threats and instability are critical(Kreft, 2019).

The age group in the study on inter-ethnic conflict in Ataye town shows that middle-aged people dominate, with 56.8% aged 30-40 years, while young people (18-29 years) accounted for 23.2%, and older people (41-59 years: 11.6%; over 60 years: 8.4%) were less represented.

The dominance of youth in Ataye reflects the "youth bulge" in Ethiopia, it supported by study shows youth make up a substantial number of the population, but their contributions to peace-building are constrained by their absence from decision-making processes (Yeung et al., 2015). Moreover, the less represented older generation, who are highly valued in conflict resolution, indicate that quantitative research may overlook their contribution, while the dominance of the 30-40 age group reflects changing conflict engagement dynamics, especially with the co-optation and repression of youth movements such as Qeerroo and Fano(A. Tesfaye & Kefale, 2025).

Educational attainment is also a very important structural variable for early warning. The distribution of educational attainment in the study of the Ataye conflict 39.2% with certificate and below, 48.9% with college diploma, and 11.8% with university degree and above is indicative of the extreme disruption of education during the violence cycle from 2018 to 2020, during which the town was subject to several militant attacks, leading to the closure of schools and mass displacement (Jemal, 2020). This is consistent with national studies that have found more than 9,000 schools have been damaged or destroyed in Ethiopia, leaving 7.2 million children out of school with children in conflict areas being less likely to attend school than those in other areas (Kassa et al., 2024). It also supported by lower levels of education connect with higher vulnerability to divisive narratives, making the changes in attitudes of this group highly indicative for CEWS models tracking radicalization or the erosion of social cohesion(Kibris, 2015).

In addition, the majority of the respondents (85.5%) have experienced conflicts three or fewer times. The experience is therefore not just from a pool of hardcore fighters but from ordinary civilians who have lived through some of the conflicts(Chielu, 2021). This segment of the body politic knows the conflicts very well. As a result, they are in a position to pick up nuanced patterns of re-escalation of conflicts before they even begin. The trauma and threat perception of the population are also dynamic variables. Heightened anxiety may therefore be

a measure of the anticipation of conflicts before they happen(A. A. Bihonegn and Mekonen, 2023).

Job strata sampling across key actor groups is perhaps the best-practice justification for CEWS design. The integration of victims at 52.6%, security actors at 21.1%, peace actors at 14.7%, and DRM actors at 12.9% has the system capable of essential triangulation of data. Victims provide information on community-level grievances and impacts (Corkalo Biruski, 2017), whereas security actors provide data on incident patterns and operational challenges (Teshome, 2021), and peace actors contribute by assessing dialogue breakdowns (Afesha, 2022; T. Bihonegn, 2015). Most of all, the inclusion of DRM actors is forward-looking since they provide humanitarian aid to victims and assess cause & impact of conflict via its technique teams(Jensen, 2022).

3.11. Limitations of the Study

One of the primary challenges encountered in conducting this study was the security risks associated with the ongoing conflict situations in and around Ataye Town. Given the sensitive nature of the data required for the study, respondents may have been inclined to exhibit social desirability bias. To address this potential issue, the researcher established a comprehensive protocol that ensured utmost anonymity during the data collection process, with no personal identifiers recorded. Moreover, it was imperative to engage in an intensive rapport-building phase prior to data collection. By clearly communicating the study objectives as an academic exercise, respondents were empowered to provide genuine and authentic responses. This approach not only facilitated trust between the researcher and participants but also enhanced the reliability of the data collected.

Furthermore, the researcher encountered limitations related to logistics and geographical factors. Accessing various stratified groups within the town was complicated by periodic changes in the security situation. To address this issue, the researcher employed local data collectors who were familiar with the terrain. Their knowledge helped ensure that the sample remained representative of the population.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONFLICT RISK KNOWLEDGE OF ATAYE TOWN

This chapter discusses conflict risk knowledge representing the outcome of vulnerability and threat analysis. This chapter is organized into three subsections to evaluate the risks for conflicts in Ataye Town systematically. It begins with the analysis of the vulnerability factors related to the attack of the Ataye town. This is followed by the analysis of the main threats to the security of Ataye town. Finally, the pattern of Ataye armed conflict are discussed in a chronological order covering the armed conflicts that evolved in Ataye Town between 2018 and 2023.

4.1. Vulnerability of Ataye Town

In the case of Ataye, there are various factors, which have led to a situation of uninterrupted vulnerability, and this has greatly affected the stability of the community.

Applying Relative Deprivation Theory, the findings suggest that the vulnerability of Ataye town to conflict is a function of the gap between what people think they should have and what they actually have. As a KII C03 said that we have lived here for generations, but now we feel like strangers in our own land. This is a perception of injustice of exclusion, which is independent of objective conditions, that creates the psychological conditions for collective mobilization. In addition, Basic Human Needs Theory helps to understand why this vulnerability is so great. As a function of Relative Deprivation Theory, the findings suggest that the object of deprivation is not merely economic but, more centrally, the need for identity and recognition. The FGD1-03 added that this is a fight for our existence, which is a threat to basic human needs and, therefore, makes conflict non-negotiable. These vulnerability factors are all interconnected, and by understanding the root causes of the instability, the town will be able to move towards becoming a stable and peaceful community.

It is clear from the results of the four FGDs that there is consistency between the two ethnic groups in the factors that promote violence in the community. Both sides agreed that weak law enforcement, lack of victim compensation, and militarization in society make violence possible. Amhara ethnic group participants agreed that their ethnic group was targeted with aggression and not the one causing it. As per FGD1 (Amhara Male), "The OLF armed fighters came with weapons. We reported to the police but no one came to our rescue." FGD2 (Amhara Female) further agreed and stated, "We called for assistance, but the OLF fighters did what they wanted." On the other hand, Oromo ethnic group members also claimed

themselves to be the victims, as they felt entitled to the town of Ataye. FGD3 (Oromo Male) said, "This is our land. We have not encroached here and we have every right to protect ourselves." Also, FGD4 (Oromo Female) stated, "We feared reporting as the Amhara Special Police cannot guarantee our safety."

Substantial differences existed in relation to ethnicity. People of Amhara background often perceived OLF's armed wing as the main attacker. FGD1 (Amhara male): "It was not initiated by us; OLF invaded our farmland wearing military uniforms and carrying rifles. They said we must either move out or die. Police were watching but they never intervened as OLF enjoyed political immunity." FGD2 (Amhara female): "We witnessed armed OLF militants walking around our marketplace. There was nothing concealed about it since they felt very sure of themselves." Contrary to Amharas, Oromos denied the assertion that OLF was the only aggressor in the conflict. Instead, they claimed that the town of Ataye traditionally belonged to them. FGD3 (Oromo male): "We are not invaders; we are reclaiming our land. Ataye is part of Oromo land, currently being governed by the Amhara administration. This is the issue." Additionally, Oromos alleged partiality on the part of Amhara Special Police Force. FGD4 (Oromo female): "Amhara Special Police force only defends their own people; they ignore us whenever we report criminal cases." The vulnerability of Atay town discussed as follows:

4.1.1. Uncompensated Victims of Conflict

Interviewee and FGD participants revealed that uncompensated victim is a primary driver of retaliatory violence, creating a self-perpetuating conflict cycle. One of the key informant interviews expressed this as¹;

I am a victim of the conflict since 2021. I have given detailed reports to investigators: dates, uniforms, license plates, names. And I am now living in a temporary shelter in 2023, and my children have nightmares. No one has been arrested for the destruction of my shop, my home, or my mother's mosque. Everyone has been burned by the attackers, who did not discriminate by ethnicity. We besieged due to living under a biased regime and lack of the rule of law violence continues unchecked. The 2019 attack of Ataye made reconciliation efforts impossible since the perpetrators have not been held accountable. The government says they have an Early Warning System in place, but after my report of threats before the incident, the local administration simply said they were

¹ Interview with C09, January 2024

monitoring the situation. Justice is not charity, but justice is my right. I have been a law-abiding citizen, have paid my taxes, and have taught my children to respect other people. Since the government failed to protect us, they should also take responsibility for their shortcomings. Compensation is not charity; it is a debt. Until the debt is settled, conflict is inevitable.

Most FGD participants expressed their views about the victims' feelings of hopelessness. Among them FGD2-04 said that the youth in these camps, having "nothing to lose," are recruited by armed groups that promise them restitution. The efforts to return home were seen as causing violence. The returnees found their property occupied and were attacked. There was also a lack of humanitarian aid, seen as inadequate, partial, and politicized. It was used as a means of control rather than assistance.

The FGD3 participants added that in the March 2021 attack on an ambulance in which his child was killed, the participant expressed that he had participated in seven official investigations since his son was removed from his clearly marked ambulance and shot dead. No arrests or prosecutions have come out of these investigations. The participant expressed that this lack of arrests was not a failure of the police to do their job but a deliberate policy of not holding anyone accountable, and this was the main cause of the escalation of the conflict in Ataye. Among interview participants' one of explain it as follows²;

The conflict of 2019 was containable, he said, because elders could make a credible promise of justice to follow. Nevertheless, by 2021, after two years of investigations that turned up nothing, that credibility was gone, and young people on both sides knew that they could kill without reprisal. He emphasized that reconciliation within indigenous groups through Shimglina would be impossible without state accountability. The elders can make handshakes, slaughter sheep. But, without prosecution of known perpetrators, it is simply a temporary ceasefire. His greatest need, he said, was not revenge but that rule of law be applied regularly so that the next generation would believe justice was possible and this cycle of escalating conflict could be ended.

² Interview with S036, January 2024

This absence of justice, compensation, and durable solutions made the victimized communities "incubators for anger," who were seeking revenge and thereby perpetuating the conflict, a phenomenon that is also informed by literature on the effects of prolonged displacement and its resultant politically volatile populations (Tronvoll, 2022).

Quantitatively, Table 6 reveals a compelling consensus, with 90.5% of respondents agreeing that the lack of long-term solutions for victims breeds violence. The results are heavily skewed, with a vast majority (79.2%) of respondents answering "Strongly Agree." This reveals the strength of this perception in the minds of the respondents. Furthermore, the marginal percentage of those who disagreed (3.2%) statistically validates the relevance of the victim issue as a conflict driver.

Table 6 : The Lack of a Compensation for Victims Drives Conflict

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	301	79.2%
Agree	43	11.3%
Neutral	24	6.3%
Disagree	12	3.2%
Total (Agree)	344	90.5%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

Quantitatively, the data shows a convincing consensus, with 90.5% of the respondents agreeing that the absence of long-term solutions for victims contributes to violence, with a huge majority (79.2%) of the respondents strongly agreeing, against a meager 3.2% who disagreed, thus statistically confirming the significance of uncompensated victimization as a driver of conflict in Ataye town between 2018 and 2023. This result is triangulated from qualitative data obtained from interviews, among other documents, to confirm that the grievances of displaced persons and uncompensated victims have continued to contribute to violence in the region. This is consistent with the national trends in Ethiopia, where more than 3 million people are displaced due to conflict and climate change, with the absence of durable solutions such as restitution, compensation, and IDP participation in peace-building processes contributing to cyclical violence.

Moreover, in the context of the transitional justice in Ethiopia, it has been particularly noted that without the provision of durable solutions for IDPs, ensuring sustainable peace is not possible, since the insecurity and feelings of abandonment associated with long-term displacement are inherently breeding grounds for instability (Jibat, 2024; Taye, 2017). In this respect, the results of the Ataye study indicate a systemic failure in the conflict-affected zones of Ethiopia, where mass displacement, lack of adequate compensation, and long-term IDP situations have turned non-remedied victimization into a source of inter-ethnic conflict.

5. Ethnic-based Federal Structure

The interview and FGD participants directly associated the source of the tensions with the administrative restructuring under the ethnic federalism approach, which replaced the multi-ethnic provinces with ethnically defined zones. This is associated with the statement of the participant in the interview as follows³:

I was born in Ataye, in my grandfather's house built in 1965. My grandfather married an Oromo woman, and for us, it was important to have good relations with our neighbors regardless of our ethnicity. The constitution of 1995 changed all that, as it forced all Ethiopians to identify themselves as members of a certain territory and language group. In towns like Ataye, where both Oromos and Amharas lived for many years together, the constitution established the dividing line. Ataye is located in the Amhara zone, and this meant that old Oromo families were relegated to minority status in their own homes. For twenty-five years, they have struggled to gain employment in the government sector due to language barriers, despite being proficient in Amharic. As their frustrations mounted, the anger and resentment of the youths at seeing their elders subjected to humiliation finally boiled over to violence, which has continued to be a cycle in 2019, 2021, and 2023. The reconciliation process in 2019 gave us a brief respite, but a faulty constitution cannot be fixed with feel-good measures. I lost my grandfather's house in 2021 under unclear circumstances, but the fact remains that the very system that is supposed to protect us has made us enemies in our own neighborhoods. Until the constitution affords us our dignity as Ethiopians, peace will continue to be a mere interlude between conflicts in Ataye.

As an interviewee P05 noted when the EPRDF came to power, they completely changed the system of governance. It created division despite the two ethnic groups spends our days

³ Interview with C06, January 2024

weeding and eating together, communicating in Amharic. It created internal minorities and politicized local conflicts, as FGD2-02 noted, "A quarrel over grazing land is no longer just between two farmers. It becomes 'the Oromos' taking from 'the Amharas' because the Woreda boundaries make it so." It was an institutionalization of ethnicity that turned territorial and resource conflicts into existential struggles.

Equally, FGD4 participants said that the FDRE Constitution also tried to answer many of the basic issues of the state. In practice, the imbalance that should be maintained between regionalism and nationalism and the tendency towards regionalism has led the people to focus on regionalism and ethnic grouping rather than nationalism. As a result, the people have failed to give due value to common national agendas, interests and values. The constitutions of some regions also contain ideas that contradict peace, solidarity and brotherhood, thus posing a threat to the rights of citizens to live in peace, security, wealth and property and to move around. Therefore, constitutional reform measures should be taken to protect lasting peace and the dignity of citizens, increase participation, and strengthen national unity.

In a survey conducted among 380 respondents, the Table 7 results were overwhelmingly positive, with 75.8% (288 people) strongly agreeing and 12.6% (48 people) agreeing to the statement (Ethnolinguistic Federal system contributing to conflicts). On the other hand, only a small percentage 5.3% (20 people) disagreed with the statement, while 2.1% (8 people) strongly disagreed. In addition to that, 4.2% (16 people) were neutral to the statement.

Table 7 : The Ethnic-Based Federal System Contributes to Conflict Escalation

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	8	2.1%
Disagree	20	5.3%
Neutral	16	4.2%
Agree	48	12.6%
Strongly Agree	288	75.8%
Total	380	100.0%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

Therefore, the above qualitative and quantitative data finding shows that the ethnic based federalism was the most dominate causes of inter-ethnic conflict in Ataye town. The quantitative findings of 88.4% agreement, which is heavily weighted toward high levels of

conviction, statistically affirm the ubiquitous lived reality described by the participants that the system “cut through our lives.” The direct quotes serve as the cause for the quantitative findings and show exactly how the establishment of ethnic zones and *Woredas*, such as Ephrata Gidim and Jille, directly led to the political marginalization of minorities and, more importantly, the direct ethnicization of local conflicts. This high degree of survey agreement is the quantitative expression of the lived reality of the people supported (G. Abbink, 2021; Jemal, 2020).

5.1.1. Historical Grievance

The interview and FGD participants underlying reason for the persistent conflict in Ataye Town between 2018 and 2023 remains unresolved historical grievances. The KII C13 in the study identified the root cause of the current conflicts to be the imperialism that characterized the empire-building era, where the annexation of Oromo territory meant not only the loss of territory but also the erasure of Oromo identity, politics, language, and religion, which were never recognized and compensated by any Ethiopian government. The FGD4-05 also identified a similar unresolved historical grievance that stems from the new constitutional order that came into place in 1991, which delegitimized Amhara historical agency and made Amharas who do not reside in the Amhara Region "settlers" in their own ancestral territory.

As another KII P03 said that, you cannot give a warning about a fire that has been smoldering under the soil since before your grandparents were born. The Early Warning System was for monitoring arms and militias. It was not for monitoring the slow poisoning of identity. Another interviewee said that my grandmother was Oromo, married to an Amhara farmer, and she is buried next to the mosque and the church she used to go to. According to the 1995 constitution, she is not in her homeland. That is what we carry with us our grievance against a constitution that cannot imagine a woman who was both. The KII 05 also spoke of how these past grievances have been used by the political elite to win over ethnic constituencies, distracting them from issues of governance, distribution of resources, and lack of democratic accountability. A mixed-heritage male FGD1-07 expressed his anguish as follows: "I am not pure. I am not unmixed. I am the grandson of an Oromo woman and an Amhara man. The constitution tells me I do not exist. It tells me I must choose: Amhara or Oromo, settler or native. I refuse to choose. In addition, because I refuse to choose, my children are invisible. Our entire history of coexistence is rendered legally nonexistent.

The second major theme revolved around the participants' unanimous opinion that no Early Warning System, no matter how advanced, can prevent violence if the root causes of such violence have not been addressed within the constitutional and political framework. The KII C06 living in Ataye expressed their frustration that we have lived in our ancestral Oromo land for centuries. We have no recognized self-governing structures in the Amhara Region. Constitutionally, we are entitled to self-determination. In reality, we are not. We cannot access public employment in our own Kebele because Afaan Oromo is not a working language.

The KII P07 spoke to the psychological violence of being identified as "*neftegna*" oppressors in state-sanctioned discourses, burdened with collective guilt while their own suffering remains irrelevant to contemporary justice claims. KII P01 added that the Early Warning System failed because it was designed to detect symptoms, not causes. It counted guns and monitored militias. It was not designed to ask why young men believe that picking up a gun is their only path to dignity. That is not a monitoring failure. That is a constitutional failure. Most interview and FGD participants spoke repeatedly to the difference between the ceremonial reconciliations of 2019 and 2020 sheep sacrificed, prayers recited, hands clasped in stark contrast to the lack of accountability for perpetrators, reparations for victims, and constitutional reform regarding the territorial and self-governance issues at the root of the conflict. They added that reconciliation without justice is merely a ceasefire. Early warning without structural reform is merely surveillance. And until the Ethiopian state is willing to engage with the fundamental contradictions of ethnic federalism the impossible demand that fluid, intermarried, coexistent communities compress themselves into discrete, ethnically homogeneous territories the people of Ataye will continue to experience not peace, but only pauses.

Table 8 clearly shows that a vast majority of respondents (83.7%) feel that historical grievances are the cause of the conflict, with 61.1% strongly agreeing and 22.6% agreeing to the statement. On the other hand, only 7.4% of the respondents (3.2% strongly disagreeing and 4.2% disagreeing) feel that historical grievances are not important, with only 8.9% being neutral.

Table 8 : Historical Grievances are Responsible for the Conflict

Response	frequency	Percentage
strongly disagree	12	3.2
Disagree	16	4.2
Neutral	34	8.9
Agree	86	22.6
Strongly agree	232	61.1
Total	380	100.0

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The result of qualitative and quantitative data shows that similarly shows historical grievances based on wrong rhetoric another vulnerability factor of Ataye conflict. Particularly as a substantial majority 83.7% of the population surveyed agree that historical grievances serve as the basis for the conflict, with a dominant majority of 61.1% strongly agreeing to this assessment statistic that assume a profound level of meaning and validation based on the personal histories and testimonies provided by participants that follow these grievances along two parallel trajectories. Similarly, all interview participants spoke to a sense of historical grievance related to the process of imperialism in the nineteenth century that represented not only a loss of territory but a complete erasure of identity, systems of governance, language, and spiritual expression that had never been acknowledged or made recompense for by any subsequent Ethiopian government, while the FGD also spoke to a parallel sense of grievance related to the legitimization of their historical agency and their characterization as permanent "settlers" in a territory that they had occupied for generations subsequent to the constitutional reforms implemented in 1991.

These findings are also in line studies on ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, which shows how the new constitutional arrangements after 1991 introduced instrumentalist understandings of ethnic identity that renegotiated historical relationships and produced new conflicts of territory and self-rule (Jemal, 2020; Regassa, 2010; Taye, 2017a). Other studies on the broader implications of the reorganization of the Ethiopian state on an ethno-linguistic basis that produced a new class of "internal minorities" who are systematically disempowered by a system that was intended to empower them (Jibat, 2024; Teshome, 2021; Yusuf, 2019). The anguish expressed by the mixed-heritage participants, "The constitution tells me I do not exist. It tells me I must choose Amhara or Oromo, settler or native," is not an expression of

poetic angst but of constitutional reality, as there is no region of Ethiopia that is ethnically homogeneous, and millions of Ethiopians are made invisible by a system that cannot accommodate intermarried, coexisting communities (Regassa, 2010). In addition, the unanimous insistence of the participants that no Early Warning System can prevent violence whose root causes have not been addressed by the constitutional order (Fiseha, 2019).

The participants in the FGD1 highlighted that you cannot generate a warning for a fire that has been smoldering under the soil since before your grandparents were born, which again points to the fact that the 2021 attacks were a result of 140 years of unacknowledged dispossession and 30 years of systemic exclusion (Gemechu, 2023). The problematic provisions in the constitution need to be amended; however, changes in self-determination rights under Article 39 of the constitution can further fuel the existing conflict if not in favor of the public (Tadesse and Yimer, 2021). In fact, the Oromo and Amhara participants clearly articulated their basic human rights: to live and rule with dignity irrespective of their ethnicities, to be considered full Ethiopians while at the same time respecting their cultural differences, and to have their historical complaints addressed as authentic claims to justice instead of attempts to split the nation. Their voices not only expose the failure of the Early Warning System but also present a pathway to redemption, provided that there is the will to do so.

6. Administrative Boundary Claim

All participants across the various interviews and FGD gave detailed explanations on how the ethnic federalism policy, which started with the transitional period in 1991 and was entrenched in the Ethiopian Constitution in 1995, systematically dismantled the historically integrated structures that facilitated the peaceful coexistence between the Amhara and Oromo in Ataye Town District throughout centuries. The pre-existing Efratana Jille *Woreda* had existed as a microcosm of inter-ethnic harmony, where Amhara and Oromo people not only shared space but also shared structures of governance, taxation systems, and other public services.

Among interview participants', one of them expresses it as⁴;

We used to be one Woreda, one people, one market, one town council. The Woreda administrator was sometimes Oromo, sometimes Amhara it did not matter, because the office belonged to all of us. Where there was a conflict over grazing land or

⁴ Interview with D08, January 2024

water, the elders of both sides would meet under the sycamore tree at the back of the mosque and resolve the conflict the very next day. Today, the conflict over grazing land or water requires two woreda administrators, two zone presidents, two regional bureaus, and sometimes even the federal government, but still, no solution is reached. The 1991 restructuring of this unified administration into Efratana Gidim (Amhara) and Jille Timuga (Oromo) Woredas was not felt by the people of Ataye as a neutral, technical change but as a violent divorce of institutions that retroactively legitimized centuries of coexistence as an occupation. This institutional divorce generated two conflicting and exclusive claims of historical ownership, which each group would come to feel as an existential issue rather than a negotiable one.

Another KII P04 said that the Oromos believe that Ataye and the surrounding lowlands are their homeland, a place taken from them by conquest and never returned. For twenty-seven years, we were told we have self-rule. It was a lie. The budgets were controlled from Mekelle, the boundaries were controlled by TPLF, and we were minorities in our own ancestral lands. KII C08 who was displaced from Ataye argued: "For us, it is not just a map. It is our ancestors' blood spilled on this land. It is our grandfathers' bones buried in that cemetery behind the church. How can you 'return' land that has been home to my family for five generations?" FGD2-04 noted that this administrative fragmentation of space created what were perceived to be zero-sum conflicts, where "one side's legitimacy to be on this land is predicated on the other side being illegitimate."

The Ethiopia ethnic based federalism reorganized the existing geographic based administration into ethnic based administrations'. This created minority ethnic groups in each majority ethnic group of administration structure. This means the right of minorities did not answered. However, the 2018 political change in Ethiopia was conducted by collaboration of Amhara and Oromo ethnic group against the TPLF dominated administration. During this time, the two ethnic groups' inter-ethnic conflict based on historical narration was absent. A Key informant interview expressed this sentiment⁵:

After election of the Oromo ethnic Prime Minister, the Oromo youth claimed that this is our time to gain full right to self-administration include in Ataye town since for twenty-seven years, we were told we had self-rule, but we knew it was a lie. When Abiy came, when the Qeerroo marched into Addis and the old guard fell,

⁵ Interview with C09, January 2024

we believed history was finally correcting itself. We did not want to displace Amharas. We wanted what the constitution promised us: the right to govern our own homeland. However, another Amhara individual from the Amhara ethnic group who was forced to leave the town of Ataye described the corresponding fear that the Oromo nationalist mobilization inspired among the Amhara population: "What they call 'reclaiming,' we call ethnic cleansing. When Oromo nationalists say 'this is Oromo land, historically and culturally,' what we hear is: you do not belong here, your grandfather's grave is an occupation, and your children have no future in the only place they have ever known. That is not a political claim. That is a threat to our very existence. Moreover, when your existence is threatened, you do not negotiate you defend.

The interview and FGD participants of Ataye town communities spoke to the manner in which such discursive construction had changed what were once administrative boundaries on a map into walls that mean exclusion not just political exclusion, but economic exclusion from markets, social exclusion from intermarriage, educational exclusion from schools, and even exclusion from burial in the soil your family has farmed for a century. The key informant interview went on to say⁶:

My grandmother is buried in the cemetery beside the mosque and the church she attended on different days of the week. According to the 1995 constitution, her grave is not in her homeland. She is a settler's wife buried in Oromo territory. The constitution tells me I do not exist. It tells me I must choose Amhara or Oromo, settler or native, minority or invader. I refuse to choose. In addition, because I refuse to choose, my children are invisible. Our entire history of coexistence, intermarriage, mutual aid, shared suffering and shared celebration all of it is rendered legally nonexistent by a document that claims to protect diversity while actually demanding its eradication.

All the interview and FGD participants unanimously agreed that such an understanding created not only the possibility but also the inevitability of violent conflict, given that the legitimacy of the belonging of one community was constitutionally tied to the illegitimacy of the belonging of the other. KII C03 succinctly put it as we are both right, and we are both trapped. The Oromo are right that this is their ancestral homeland, and the Amhara are right that this has been their home for five generations. Both are historically true, but the

⁶ Interview with C11, January 2024

constitution only allows one of them to be legally true. That is not federalism. That is a machine for producing war.

The quantitative data Table 9 evident that there is a definitive validation of the statement, as 85.3% of the respondents (324 people) said that territorial administrative conflict is a major driver of conflicts in the region. This is a display of profound conviction, as the dominant majority of 63.7% of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement. However, the disagreement is only 7.4%.

Table 9 : Territorial Boundary is a Factor of Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	12	3.2%
Disagree	16	4.2%
Neutral	28	7.4%
Agree	82	21.6%
Strongly Agree	242	63.7%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

This indicated that boundary disagreement is the cause of Ataye town conflict. The qualitative finding also confirmed that lack of boundary demarcation between the Ataye town administrations with Oromo special zone administration is causes of conflict. They added that the ethnic based demarcation of administrative boundaries' unattainable due to conflict interest of ethnic leaders. It is also supported by other study (Jemal, 2020).

7. Manipulation of Ethnic Identity for Political Gain

The interview and FGD participants also identified the other vulnerability factor is the dominance of ethnic based political parties. They claimed themselves as defender of their own ethnic group right and interest while disregarding the rights of other ethnic groups. To support this statement, the FGD1-02 said that the Oromo ethnic groups are minority in Ataye town despite their more than 30% population especially in Kebele 01. They cannot hold office, they cannot influence budget decisions, they cannot advocate for their own communities through formal government channels. The reason for this is that the Woreda they live in belongs to the Amhara region, and they are minorities in that region. In the same way, the Amhara ethnic group living in the Oromia Special Zone does not have the right to self-administration. They are permanent guests in someone else's homeland, despite however

many generations their families have lived there. This is not a failure of implementation. This is the system functioning exactly as designed.

The FGD3-04 elaborated on the above statement by describing the impact of institutionalized exclusion on communities, which eventually forces them to turn to ethnic nationalist parties as the last hope for political expression as when your own government tells you that you do not belong, that your identity disqualifies you from full citizenship in the place where you were born, where do you go? You go to those who promise to restore your dignity, the ethnic entrepreneurs, the nationalist movements, the armed groups. They may not provide the solutions, but they provide the recognition. They tell you, 'You are Oromo, and that is enough. You are Amhara, and that is enough.' For people who have been told their entire lives is intoxicating. Moreover, once you are intoxicated by ethnic nationalism, coexistence is betrayal. The actors who the participants saw as engaging in this ethnic manipulation ranged from the Woreda administration to regional party leaders to federal-level political elites.

To support it FGD4-05 said that ethnic based political parties like Amhara national movement party and Oromo liberation front party claim for liberation of their own ethnic groups. However, the Amhara and Oromo ethnic group mixed by marriage and other association, and live in on administration as one family. Despite this fact, this ethnic political disseminate hat speech one against the other. The system pays off the strategic use of ethnicity pays it off with power, with budgets, with political appointments. And as long as that system is in place, the violence will continue. The interview participant described the construction of narratives of historical oppression and demographic threats⁷:

The TPLF spent twenty-seven years telling Oromos that Amharas are colonizers, telling Amharas that Oromos are rebels. They fed both sides a diet of grievances, of fear. Nevertheless, when the TPLF fell, the narratives remained. They had become embedded in our political consciousness, in our educational curriculum, in our constitutional definitions. Today, all of us in Ethiopian politics whether in Addis or Bahir Dar or Adama use these narratives as our tools. We did not create them; we inherited them, we use them, we pass them on, and we make them deadlier than ever.

All participants rejected narratives of conflict based on 'ancient hatreds' or 'primordial' ethnic conflict. To support it FGD2-07 explained that my grandfather and his Oromo neighbor were

⁷ Interview with S04, January 2024

closer than brothers were. This is about a system that took our shared history and cut it in half, then told each half that the other half was the enemy. We did not wake up one morning hating each other. We were taught to hate, systematically, over thirty years, by a political architecture that needs enemies in order to justify itself. The conflict in Ataye is not a failure of early warning. It is a failure of constitutional design. Moreover, until we redesign the system, no Early Warning System in the world will save us. The end result of all of this systematic instrumentalization, in the view of the participants, is the transformation of local communities into a kind of “battlefield” where decisions about where to live, where to work, where to educate children, and even where to bury the dead all become sites of ethnic conflict. Conflict is thus not seen as an aberration of the system but rather its logical outcome.

The quantitative finding Table 10 indicates a majority of 60.5% of respondents agree that political manipulation of ethnicity is a cause of conflict. Although a strong plurality of 40.0% of respondents answered Strongly Agree. It is important to note that the high combined percentage of respondents who Disagree (21.1%) and those who answered neutral (18.4%) suggest that this factor is seen as more nuanced and actor-specific, especially when contrasted with other structural factors such as boundary disputes.

Table 10: Manipulation of Ethnic Identity for Political Gain

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	28	7.4%
Disagree	52	13.7%
Neutral	70	18.4%
Agree	78	20.5%
Strongly Agree	152	40.0%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The integration of data shows that the role of the instrumentalization of ethnicity by elites as a cause of conflict is widely accepted as an accelerant of conflict," yet it is "seen as operating within and taking advantage of existing structural flaws." The qualitative narratives describe the process of manipulation where politicians and "unofficial actors" engage in the active politicization of identity, which is supported by the significant quantitative agreement of 60.5%. It is supported by study (Jemal, 2020). However, the significant proportion of neutral and disagreeing quantitative responses is supported by the qualitative narrative that identifies this process of manipulation as a symptom rather than a cause. The primary issue, in their view, is the ethno-political system that creates these exclusive "fiefdoms" and "political

marketplace," making the manipulation not only possible but also profitable. The data thus converges to confirm the significant role of elite ethnic entrepreneurship in fueling violence, not only in its immediate effects but also in its ability to do so through its foundation in the institutional framework that equates power with ethnic identity, making people susceptible to radicalization (Gemechu, 2023; Teshale, 2023; Yusuf, 2019).

8. Existence of Informal Armed Groups

Key informant interview uniformly stated that the primary catalyst for the escalation of local conflicts to full-scale organized warfare was the actions of Informal Armed Groups (IAGs). A KII succinctly summarized the role and nature of IAGs⁸:

Fano and OLF are not protectors they are predators who have learned to wear the language of liberation and self-defense as camouflage. They present themselves to Oromo youth as the armed wing of historical justice, and to Amhara youth as the last line of defense against annihilation. But both communities are being fed the same poison: the belief that violence is the only language the state understands.

Similarly, all FGD participants expanded on the role that IAGs play in translating abstract historical grievances into concrete military action. They turned our grandfathers' tears into recruitment slogans, our mothers' laments into justification for atrocities. They are the physical embodiment of our historical grievances translated into military campaigns and once grievance becomes a campaign, reconciliation becomes treason. They described the ways in which groups such as Fano among the Amhara youth and OLF-Shane among the Oromo populations use the security vacuum created by the inconsistent and politically selective security presence of the federal government to their own strategic advantage. Another interview participant expresses as⁹:

The government is here today, gone tomorrow. One week they flood the zone with soldiers and command posts; the next week they pull out, leaving us defenseless. The armed groups do not pull out. They are always there, always recruiting, always waiting. This militarization locks in the youth at the most vulnerable stage of their lives educated but unemployed, politically conscious but powerless through institutionalized means. The politician forward their gaps into the cause of their failure is the other ethnic group besides them. This

⁸ Interview with S01, January 2024

⁹ Interview with C05, January 2024

caused to the creation of informal armed group in both ethnic groups. Their purpose is one against the other or in the name of right to self-administration.

Table 11 demonstrates that among 380 respondents' 66.6% (253) of the respondents' perception on the existence of informal armed group escalate the conflict. Moreover, the responses of 80(21%) respondents' were neutral, very small number of respondents' (12.3%) disagrees over the role of informal armed group as causes of Ataye conflict.

Table 11: The Presence of Informal Armed Groups Escalates Violence

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	1.8%
Disagree	40	10.5%
Neutral	80	21.1%
Agree	168	44.2%
Strongly Agree	85	22.4%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The discussion of the qualitative and quantitative result indicated that the existence of informal armed group in Amhara and Oromo ethnic group the vulnerable factors of Ataye conflict. Accordingly, majority of respondents' 66.6% agreed with the escalation effect of informal armed group similar with response of interview and FGD informants. The qualitative research reveals the *raison d'être* of the above statistic: these groups provide a security vacuum for the state, militarize identity, and impose a deadly "tit-for-tat" pattern of retaliation. The substantial neutral response in the quantitative study (21.1%) is also contextualized through the qualitative findings, which highlight the complex double role these groups can fulfill as protectors in a security vacuum or perceived bias in favor of the state. It supported by studies (Beshir et al., 2023; Guta et al., 2024; Teshome, 2021; Yusuf, 2019). The above findings strongly suggest that these factions are not simply agents of conflict but rather vested actors in the continuation of conflict, rendering their role a primary obstacle to peace-building efforts that fail to address the security vacuum and tit-for-tat pattern of retaliation they both exploit and perpetuate.

9. Community Militarization

The interview and FGD participants explained the militarization of their communities as a direct, unavoidable, and collective action to address the complete failure of security provision by the state, which normalized the ownership of weapons from a deviant behavior to a necessary action. One of the interview participants eloquently expressed this¹⁰:

We have all collectively paid every household, every farmer, and every merchant to buy heavier arms because we feel vulnerable. This was not a decision made by extremists or criminals. This was a decision made by our Kebele council, by our elders, by ordinary mothers and fathers who watched the 2021 attacks from their rooftops and swore it would never happen again. We do not want these guns. They are expensive, they are dangerous, and they attract retaliation. Nevertheless, we want to live. Moreover, if the government cannot protect our lives, we will protect them ourselves.

Another KII C08 described the progression of this kind of thinking towards offense that the gun you buy to defend your home tonight is the gun your neighbor will buy to avenge his brother tomorrow. There is no difference between offense and defense when both sides are armed and both sides are afraid. Fear does not know the difference between offense and defense. Fear does not know the difference between the man who burned your house and the man who just happens to look the same. Fear only knows that the other side is armed, and so are we. Fear only knows that the other side is afraid, and so are we. Fear only knows that the other side has guns, and so do we. Fear only knows that we have to have more. The lack of trust in government security was not only encouraged, in their view, but was also fueled by the presence of a thriving black market in arms, which they described as being largely unimpeded.

Similarly, FGD3-06 said that Firearm traffickers use the tensions in our communities to their advantage to sell guns as if merchants sell grain in the market. They know that the time their product is most sought after is when fear is high, after a massacre, after a provocative speech, after the government removes troops. They come with their trucks filled with guns. They sell to Amhara, they sell to Oromo, and they sell to anyone who is afraid. Their livelihood depends on our fear never ending. What are more worrisome; however, are the varying degrees of complicity of the government with the militarization of the region, which shows

¹⁰ Interview with C10, January 2024

that the conflict cannot be explained by non-state actors or the free market. KII S03 added that during the 2021 attacks, vehicles of Senbete town administration were intercepted at Ankober checkpoint with 26,000 rounds of ammunition destined for hostile zones. These were not rebel trucks passing through back roads at midnight. These were government vehicles, government license plates, government fuel, passing through a government checkpoint. Whose bullets were these? Who authorized their movement? Moreover, why, three years later, no one seems to have been held accountable? The interview participants talked about how these converging processes communal self-armament, illicit trafficking, and state complicity produce a self-perpetuating cycle that replaces the rule of law with the rule of the gun.

Another KII C13 on the human tragedy of this situation that every weapon we purchase for our defense becomes, in the eyes of the other side, evidence of our intent to offend. They added that our security is their threat and the opposite is true. We are locked in a permanent arms race that bankrupts us, terrorizes us, and kills our children. Moreover, the state that is supposed to mediate this arms race for us is a participant in the race, arming both runners. The FGD1-03 captured the heart of the governance crisis the main indicator is gun competition. They know the existence of huge weapon and frequent militia training with propaganda one against the other. However, to count weapons is not to disarm. To count routes is not to apprehend traffickers. The rule of law is not about information. It is about enforcement. Moreover, we have had no enforcement for thirty years. We do not live under the rule of law. We live under the rule of the gun. In addition, the gun has no allegiance but to fear. The state that was meant to defend us has made us executioners of each other.

The quantitative findings Table 12 shows that a large majority of 70.0% of the total population, which is 266 in number, agrees that militarization causes escalation. The large percentage of 40.3% of the population who strongly agree with the statement shows that the belief in the danger of weapon proliferation is deeply ingrained. The large number of neutrals, 22.4%, indicates a duality of belief that weapons pose danger but also provide the solution to personal security, while the small percentage of 7.7% who disagree with the statement cements the notion of a consensus that weapon possession cause conflict to go unresolved.

Table 12: The Increasing Militarization of Society Escalates Violence

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	1.1%
Disagree	25	6.6%
Neutral	85	22.4%
Agree	113	29.7%
Strongly Agree	153	40.3%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

Thus, the integration of the data supports militarization as an important, self-sustaining force of conflict, where statistical agreement supports lived experiences of a communal arms race. The high level of quantitative agreement (70.0%) statistically supports the qualitative experiences of fear-based weaponization, where communities collectively acquire "heavier arms" due to state failure. The qualitative findings provide context to the mechanism underlying the statistics, where the lack of trust in state protection creates a vicious cycle of defensive militarization, which is exploited by criminal actors and thus decreases the threshold of violence. Moreover, the high level of neutral quantitative agreement (22.4%) is also supported by the qualitative findings, where individuals recognize the violence-escalating effects of arms (Strongly Agree) but feel pressured to acquire arms for self-preservation due to the lack of state protection and insecurity. It supported by studies (Beshir et al., 2023; Guta et al., 2024). Thus, the findings support a self-sustaining cycle of violence, where state failure and violence lead to militarization, which in turn fuels violence, criminality, and the difficulties of disarmament, ensuring that each conflict cycle breeds the next.

10. Competition over Resources

The interview and FGD participants described that competition over scarce natural resources, especially water for irrigation, grazing, and pasture are the immediate, seasonal, and existential conflict that erupts into violence, directly relating the scarcity of natural resources to poor governance and the lack of unbiased conflict resolution mechanisms.

KII participant explained the predictability of natural resource conflicts as follows¹¹:

Our land needs to be irrigated with water from the Ataye River to grow vegetables like tomatoes, onions, and peppers that feed our families and provide for the markets of Kemissie and Debre Berhan. But during the drought season, when the river dries up and the lowland grazing areas dry up, the Oromo pastoralists will come to our farms with their cattle. Not to attack us, not to steal from us just because our land is near the water, and their cattle are dying of thirst. We understand. We are not enemies. But then, when fifty cattle destroy your tomato seedlings in one night, before dawn, your harvest is destroyed, and you are not in an understanding mood. You are in an angry mood and that anger is easily weaponized.

The FGD1 participants also support scarcity of resources as cause of conflict. They highlighted the enormity of the impact of the loss of these resources that when the crops are destroyed, it is not food loss. It is not income loss. It is our way of survival the school fees, the medical bills, the seed for next season, everything we have invested in the soil. The international organizations speak of 'food insecurity' as a statistic. For us, it is the moment you realize you cannot feed your children and there is no one to help you. That is when a dispute over water becomes a war over existence.

Most interview participants also highlighted the contrast between the past, which was characterized by effective indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, and the present. A KII C05 shared with a hint of nostalgia: "There was a time and this is not ancient history, this was within my lifetime when respected elders and religious leaders from both communities would mediate these resource disputes within a single day." The KII C06 would agree that there was damage to the crops, while the Amhara elders would agree that there was a need for pasture and water. The two sides would agree on the compensation to be given to the pastoralist, such as so many birr for every trampled seedling, while the pastoralist would receive so many cows as compensation. Both sides would agree on the compensation, knowing that the outcome was reached through the mediators. The conflict would thus come to an end. There was no grudge held, nor was there a planned revenge to be taken during the next drought season. It was resolved.

¹¹ Interview with C06, January 2024

All the FGD participants unanimously agreed that the failure of this system was due to the failure of politics at different levels of governance. The bitter remark of one of the KII C09 was today, when Oromo cattle destroy an Amhara farmer's crops, he does not go to the elders. He goes to the Fano. When an Oromo pastoralist is denied access to water, he does not petition the Woreda administration. He joins the OLF. The politicians have deliberately destroyed our traditional mediation institutions because those institutions resolved conflicts without ethnic mobilization. Resolved conflict does not win elections. Resolved conflict does not warrant emergency budgets or security commands or arms purchases. Ongoing, escalating, ethicized conflict does. Therefore, they starve our indigenous institutions of recognition, of resources, of legitimacy and then they express surprise that we solve our conflicts with guns, not dialogue. This transformation of local, manageable conflicts over scarce resources into zero-sum ethnic conflicts is, in the view of the participants, one of the most destructive legacies of failed governance in Ataye the loss of not just economic but social infrastructure that allowed communities to share scarce resources without resorting to conflict.

Table 13 discloses that among 380 respondents', 66.3% (252) respondents' response on competition for resources, as causes of conflict were positive. The smaller number respondents' (18.9%) disagree over it. The remaining 14.7 % (56) respondents were silent to respond it.

Table 13 : Competition over Land, Water, and Grass Leads to Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	32	8.4%
Disagree	40	10.5%
Neutral	56	14.7%
Agree	140	36.8%
Strongly Agree	112	29.5%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The discussion of the qualitative and quantitate finding competition for resources was another causes of the conflict. Majority of questionnaires respondents were positive perception of resources competition as causes of conflict. Similarly, most FGD and interview participants said that completions for resources like land are the cause of conflict. The Oromo ethnic

group claims ownership of the Ataye town especially Kebele 01, which is under Amhara region administration. As one FGD2-04 puts it, "When the crops are destroyed, it is not food loss; it is our way of survival the school fees, the medical bills, everything we have invested in the soil." This is strongly corroborated by extensive scholarly evidence from Ethiopia's pastoral and agro-pastoral regions on the resource competition for water and grazing land as a major cause of inter-ethnic conflict, particularly in the face of resource scarcity, the lack of effective customary institutions and property rights, and the politicization of ethnicity in the face of federal restructuring (Bamlak, 2013), Territorial expansion, competition over resources, and cattle raiding as the core drivers of violent conflicts (Burka et al., 2023; Fikeryohannes et al., 2023). The 66.3% consensus among the Ataye population indicates a system failure in the management of shared resources and the politicization of identity in the diverse ethnic states in Ethiopia, which led to the escalation of conflicts over seasonal drought and marauding herds into ethnic conflicts.

11. Weak Government of Ataye Town

Consistently, the interview and FGD participants identified the local administration, including *Woreda* officials, zone administrators, and particularly the local police, as a major source of conflict rather than a force preventing conflict. The FGD1 -02 said that our town was peaceful before 2018. However, the 2018 peaceful support demonstration for the political reform changed into riot due to mismanagement. Moreover, the preparation of the town administration to manage riot escalated into inter-ethnic conflict in 2019. Then it administrated by command post. However, this command post also unable to prevent the 2021 attack of Amhara orthodox ethnic group by armed group. Then the armed group changes their target of Amhara ethnic group into Amhara special police force. Another Interview Participant adds as¹²;

As a young adult affected by conflict, I have grown up during the reign of Prime Minister Abiy, experiencing unending violence in my hometown since I turned eighteen. Today, at twenty-three, I have lived my entire young life in conflict. In March 2021, we notified the authorities about the unauthorized military training taking place in our region, even issuing warnings a week before the clashes. Nevertheless, the defense forces' constant claim that they could do nothing but wait for orders has become a chilling tombstone for my generation. The violent clashes in April 2021 resulted in massacres throughout and the destruction of 3,073

¹² Interview with C12, January 2024

buildings. By January 2023, OLA militants attacked once more, leaving destruction and mass displacement in their wake. The federal army entered our region only after the damage had been done and basic services had failed. Today, in 2023, I understand that the government has abandoned us. We have learned the bitter truth: in Ataye, self-defense is the only effective shield.

Another interview participant told of the tragic metamorphosis of the administration's role as conflict mediator¹³:

Twenty years ago, when a conflict arose between Amhara and Oromo farmers, the woreda administrator would sit with the elders under the sycamore tree. He would listen. He would acknowledge grievances on both sides. He would work to find a solution. Nowadays, he just tells us to resolve it ourselves. We are the elders. We are supposed to resolve it ourselves. He would lend the authority of the state to the judgment of the community. This partnership of formal and informal institutions this is what resolved conflicts. Today, the administrator does not come to the tree. He sends a junior officer who takes notes and leaves. The elders deliberate alone, they render judgments alone, and they try to enforce compensation alone. Moreover, when one side refuses to comply, the elders have no power to force their compliance because the state has withdrawn its backing. The administration is not just passive. It is, through its passivity, actively partisan. It favors the party who refuses reconciliation, who refuses to be accountable, who refuses to see the humanity of the other party.

Unanimously, the interview participants concluded that the inaction of the administration constitutes, in and of itself, a direct action a deliberate abdication that has the consequence of allowing the escalation of local conflicts into ethnic wars. As the FGD4-04 described it as the Early Warning System is a question of what warnings were not taken. What were the early warnings that were not acted upon? I am here to tell you that you were not taken unaware by anything. You were aware of the militia training, the arms supplies, and the inflammatory rhetoric. You were aware of it all, and you chose to do nothing. In not doing anything, you were doing something. In not doing anything, you were doing it. Moreover, it is that doing nothing that has killed more people than all the armed groups put together because the armed groups exist because of your failure to stand by us.

¹³ Interview with D04, January 2024

Table 14 shows that among 380 respondents', 242(63.7%) respondents' agreed that weak government of Ataye town the causes of frequent attack. The other 84(22.1%) respondents' remain silent to take either agree or disagree side. The small number of respondents' (14.2%) disagrees of the contribution of Ataye administration for frequent conflict.

Table 14: Ineffective Governance or Weak Law Enforcement Causes Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	16	4.2%
Disagree	38	10.0%
Neutral	84	22.1%
Agree	161	42.4%
Strongly Agree	81	21.3%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

These indicated that majority of respondents' agreed that the weak law enforcement capacity of the town administration. Similarly, the interview and FGD participants said that the weak law enforcement capacity of the Ataye town administration in 2018 changed the conflict into inter-ethnic conflict. Moreover, the low law enforcement capacity of North shewa zone administration unable to prevent the 2019 conflict. The qualitative narratives reveal the causal mechanism, i.e., how the administrative inaction leads to a "direct action" that fuels violence, a pattern that matches the theory of the "security gap" (Asnake, 2020). The significant quantitative neutral response (22.1%) makes more sense in this context, i.e., they view the state as fully irrelevant.

4.2. Threats of Ataye Town

This section highlights the changing nature of the threats that Ataye is facing. These identified threats are ethnic entrepreneurs, firearm traffickers, and social media abusers. The nature of each threat discussed as follows:

4.2.1. Ethnic Extremism

The unanimous consensus among the interview and FGD participants was that ethnic entrepreneurs, both as individuals and networks, who exploit ethnic fears, grievances, and demographic anxieties for political and material gains, were the main instigators and perpetrators of the conflict in Ataye. The FGDs agreed on one thing ethnic extremists were seen as a major threat to the peace in Ataye; however, both FGD1 and FGD2 saw that the Oromos were the source of this problem while FGD3 and FGD4 believed that it was the Amharas. For instance, FGD1 (Amhara male) claimed: "Ethnic extremists from Oromo OLF's armed group entered Ataye with the intention of chasing away all Amhara from Ataye. They said 'This is Oromo land. Leave now or you die.' They torched our houses chanting ethnic slogans." Similarly, FGD2 (Amhara female) maintained, "The Oromo extremists set fire on our shops, church, and residences. They said we were settlers despite having lived in Ataye for generations." However, FGD3 (Oromo male) insisted: "The Amhara ethnic extremists from the local militia and Amhara Special Police forced us out together. They said we were invaders and burnt our houses while saying 'Go back to Oromia.'" Finally, FGD4 (Oromo female) confirmed this point by saying: "The Amhara neighbors that had always shared their food with us have become ethnic extremists overnight. They ordered us to leave Ataye or we will be killed." Therefore, any early warning mechanism should get information from both ethnic groups simultaneously.

An interviewee explained the structural enabling environment as¹⁴;

The ethnic federalism in Ethiopia creates an environment where ethnic entrepreneurs can exploit ethnicity to mobilize groups for their agendas. In fact, the Ethiopian constitution defines political identity exclusively along ethnic lines. Political parties are organized along ethnic lines. Administrative boundaries are demarcated along ethnic settlement patterns. Electoral constituencies are ethnically demarcated. In such a system, the most rational strategy for any ambitious politician is not to appeal to cross-cutting interest's

¹⁴ Interview with P05, January 2024

development, employment, public services but to mobilize the most extreme elements of their own ethnic constituency. Moderation is electoral suicide. Extremism is rewarded with votes, with budgets, with appointments. We have created a political economy of ethnic grievance, and ethnic entrepreneurs are its most successful entrepreneurs.

These actors carefully manipulate the history of victimization while, at the same time, heightening the sense of existential threat to both sides to create a self-perpetuating sense of emergency to justify the process of radicalization. The FGD1- 01 added that the movement to rename the town of Kemissie, the administrative center of the Oromia Special Zone, from its original name to the Amharic equivalent of the Oromo name, "Midre Gegni", the threat of existential erasure is highlighted. When Amhara nationalists campaign to rename our towns, to erase our language from street signs and other public spaces, to redraw boundaries that would place Oromo-majority areas under Amhara administration, they are not making territorial claims. They are declaring that our very identity has no right to exist. This is not politics. This is assimilation by administrative decree. Moreover, we are expected to respond with dialogue.

One of the key informant interviews described the fears of both sides¹⁵:

When Oromo nationalists claim that, the area is Oromo land historically and culturally, when armed groups openly declare their intention to 'liberate' our towns from Amhara administration, when our children are killed in door-to-door massacres and the perpetrators are never prosecuted, we do not hear a political claim. We hear a death sentence. We hear that our ancestors' graves will be plowed under, that our churches will be converted to mosques or burned, that our language will be forbidden in schools. You cannot negotiate with someone who has already decided you do not have the right to exist.

This strategic manipulation of mutual fear leads to radicalized and exclusivist slogans that participants identified as the linguistic weapons of ethnic war. Similarly, the FGD2-03 illustrated the manner in which these slogans, such as "Amhara first" and "Oromo first," serve to ignite ideologies: "These slogans are not expressions of legitimate ethnic pride. They are declarations of ethnic supremacy disguised as ethnic self-defense. 'Amhara first' does not mean that Amhara people deserve equal rights to other people in Ethiopia. It means that

¹⁵ Interview with P04, January 2024

Amhara people deserve more rights than Oromo people living in Amhara territory. 'Oromo first' does not mean that Oromo people deserve self-determination rights. It means that Oromo people deserve domination over non-Oromo minorities in Oromo territory. Both slogans have the same dangerous underlying assumption: that my rights can only be secured by diminishing yours. This is not nationalism. This is supremacy and supremacy always leads to violence.

Another key informant interview related an instance where the rhetoric creates an impenetrable lens of victimhood that makes resolution impossible¹⁶:

Once a community becomes convinced that it is the victim of historical injustice and that the other community is the perpetrator, every action by the other side confirms this narrative. If they negotiate, it is a trick. If they offer compensation, it is an admission of guilt. If they remain silent, it is contempt. There is no gesture that cannot be interpreted through the lens of victimhood. Moreover, when both sides are trapped in this lens each convinced that they are the injured party and the other is the aggressor there is no common ground, no neutral language, and no trusted mediator. The only resolution is the complete submission of the other side, which is not resolution but annihilation.

This statement indicated that ethnic extremist is the motor of the conflict, mobilizing their ethnic group against the other ethnic group is their means of income. To support this statement, the FGD3-01 said that the ethnic extremist create ethnic fear over us through dissemination of hate speech and wrong narration via sponsored social media. However, when the conflict burns our children and properties and looks it as film.

Table 15 indicated that among 380 respondents', 327(86.1%) agreed that the ethnic extremist of both ethnic group are the main threat of Ataye town peace. Among it, 63.2 %(240) respondents' strongly agreed it. The negative response is too small, which was 7.4% respondents only disagree the contribution of ethnic extremist.

¹⁶ Interview with D02, January 2024

Table 15 : Ethnic Extremism is a Catalyst in Inter-Ethnic Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	20	5.3%
Disagree	8	2.1%
Neutral	25	6.6%
Agree	87	22.9%
Strongly Agree	240	63.2%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

Ethnic extremists were the most visible and destructive threat during the period under consideration. Using Relative Deprivation Theory, the rise of ethnic extremism can be seen because of the value expectations held by the Amhara and Oromo ethnic communities. Both communities developed a belief system about what they were entitled to: territory, political power, cultural superiority, and economic opportunities. When the reorganizations were made, the perceived losers and winners were created, and the gap between the two was extremely large. The ethnic extremists capitalized on the perceived relative deprivation and presented the perceived gains by other communities as a loss for the respective ethnic communities. Basic Human Needs Theory adds another dimension to the above analysis by revealing the reason why ethnic extremism is so appealing: it is a threat because it fulfills the basic human need for security. When the security of the ethnic community is perceived to be under threat, the appeal of ethnic extremism is extremely dangerous. The ethnic extremist threat was not a political threat; it was an existential threat: a reaction to the threats perceived by the ethnic communities and which required non-negotiable confrontation.

The discussion of the qualitative result with the quantitative result indicated those ethnic extremists are the main actor of Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023. All interview and FGD participants supported the existence of ethnic extremist for this conflict both in the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups. Moreover, the majority of (86.1%) questionnaires respondents' agreed on ethnic extremist as causes of Ataye conflict. The qualitative findings, therefore, provide an explanation of the mechanism through which the statistic operates, i.e., the exploitation of the ethno-federal system to promote extremist slogans and identities, which justifies the militarization of the community and creates a self-sustaining cycle of retaliation. The data, therefore, converges to indicate that hate speech is not just a symptom of the

conflict but also an important driver of the conflict, with the super-majority of the quantitative respondents living in a reality that has been politically constructed to reflect the qualitative findings on the direct relationship between rhetoric and polarization, militia formation, and conflict.

4.2.2. Firearm Traffickers

All interview and FGD participants said that the other threat of Ataye town peace was firearm trafficker. They instigate both ethnic groups via dissemination false preparation of the other ethnic group against the other. Four FGDs mentioned firearm traffickers as the enabler of violence, creating conditions necessary for violence to occur. FGD1 (Amhara male) said: "The firearms traffickers supplied automatic rifles, pistols, and hand grenades from other areas than Ataye. Before 2021, no firearms could be found anywhere around Ataye. But now, all young boys have firearms. The traffickers sell them to whoever pays; Amhara and Oromo both can get guns." FGD2 (Amhara female) said: "The firearms traffickers would openly sell firearms at the local market if you know the right person. Police did not interfere since some of them were involved or too scared to intervene. For several months, firearms were available in the open market." FGD3 (Oromo male) said: "The traffickers introduced not only firearms but also fighters associated with Al-Shabaab terrorism. The trafficking was facilitated through informal boundaries using trucks loaded with various kinds of firearms. When firearms started becoming easily accessible, every small dispute led to shootings." FGD4 (Oromo female) said: "Young boys carrying firearms for the first time appeared. The firearms traffickers cultivated the culture of violence. The conflict would remain on the level of fist fights without the traffickers."

Interview participant expressed it as¹⁷;

The gun traffickers made Ataye a battlefield from 2018 to 2023. Before 2018, we knew who our enemies were. They came with sticks and machetes, and we could protect our loved ones. However, during the 2019 attack on Ataye, I witnessed things that I had never witnessed in my seventy years of life. The attackers came with AK-47 guns and randomly shot at our homes. In 2021, the attack got worse. The attackers came with grenades and heavy guns, aiming at the center of our town. I personally saw the destruction of the Jewha St. George Church, not by fire but by men who first shot at the walls of the church using automatic guns. These guns did not come from our soil. They were

¹⁷ Interview with S07, January 2024

trafficked through known routes from Somalia to the Oromo Special Zone, which borders our district. The traffickers are operating in the open in the areas around Karakore and Awash River. They possess weapons concealed in trucks carrying khat and charcoal, bribing the authorities at the checkpoints. Our youth who were taken to Somalia for training brought back these same weapons to attack us. Between 2018 and 2023, I buried thirty-seven of my neighbors who were killed by gunshots. Not one of them died from a conventional weapon. The gun traffickers have made peace impossible in Ataye because a gun does not negotiate it only kills when the state fails to protect us. They do not create the security void. They take advantage of it.

Another interview participant¹⁸ made the direct connection between the failure and the lack of relevance of the Early Warning System when he said¹⁸:

The Early Warning System knew the flows of arms across borders. It knew the number of AK-47s coming into the zone every month. It knew which villages were stockpiling ammunition and which traffickers were operating with impunity. The law enforcement organs know the arm trafficker and types of weapon trafficked. However, they did not arrest such persons.

All key informants interview said that firearm trafficker the leading threat of Ataye peace since without firearm the community did not be part of armed conflict. To support it the FGD participants added the impact the conflict more devastating due to the use of firearms. The government know the trafficker and their rout of firearm trafficking but nobody arrested due to lack of government will to enforce law.

Table 16 indicates that among 380 respondents', a majority of 58.4%, which represents 222 people; agree that the trade in illegal arms increases the level of conflict. The combined level of disagreement is also substantial at 28.2%, and a significant number of 13.4% are neutral, which may indicate a more complex community viewpoint that sees firearms as unavoidable for self-defense in a dangerous area.

¹⁸ Interview with P02, January 2024

Table 16: Firearm Trafficking Escalates the Conflict in Ataye

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	44	11.6%
Disagree	63	16.6%
Neutral	51	13.4%
Agree	147	38.7%
Strongly Agree	75	19.7%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The integration of the data highlights the role of firearm trafficking as a potent catalyst and indicator of the conflict, which occurs in a cycle of fear, state collapse, and community militarization. The majority quantitative agreement (58.4%) statistically affirms the qualitative story that arms traders deliberately heighten the conflict by selling fear, which lowers the bar for lethal conflict, as discussed in the literature (Beshir et al., 2023). The qualitative quotes offer the mechanism to understand how arms traders initiate the “security dilemma”. However, the substantial quantitative disagreement (28.2%) and neutral responses are understood on a critical level by the qualitative finding that the activity of firearm trafficking occurs precisely because of state abandonment: for many, it is a rational choice to acquire arms to feel "unprotected by the local government." Thus, the data here triangulates to reveal that firearm trafficking is a perilous feedback loop, one that is a material escalator of violence but also, for a large part of the community, an internalized, almost expected expression of a larger governance crisis wherein survival means self-armament. This, therefore, places the arms trade not just as a driver of violence but as an integral part of the conflict's brutal economics.

The threat caused by firearm traffickers shows the alarming link between relative deprivation, unsatisfied basic needs, and the capacity for violence. Relative Deprivation Theory shows the demand-side link for the firearm threat. Communities with a sense of relative deprivation sought firearms for self-defense and assertion through violence. The illegal firearms were not only a product of crime; they were also a reaction to the security dilemma caused by relative deprivation. When communities perceive the state is unable to protect them and other communities are armed, the need for arms is a rational response. Basic Human Needs Theory also shows the firearm threat by revealing the need for security is the unsatisfied basic need behind the demand for firearms. Another FGD2-01 said that they wanted safety, not guns; they wanted safety, not guns. However, the Early Warning System failed to address the need

for security; hence, the threat was caused by the capacity for violence acquired by firearm traffickers. The threat was not addressed by the Early Warning System because the focus was on illegal firearms without addressing the need for security.

4.2.3. Social Media Abusers

Key informant interview and FGD participants' statements portrayed social media as an active tool that escalated conflict by allowing extremists to spread hate speech, misinformation, and calls to violence. Social media abusers were another threat highlighted by all four FGDs and noted to have contributed to violence that came from out of Ataye. FGD1 (Amhara male) commented: "Facebook and Telegram spread hatred and instigated the violence. Social media abusers would share our neighbors' names as targeted and call for their deaths. They send messages through WhatsApp to encourage violence from out of Ataye." FGD2 (Amhara female) further explained: "Our children showed us some violent video clips on WhatsApp: shooting of people, burnt churches, and people lying dead on the road. The social media abusers lied to create fear among us; we could never confirm if those videos were true." FGD3 (Oromo male) agreed with: "Social media helped bring others into our dispute. Messages sent by people in other areas encouraged us to fight, saying our people had been attacked in other areas." FGD4 (Oromo female) concluded: "We received messages about atrocities on social media from out of nowhere. They were probably lies, and yet they created fear in us faster than the truth."

Interview participant expressed it as¹⁹;

I witnessed social media ignite our town before the first shot was fired between 2018 and 2023. I was on Facebook and Telegram daily, and I witnessed how extremists used these platforms to promote hate directly against Ataye. Social media is a great tool used by extremists to spread hate and provoke violence.' In 2019, before the first big attack, Telegram groups started posting old pictures of Amhara militias attacking Oromo villages, saying these were taken in our region. None of it was true, but people believed it. The extremists used social media to 'brand other groups as an existential threat.' They labeled us 'settlers,' 'invaders,' 'fanatics' who need to be expelled from Ataye. Moreover, I confess, as a young man watching these videos every day, it had an effect on me. When the attack of 2021 finally happened, many young men on both sides had already come to believe that

¹⁹ Interview with P05, January 2024

the other side deserved to die based on what they had read on the internet for years. After every attack, videos of the destruction would emerge within hours, but always edited to show that only one side was to blame. Every physical altercation was escalated and misrepresented on social media, which directly led to revenge killings. Social media did not report our conflict it manufactured it.

Similarly, the FGD2-03 added that the involvement of social media in the Ataye conflict between 2018 and 2023. She said that the evidence she gathered was irrefutable. She said that what started as a local conflict over land escalated into an online war zone where peace was no longer possible. She remembered that one of the participants mentioned how social media became a great tool used by extremists to spread hate and incite violence. She said that she gathered screenshots from more than forty Telegram channels and Facebook pages that specifically focused on Ataye. She said that according to her research, these platforms would take any small incident, such as a stolen cow or a land dispute, and blow it out of proportion as proof of a conspiracy against their group. She also cited another participant who accurately pointed out how extremists used these platforms to label other groups as an existential threat. She said that the Amhara ethnic group in Ataye was labeled as an outsider who needed to be erased, while the Oromo ethnic group was labeled as bloodthirsty aggressors, saying that both were grossly oversimplified and blatant lies. She remembered a local who shared with them something very important: that social media had changed the nature of conversation from talking to acting, and that it was impossible to have a peaceful conversation. She saw this firsthand from 2019 to 2021, saying that every time the local elders tried to put up a message calling for calm, they were beaten up on social media for being traitors and were shut down. By 2023, she said, any possibility of conversation had been utterly destroyed. She stressed that social media did not just report on the conflict in Ataye, but was a major tool of war.

The findings from Table 17 results also indicate that only 31.1% of the population, which is 118 out of the total number of respondents, agree that social media is used in the spreading of hate and inciting of violence. However, a substantial 46.1% of the population disagrees with the notion, with 23.7% strongly disagreeing with the idea. This clearly indicates that social media is one of the least agreed-upon factors in conflict situations, implying that for many in society, it is seen as a mere reflection of what is taking place in real life.

Table 17 : Social Media Users Escalate the Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	90	23.7%
Disagree	85	22.4%
Neutral	87	22.9%
Agree	106	27.9%
Strongly Agree	12	3.2%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The qualitative results from the Ataye conflict participants introduce social media as a dynamic and powerful force that significantly contributed to the escalation of violence between 2018 and 2023. The key informant interview identification of more than forty specific Telegram channels and Facebook pages targeted in the documentation of the conflict clearly indicates a strategic effort to blow small local events out of proportion to provide evidence of an existential conspiracy. This is consistent with other studies on the impact of social media on Ethiopian conflicts. In the Ethiopian setting, social media platforms such as Facebook and Telegram have turned into "virtual battlefields" where ethnic complaints are exaggerated and manipulated well before actual violence breaks out on the ground (Adamu, 2020). The Ataye experience, where elders in the community who posted messages of calm were attacked and silenced on social media, directly corresponds to this phenomenon of digital radicalization.

However, the quantitative information derived from Table 18 offers a crucial contrast to these qualitative observations. The results show that only 31.1% of the respondents (118 out of the total) agree that social media is a platform that disseminates hate and inspires violence, while a significant 46.1% disagree, with 23.7% strongly disagreeing. This makes social media one of the least agreed-upon conflict factors in the general population (D. C. Mengistu, 2021). This contrast between qualitative richness and quantitative scope is highly significant. The Ataye quantitative results confirm this interpretation, suggesting that while social media clearly accelerated and magnified violence for those who lived through it, the general public may see it as a symptom of more fundamental structural issues such as ethnic federalism, land rights, and political marginalization as identified by the key informant interview and FGD participants themselves. This complexity of social media as both a primary tool in a given situation and a secondary reflection in a broader perspective demands a rich understanding in conflict resolution approaches.

The most pervasive threat during the period was social media abusers who used information to fuel division and violence. Relative Deprivation Theory provides insight into why social media narratives were so influential. Social media abusers created alternative historical narratives to depict each social group as the rightful owners of their lands and the others as invaders. They also used images to create the illusion of gaps between expectations and reality. For example, one of the respondents said, “Facebook showed people what they were missing and who was taking it away from them.” Basic Human Needs Theory provides insight into why the threat of social media abusers was so emotionally compelling. Messages about identity and recognition were particularly threatening to the social groups. This is because identity and recognition messages violated the social groups' basic human needs. For example, when the youth saw messages mocking their culture and their history, their basic human need to recognize them was violated. Similarly, when the farmers saw messages depicting violence against their social groups, their basic human need to provide security was violated. Social media abusers understood that messages dealing with identity were the most threatening and thus made violence inevitable.

4.3. Pattern of Armed Conflict (Disaster)

This section offers a chronological examination of the armed conflict in Ataye Town from 2018 to 2023.

4.3.1. The 2018 conflict

In their description of the July 2018 uprising in Ataye, the KII P05 portrayed it as a fundamentally cross-ethnic political uprising against a corrupt and unaccountable local government, not an ethnic war a moment of remarkable unity that the informants remembered with a mix of pride and sorrow. All four FGDs concur that there was violence between proponents of political reforms and loyalists of the old regime/EPRDF in 2018. As said by FGD1 (Amhara male): "When Abiy came into power, the loyalists did not accept that and they armed the Oromo militia and told them that reform means Amhara had to leave. They instigated chaos to demonstrate that the reform government had failed." FGD2 (Amhara female) explains further, saying: "We were happy with the reform that was taking place through radio. The old regime/EPRDF loyalists hiding in other zones sent armed members to fight us first." However, FGD3 (Oromo male) believes: "Special police of Amhara were loyal to the old regime/EPRDF and tried to incite us so as to fight back to make the reform government look weak."

Furthermore, FGD1 participants' explained the initial motivation of the uprising that we wanted to show our support and join in the reform. TPLF had controlled everything for twenty-seven years our budgets, our boundaries, our very identity. When Abiy came, when the Oromo and Amhara youth marched together in Addis, we felt this is our moment. We were not Oromo or Amhara that day. We were Ataye residents demanding clean water, electricity, jobs, and an end to corruption." This unprecedented unity was encapsulated in the formation of the "Oromara" alliance, which was a portmanteau of the two ethnic groups. The slogan "Amhara Kegna; Oromo Kegna" (Our Amhara; Our Oromo) was chanted in the streets as Oromo youth made their way from Senbete to Ataye, where they were to meet the Amhara protesters, both of whom directed their ire at the woreda administration they collectively perceived as predatory.

A key informant interview participant captured this moment with palpable nostalgia²⁰:

I am an Oromo, and I stood beside my Amhara neighbor and we shouted the same slogans. We did not inquire about each other's ethnicity. We asked, are you tired of being lied to? Are you tired of being asked to bribe for basic services? Are you tired of seeing your children graduate and have no jobs to go to? The answer was always yes. For one week, we were not two communities. We were one community with two names. However, such an opportunity was deliberately undermined by the local government's failure to address the grievances, and it is from such an action that the descent into chaos began, which the participants pointed out as the turning point towards ethnic conflict. As they attempted to protest, the local government did not want to engage with the protesters and even sought to stop the movement using force, and the political uprising turned into chaos and violence.

Correspondingly, FGD1 participants described the tragic shift from a political movement towards chaos and violence the government did not respond to our demands. They did not arrest the corrupt officials. They did not investigate the missing budgets. Instead, they sent police to break up our peaceful demonstrations. They arrested our youth leaders. They called us 'destabilizing elements' and 'anti-peace forces.' What started as a call for justice quickly degenerated into chaos, with government buildings looted, police stations overrun, and military-grade weapons seized from armories. We did not plan this. We did not want this.

²⁰ Interview with C10, January 2024

But when the state treats its citizens as enemies, citizens eventually become enemies of the state. This looting of weaponry from the police stations during this period, where over 140 guns were looted during the first bout of violence, meant that a massive quantity of military-grade weaponry had now been placed in the hands of civilians, and a volatile situation had been created that, as the actors themselves realized with a sense of dread, would lead to future bloodshed. An interview participant explained the irreversible nature of the violence²¹:

Before July 2018, there were illegal weapons in our communities, but not in these numbers. After the police stations were looted, every young man with grievances could access an automatic rifle. The genie was out of the bottle, and no one, not the elders, not the religious leaders, not the regional government could put it back. This period critically and permanently undermined the governance of the region. The administration of the Woreda was perceived as corrupt and biased toward certain ethnic groups. It was also shown to be inefficient and incapable of maintaining law and order. The people who had previously relied on the administration for security were now forced to see it as a predator or a failure or both. As the common enemy of the TPLF-dominated administration in the Woreda was removed from the political scene due to the subsequent rearrangement of the administration, a political vacuum was created.

As the interview participant described²²:

We united against the old officials, and we defeated them. They were transferred, demoted, or simply disappeared from the political scene. But we had not agreed on what would replace them. We had not negotiated how power would be shared, how resources would be distributed, how the Oromo minority in Ataye would be represented in the new administration. We celebrated our victory together, and then we awoke the following morning with no common enemy, no common vision. Into the vacuum came the ethnic entrepreneurs—the nationalists, the armed groups, the politicians with their simplistic solutions to complex problems. They did not create the division. They simply filled the space we had left together, and then failed to fill ourselves. The local grievances that had initially sparked the rebellion corruption, unemployment,

²¹ Interview with P06, January 2024

²² Interview with C14, January 2024

lack of basic services, exclusion in the constitution remained completely unresolved. These grievances, now paired with the availability of weapons, lack of trust in the government, and the absence of political leaders who represented ethnic groups, provided the perfect storm for the ethnic violence of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2023.

To support it, the FGD2 participants said that the Early Warning System monitored social media for hate speech. It monitored the movement of militias and the delivery of arms. It did not monitor the slow death of hope. It did not measure the distance between a peaceful protest demanding clean water and a door-to-door massacre of families who have lived as neighbors for a century. That distance is not measured in kilometers. It is measured in the failure of governance failure to respond, failure to listen, failure to protect, failure to prosecute. We gave the government a warning in 2018. We gave them our demands, our energy, our hope. They responded with bullets and arrests. Now we are all paying the price for their arrogance.

The Table 18 results indicate that a slight majority, 53.7%, or 204 people, agree with the political framing of the 2018 conflict. However, a substantial 34.8% disagree with it, and 11.6% are neutral. This shows that there is a stark division in the population, with almost half disagreeing with or not identifying with the "pro/anti-reform" framing of the conflict that they went through.

Table 18 : The 2018 Conflict was Between Pro- and Anti-Political Reform Factions

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	61	16.1%
Disagree	71	18.7%
Neutral	44	11.6%
Agree	142	37.4%
Strongly Agree	62	16.3%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The integration of the data shows that 2018 was a complicated catalyst with political, communal, and opportunistic drivers that blended together, creating polarized memory. The qualitative majority opinion (53.7% agreement) reflects the opinion of the participants who considered themselves change agents of the nation, fighting a corrupt, TPLF-aligned local

government. However, the large percentage of dissent (34.8%) can be explained by the qualitative narrative of the "Oromara" alliance and subsequent chaos. For these individuals, the conflict was not an ideological battle but a rebellion of the people against an unjust government, which unfortunately descended into chaos, looting, and security breakdown. The data, therefore, shows that although the national reformist movement was the catalyst and frame for the conflict, the reality was defined by poor governance, solidarity between ethnic groups that rapidly broke down, and the dangerous injection of arms into the conflict, which set the stage for the ethnic war that followed.

4.3.2. The 2019 conflict

The interview and FGD participants characterized the conflict in March 2019 as a catastrophic escalation from politics to full-scale inter-ethnic warfare that was weeks in the making and observable to anyone who cared to look, which should have triggered immediate early warning response and instead happened with complete impunity. On the 2019 massacre, both sides blame each other for the conflict, with the old regime/EPRDF blamed for supplying the arms for both parties. As FGD1 (Amhara male) noted, "The Oromo militiamen surrounded Ataye, massacring many Amhara in three days. The old regime/EPRDF loyalists armed those months ago to make sure the violence would erupt." Moreover, FGD2 (Amhara female) said with tears in her eyes, "I hid myself and my kids from Oromo militiamen who killed our neighbor. The old regime people had circulated rumors that the Amhara people would strike first, making the Oromo people pre-emptive strikes." On the other hand, FGD3 (Oromo male) declared, "The Amhara special policemen stormed Oromo neighborhoods during the dawn hours, shooting men listed in their documents. Those special policemen were old regime members redeployed to create a civil war between communities."

The interview participants recalled the chilling intent behind this mobilization²³:

We were prepared for weeks. This was not spontaneous anger or a fight that erupted from a single incident. People were buying guns openly in the markets, and some even sold their livestock their plow oxen, their milking cows, their future to arm themselves. You do not sell your plow ox unless you believe you are preparing for war. Everyone knew what was coming. The elders knew. The priests knew. The woreda administrators knew. And no one stopped it. No one arrested the arms dealers. No one confiscated the weapons. No one called the communities

²³ Interview with C05, January 2024

together to de-escalate. We were like people standing in dry grass watching a fire approach, and those with the power to extinguish it simply watched.

This planned militarization was compounded by the direct involvement of state-trained militias, transforming government security initiatives into instruments of ethnic violence. The FGD3 -01 bitterly revealed that the newly trained militias, 950 young men who had just completed 15 days of official government training at the Ataye public stadium, were directly involved in the conflict. The government provided them with uniforms, provided them with weapons, provided them with military discipline, and then lost all control of the use of these tools. Some of the militias protected their own communities. Some of the militias participated in the attack. It was impossible to differentiate between the two. What is certain is that the state that provided the training, provided the weapons, and provided the deployment of the militias was directly responsible for the violence that followed.

The KII C04 noted that the location and the time of the militia graduation ceremony, scheduled for the 6th of March 2019 at the Ataye public stadium, directly adjacent to the majority Oromo kebeles, was itself a provocation that transformed a routine security operation into a catalyst for ethnic conflict. Similarly, the FGD4-02 described it like the movie imagine 950 armed Amhara militia forces conducting public exercises in the middle of a town inhabited by a large number of Oromo people, shouting slogans, showing off their arms, and rejoicing over their preparedness. How would the Oromo people read it? As a security measure? As a form of intimidation? As an occupation? As a statement that their presence in the area of Ataye was dependent on the tolerance of the Amhara? The government failed to grasp or chose not to grasp the reality that in a polarized environment, security arrangements for one group equate to a survival threat for the other.

Such violence was responsible for catastrophic damage and destruction, which changed the social fabric of Ataye town forever. The conflict, therefore, changed the social fabric of the region from one of coexistence and harmony to one of institutionalized hatred and division between communities. The KII P03 described the conflict of March 2019 as unique and distinct from all other conflicts in the region, as they said before 2019, when conflicts happened over grazing, over water, over cattle there was always a division between combatant and civilian, between fighter and family. The conflict of 2019 erased all those divisions. Militias went house to house, not looking for enemy fighters, but enemy ethnicity. They burned homes with families inside. They killed elderly women who could not escape.

They looted stores owned by the other ethnicity, regardless of whether or not they had ever been involved in politics or violence. This was not war. This was ethnic cleansing. All participants unanimously agreed that the conflict of March 2019 was purely an ethnic conflict, which was distinct from the 2018 political uprising.

One of the interviews who was affected by the loss of his home said²⁴,

As in 2018, we were attacked because we were linked to the corrupt local government. As in 2019, we were attacked because we were Amhara. My politics had not changed. My identity had not changed. What had changed was that the organizers of the conflict had determined that no longer was individual guilt relevant; only our ethnicity mattered. The damage was tremendous. Hundreds of houses were destroyed, businesses were looted, fields were left unplowed, and the economic base of a town was destroyed. But the psychological damage was said to have been more devastating.

To support it FGD3 explained the change as before 2019, an Amhara family and an Oromo family may not have been friends, but they would have been neighbors. Their children would have played together. They would have shared coffee during Ramadan and bread during Easter. Nevertheless, after 2019, this became impossible. How can you share coffee with a man whose brother may have burned your cousin's house? How can your children play with children whose fathers may have looted your shop? However, the conflict has not only destroyed our buildings; it has destroyed our belief that we can coexist. It has institutionalized suspicion as a means of survival. Another interview participant explained the material grievance²⁵:

The looted property has never been returned. The houses that were burned have never been rebuilt. The people who were killed have never been compensated. Every victim family carries not only grief but also economic ruin, and every perpetrator community carries not only guilt but also stolen wealth. This is not a wound that can heal through prayer and handshakes. This is a debt that must be repaid. Moreover, until it is repaid through restitution, through prosecution, through acknowledgment of responsibility the division will remain.

²⁴ Interview with P06, January 2024

²⁵ Interview with C13, January 2024

To support it, the FGD2 participants added that the Early Warning System monitored the weeks of preparation. It was aware of the arms deals, the militia training, and the provocative propaganda being spread in the markets. It produced reports, gathered data, relayed alerts to higher authorities. Moreover, nothing happened. The information was there. The alerts were sent. The political will to act on them was not. We did not lack early warning. We lacked late response. Moreover, because we failed to respond adequately in 2019, we had a massacre in 2021, a mobilization in 2023, and God knows what we will face tomorrow. The failure of 2019 was not a failure of early warning. It was a failure of conscience.

The quantitative data Table 19 suggests that the majority of the respondents, at 53.4% or 203 people, agree that the conflict in 2019 was an inter-ethnic one. However, the significant combined figure of 46.6% disagree or have no opinion, indicating that there was no absolute agreement, and to a certain extent, the term "ethnic conflict" does not seem to define the understanding of the majority of the population about the conflict.

Table 19 : The 2019 Conflict was an Amhara and Oromo Inter-Ethnic Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	54	14.2%
Disagree	58	15.3%
Neutral	65	17.1%
Agree	159	41.8%
Strongly Agree	44	11.6%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The integration of the data suggests that while the conflict in 2019 was clearly an ethnic conflict in terms of its obvious characteristics, there was a certain understanding within the majority of the population that the factors behind the conflict were more complex than just ethnic differences. The quantitative majority opinion, at 53.4% agreement, is supported by the accounts of ethnic attacks, looting, and the ethnic dichotomy of Amhara and Oromo. However, the quantitative dissent and neutrality (46.6%) are understood in a more qualitative manner: the planning of militarization, the exchange of livestock for arms, and the involvement of government-trained militias. In these narratives, the conflict was not so much about primordial ethnic hatred but more about the "conflict complex," which saw ethnicity merely as the "vehicle," but militarization and the involvement of the state's "engine." Therefore, the data confirms the 2019 conflict as a defining ethnic war but also suggests that

the collective memory of the community is split into those who see the face and those who see the skeleton of the conflict.

4.2.4. The 2020 conflict

Informants saw the October 2020 conflict as an explosive escalation of conflict that was triggered by a securitized state intervention perceived not as law enforcement but ethnically biased occupation, in the context of a tense atmosphere of a national war that had changed the security calculations of all communities. Interview participant expressed it as²⁶:

The immediate cause was when the Amhara Regional Police Special Forces shot dead an Oromo youth in Ataye town for disobeying the command post directive regarding the possession of weapons within five kilometers of the main road. This is not law and order. This is the overreach of our right to self-government. The command post directive was given by the Amhara regional government, forced on the Oromo citizens of Ataye without consultation, without negotiation, without any acknowledgment that we are not subjects of the Amhara government but a national minority with constitutional rights to self-determination. When the Amhara police kill an Oromo youth for having a weapon to protect his home, we don't see a legal arrest; we see an occupying force protecting settlers on land they usurped. Within hours of this incident, armed youth from the Oromo ethnic group mobilized not only in Ataye but also in Senbete, Kemissie, and Karakore. Not through any command structure, but simply through family ties, clan affiliations, the common denominator of a perceived threat. And then, just as quickly, our Amhara brothers mobilized to protect the police not because they believed the police had acted properly, but because they recognized that, in the parlance of ethnic conflict, an attack on the regional police of the Amhara National Regional State was an attack on the Amhara people. Within 48 hours, what had begun as a disputed police action had escalated into inter-ethnic armed conflict?

Similarly, the FGD4 participants stated that the outbreak of the Tigray war in November 2020 marked a radical turning point in the Ethiopian political order. While Tigray is far away, the federal governments positioning against one ethnic group sparked concerns about its intentions to target others, challenging the monopoly on violence. Each ethnic group

²⁶ Interview with S03, January 2024

understood that their own security depended on their own armed strength as the federal military moved heavy weaponry northward, creating a security gap in their territory. This gap, existing since 2018, was filled by increasing private stockpiles, suggesting that the conflict in Tigray was a catalyst rather than a cause of the local conflict. The situation escalated from joint protests in 2018 to armed conflict in 2019 and violent state repression in 2020, as their belief in the state's protective power had been seriously diminished.

The quantitative results provided in Table 20 indicate that fewer than half (44.8%, or 170 people) agree with this framing between the police and the community. The majority, at 55.2%, either disagrees or falls neutral on this definition, which for most members of the community represents an inaccurate or inadequate representation of the complex violence that they endured in 2020.

Table 20 : The 2020 Conflict Had Involved the Amhara Regional Special Police Force and Ethnic Oromo Groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	60	15.8%
Disagree	83	21.8%
Neutral	67	17.6%
Agree	126	33.2%
Strongly Agree	44	11.6%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The integration of this data provides a clear disconnect between the catalyst that spurred the violence in 2020, and how the community at large in relation to the full scope of that violence perceived it. The qualitative results provided a clear representation of the catalyst that spurred the violence and the 44.8% who agree with this definition of it being a police-community issue, detailing how this event represented an ethnicized assault on the community by the state and reinforced theories regarding the perception of regional policing entities as ethnic instruments (Jemal, 2020; M. Tesfaye et al., 2020). The majority quantitative results regarding this definition being inaccurate or insufficient (55.2%) are critically illuminated by the qualitative results detailing the swift manner in which this event escalated to more than a policing incident. The quote "our Amhara brothers came to defend the police" reflects the shift to full-blown inter-ethnic conflict. This is the defining memory for the majority, not the spark but the devastating conflict and the "conflict spillover" from the national Tigray war

that it got subsumed by. Hence, the data triangulates to suggest that although the trigger was indeed the state securitization, the conflict is remembered by the majority as part and parcel of the growing ethnic war, with the police being the first player in the much larger and familiar tragedy.

4.3.5. The 2021 conflict

The interview and FGD participants vividly recalled the incident that happened on the night of March 2021, describing it as a night of unprecedented terror and systematic destruction, and unanimously and emphatically dismissing the state's narrative that the violence was a retaliatory inter-religious conflict between Christians and Muslims. The Amhara respondents indicated that there was systematic burning of Orthodox Churches and destructions committed by OLF soldiers who had foreign connections. This is what FGD1 (Amhara male) noted: "OLF soldiers affiliated with Al-Shabaab have burned Orthodox churches within one week. Our priests were killed while they were praying. Those from the old regime helped these rebels to open up the border passages and instigated a war against religion." FGD2 (Amhara female) added that, "I witnessed the actions of OLF soldiers throwing their Bibles inside a burning Church building. Arab community money and old regime logistics were used together to create an image of Ataye as the failed reform." On the other hand, the Oromo respondents denied any religious motivations in the conflict. FGD3 (Oromo male) indicated that, "They have burned their churches and then blamed us on this. Old regime spies working under a disguise of policemen burned the churches while calling us names."

Interview participant said:²⁷

The history of violence in Ataye begins in 2018. Periodic attacks have hurt Ataye. When the first grief is over, another grief comes. Now that the time of destruction has stopped, another disaster will replace it. As her grief increases, she is forced to endure a series of times. Ataye has not been able to undo the previous attacks, the destroyed institutions have not been properly restored, and the citizens who lost their loved ones in injustice have not forgotten their grief. The unexpected attack that took place around 3 pm on March 18/2021 has brought disaster. People have died; bodies have been missing; life has been destroyed; people have been displaced, and they have had to live in fear. The attacks began on the day the Amhara special forces, which were in the area

²⁷ Interview with S09, January 2024

days before the attack, were deployed to enforce in North wollo. In the evening, unknown people from where they came from in Ataye city began to enter Ataye city in vehicles, singing and dancing; who are you? When asked, they said they were marriage ceremony. After that they entered the city, they started shooting; as night fell, the smugglers, who entered the city under the guise of smugglers, began to carry out their first attack with the help of their heavy weapons. They spent the whole night spraying the city with gunpowder. The attack that began on Friday night continued on Saturday, killing innocent people and destroying property; hotels, financial institutions, houses, businesses from small to large shops, were burned, looted, and most of all, irreplaceable human lives were lost. Other infrastructure, including the network, was destroyed. The group that carried out the attack is a militant group called ONF Shene.

In support of this view, the FGD2 participants disclosed that the Ataye town administration has been repeatedly attacked by the OLF Shene militant group from the neighboring Oromo National Administration since 2018. It has more than 34 thousand residents. In particular, in April 2021, the militant group completely burned and looted 420 houses, 717 dormitories and services, 1,505 shops of various levels and 23 government offices were completely destroyed and looted. The TPLF armed forces also destroyed or looted in the city's college, Ataye hospital and schools' properties worth 145 million. The recovery of Ataye town needs more than 4 billion birr. An interviewee recalled the horrors of that night²⁸:

That night was terrifying; bullets were everywhere, like heavy rain on a tin roof, people were screaming, children were separated from parents; elderly neighbors were dragged from their homes and shot in the streets. We did not know where to run because every direction seemed to bring us closer to the gunfire. Some families hid in latrines, others climbed roofs and lay flat until dawn. This was not a spontaneous outbreak of religious hatred. This was organized, systematic ethnic cleansing.

There was a single, crushing piece of counter-evidence that utterly destroyed the entire construct of the religious conflict narrative: Muslim Amharas were completely untouched. Another KII C05 spoke to me with bitter intensity that if this was a religious war, and Muslims were fighting Christians because of their religion, then why were Muslim Amharas

²⁸ Interview with P06, January 2024

untouched?" My neighbor is an Amhara. He is a Muslim. He prays five times a day at the mosque. His wife wears a hijab. His children go to Islamic school. The attackers did not burn his house. They did not loot his shop. They did not shoot his sons. Instead, they went around his house and burned the Christian Amhara homes on either side. This is not a religious war. This is an ethnic cleansing, and it's being done in the name of religion to confuse the international community and to give the government cover.

Moreover, the FGD3 participants' pointed to the strategic selectiveness of the destruction that the attackers knew exactly which houses to burn, which shops to loot, which families to execute. They did not have to ask religion they knew their neighbors. They grew up with these people. They went to school with these people. They shopped at the same markets with these people. They drank coffee in the same houses with these people. This was not a mob of religious fanatics from another region. These were local people who had been convinced that their Amhara neighbors were illegal settlers occupying Oromo land. Religion was simply the most effective justification for ethnic cleansing in the eyes of the world.

The KII D07 also highlighted the catastrophic failure and the perceived active collusion of the state security forces, and they pointed to particular and documented cases in which the Amhara Special Forces were prevented from intervening, and in which the federal forces present in the region did not intervene at all. The other KII C06 declared with an almost uncontrollable rage that he forces that were supposed to protect us did nothing or actively prevented others from coming to our aid. The federal soldiers who were stationed at the edge of our town heard the shooting, saw the flames, received our desperate phone calls and stayed in their barracks. When the Amhara Special Forces units tried to mobilize from Debre Berhan to our aid, they were prevented from doing so at the checkpoints. Who ordered that? Who decided that our lives were not worth saving? Three years later, we still cannot say." Another informant made the connection between the failure of the security forces and the lack of relevance of the Early Warning System explicit when he declared the Early Warning System generated reports. It knew OLA units had infiltrated the zone. It knew heavy weapons had been transported across the border.

The other FGD6-02 02 said that it knew that on 19 March a Friday and a market day, when both communities would be concentrated in the town was a high-risk date for attack. This knowledge was passed on through the system: woreda to zone, zone to region, and region to federal. And nothing happened, no preemptive deployment, no reinforcement of checkpoints, no disarmament of the identified militias. The system generated the warnings. The state ignored the warnings. Moreover, we paid the price for that lapse with the children's lives. A displaced farmer summarized the events with a devastating conclusion: "It's not about the religion; religion was just used as an excuse, a convenient excuse. However, the target was ethnic Amhara. The attackers did not burn the churches because they hated Christianity. They burned the churches because the church is the cultural and historical heart of Amhara identity in this region. Destroy the church, destroy the history, displace the congregation, and the land is available for re-allocation to the rightful owners.

This is territorial expansion through ethnic cleansing, masquerading as religious conflict. The world bought into this masquerade because it was easier to deal with than the constitutional failure, the governance failure, and the impunity that made this massacre possible. But we, the survivors, know the truth. Our Muslim neighbors survived because they were Amhara. Our Orthodox Christian neighbors died because they were Amhara. The faith had nothing to do with it. The faith was the disguise. The interview participants unanimously concluded that the use of faith in the March 2021 attacks had not marked the beginning of a new phase in the conflict but had been the evolution of ethnic conflict into a form more palatable to the international community a calculated move by conflict entrepreneurs who recognized that "religious violence" garners humanitarian attention, while "ethnic cleansing" requires political action. Other interview added that they did not kill us because we are Christians. They killed us because we are Amhara. They burned our churches not because they hate Christ, but because our churches are the physical proof that we have lived on this land for generations. Erase the church, erase the proof, erase the people, and the land becomes empty available for 'return' to its 'original owners.' This is the oldest colonial logic in history, and we never expected to be its victims in our own homeland.

As shown in the quantitative results in Table 21 below, the distribution is nearly even, with 46.3% of the population (176 people) agreeing that the conflict was inter-religious, while 45.6% disagreed. This polarization is stark, with nearly all the rest (8.2%) being neutral. This suggests that the dimension of religion was highly visible and contentious but failed to provide a common narrative for the conflict's main cause.

Table 21 : The 2021 Conflict Was between Inter-Religious Groups rather than Inter-Ethnic Groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	85	22.4%
Disagree	88	23.2%
Neutral	31	8.2%
Agree	135	35.5%
Strongly Agree	41	10.8%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

From the integration of the data, it is possible to deduce that the dimension of religion in the 2021 conflict was powerful but superficial, disguising the more important underlying factors of ethnicity and politics. The quantitative findings can be understood from the qualitative findings. The 46.3% who agree on the inter-religiosity of the conflict were probably concentrating on the immediate cause of the conflict the assassination of a Muslim leader. However, the nearly equal proportion of those who disagree is validated by the qualitative descriptions of the nature of the violence the targeting of the ethnic Amhara regardless of their religion and the failure of the ethno-regional security forces. This segment of the population understands religion as a "strategic excuse," not the cause. Therefore, the data triangulation confirms that although the catalyst was religion and the frame was observable, the architecture of the conflict was fundamentally ethnic and political, driven by the administration and security forces issues and the instrumentalization of identity, as evidenced by external studies (ACLED, 2021; Addis, 2025).

4.3.5. The 2022 Conflict

The interview and FGD participants described 2022 as a year of prolonged low-level conflict, a condition of "neither war nor peace." This was a time of pervasive tension, rather than open conflict. Interview participant expresses it as ²⁹

²⁹ Interview with S04, January 2024

In 2022 was a year of no war, but also of no peace. We were always in a state of tension. The conflict was not the large-scale massacres we experienced in 2021 or would experience again in 2023, but a constant series of sporadic border clashes between Efratana Gidim and Jille Timuga. There were house burnings, displacement, and recriminations traded back and forth like currency. The security situation was completely fragmented there was no government presence, only a security vacuum. Moreover, that vacuum was filled by 'hit and run' attacks and increasing highway robbery along the Ataye-Kemissie road. The road was no longer safe. The Thursday market in Senbete lost half its vendors. The economy de-urbanized people stopped coming to town, businesses shut down, and we all retreated into our walled villages. The Early Warning System was conceptually blind. It was tracking militia movements and counting weapons, but it was not tracking the hectares of farmland being abandoned or the children who stopped going to school. By their measure, 2022 was a year of decreased conflict. By our measure, 2022 was the slow death of normal life.

To support it, the FGD participants added that we are not looking at this as a pause. We are looking at this as a transformation. We are transforming episodic ethnic conflict into permanent militarized conflict. Before, we would fight, then reconcile, then go back to our lives. Now, we are always preparing for the next fight, always looking over our shoulders, always armed. We are no longer fighting to win we have learned that no one wins these wars. We are fighting for the pause between battles. We fight to gain a few months of relative peace, knowing that peace is only temporary, knowing that someone will come seeking revenge for the last death, knowing that the armed groups are always recruiting, always waiting. This is not strategy for peace. This is strategy for survival. Moreover, the Early Warning System does not understand this because it tracks conflict events, not the permanent state of fear that now defines our lives. When you live in a community where every young man is armed, where every border crossing is a check to see which ethnic militia is in charge of the checkpoint, where every market day is potentially your last that is not peace, no matter what the numbers say.

Table 22 analyzes the perception of the year 2022 as "no war and no peace" in Ataye, showing a mixed reaction from the respondents. A considerable number, 36.1%, chose the neutral option, reflecting a sense of ambiguity or ambivalence. At the same time, 43.9% of

the respondents chose to express that the year did indeed mark a "no war and no peace" situation, with 31.8% agreeing and 12.1% strongly agreeing, reflecting a sense of stagnation of peace. On the other hand, 20% of the respondents disagreed, consisting of 12.1% who disagreed and 7.9% who strongly disagreed

Table 22 : 2022 Was a 'No War and No Peace' Year in Ataye

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	30	7.9%
Disagree	46	12.1%
Neutral	137	36.1%
Agree	121	31.8%
Strongly Agree	46	12.1%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The integration of the data verifies that 2022 was an era of "negative peace" or "hybrid peace," whereby "the absence of major battles belies an underlying reality of chronic instability and localized violence." The qualitative explanation of living under constant tension and "security vacuum" adds content to the quantitative verification that 43.9% of respondents perceived a reality of "no war, no peace." Yet, the very high percentage of neutral respondents (36.1%) is critically explained by the qualitative explanation that "the conflict has become fragmented and uneven, with the town center possibly more peaceful, but with clashes continuing in the rural border areas of Efratana Gidim." This difference in experience within the community also explains the lack of agreement, with some possibly experiencing the conflict directly through violence, while others may have experienced it latently through the threat of violence. The above information collectively shows that 2022 was not a year of recovery but rather one in which the conflict transformed into a crisis of low intensity, revealing the inability to tackle the root causes of boundary conflicts and governance failures from previous years.

4.3.6. The 2023 conflict

The FGD participants' said that Ataye conflict in 2023 was no exception to the devastatingly familiar pattern of a single, securitized incident perceived as ethnically biased prompting immediate retaliatory action on a massive scale, while federal forces remained passive and accountability mechanisms remained entirely absent.

To support it, a KII expressed it as³⁰;

In January 2023, the Special Forces of the Amhara region shot and killed seven ethnic Oromo youths in Muti Fata village near Senbete because they were suspected of being members of the Oromo Liberation Front Shane. In retaliation, within 24 hours, Oromo gunmen attacked Jewaha Negeso kebele in Efratana Gidim woreda in the Oromia special zone. This attack led to two days of fighting that resulted in the deaths of at least 28 Amhara Special Forces members and six federal police. Meanwhile, 98 civilians were killed, and 1,930 homes were destroyed in the Oromia special zone. The conflict radiated outward instantaneously Ataye and other regions all fell simultaneously, as if the conflict was not spreading but simply becoming visible everywhere at once. The A2 highway, the main north-south transportation artery in Ethiopia, was closed for days. Hundreds of thousands were displaced. And the federal troops stationed nearby? They were notified. They did not show up. Not then, not during the December ambush of disarmed Amhara Special Forces on their way home for holidays, not ever. This was not escalation. This was systemic failure.

To support it, FGD3-06 added that the ambush in December 2023 encapsulated the problem the political reaction played out the same script: OLF denying the incident and blaming Amhara soldiers, Amhara regional government threatening retaliation, National Movement of Amhara blaming the regional government and the ethnic war script filled the entire frame, leaving no room for the question that should be at the forefront: Why are the schools shut and the land unplowed? The Early Warning System had been monitoring weapons, words, and mobilization. It had been producing reports, gathering data, issuing warnings and yet, nothing changed. Not in January, not in December, not in five years of predictable, preventable, and cumulative violence. They tally the dead and sort them by ethnicity. They do not wonder at the state that tallied the dead and did nothing to stop the tallying. This is not early warning. This is late documentation record-keeping before the next massacre. The 2023 pattern was not an anomaly. It was the system working as intended.

The quantitative data from Table 23 indicates that the plurality of 45.7%, or 174 people, agrees that the conflict in 2023 was an inter-ethnic one. Nevertheless, the total percentage of people disagreeing with the statement, at 35.6%, is substantial, and the 18.7% , who are neutral demonstrate that ethnicity, although the dominant discourse does not represent the

³⁰ Interview with S03, January 2024

primary or even most accurate description of the conflict from the perspective of the population.

Table 23 : In 2023, the Conflict Was an Inter-Ethnic Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	31	8.2%
Disagree	104	27.4%
Neutral	71	18.7%
Agree	140	36.8%
Strongly Agree	34	8.9%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The integration of the data shows that there is a critical tension in the perspective on the 2023 conflict, whether it is an ethnic war per se or the result of a failure in governance that uses ethnicity as the language through which it is expressed. The instant ethnicization and retaliatory logic described in the qualitative data provide the perspective from which the 45.7% agree that the conflict in 2023 was an inter-ethnic one, and the logic by which the actions of the security forces trigger the "revenge logic" (Ajalaw, 2021; A. A. Bihonegn and Mekonen, 2023) and mobilize the entire population along ethnic lines. However, the quantitative disparity (35.6%) is supported qualitatively by the understanding provided by the people who pierced the mask of identity, stating that the ethnic label is a tool for politics, hiding the true crisis of failed institutions, closed schools, and economic ruin. The high rate of neutrality also speaks to the "violent liminality" of the community, as the low-grade tension cannot be categorized. The data here affirms that the conflict indeed exists on two levels at once: as a brutal ethnic conflict driven by feelings of responsibility, and as a crisis of legitimacy, in which the failure to deliver security and services is the ultimate driver, with ethnicity being its most obvious and explosive manifestation.

The armed conflict in Ataye from 2018 to 2023 can be cited as a case where there was a disturbing escalation of conflict from political grievances to a deeply entrenched inter-ethnic warfare. However, it was not ethnicity that fueled this conflict but a political uprising among all ethnic groups in the form of the "Oromara" movement against the corrupt local political administration. Although it was a unifying factor in its intent, it was not until later that it became apparent that it was also the cause of the destruction of the state and the arming of its people. This can also be evidenced by the survey data where only 53.7% (204 respondents)

saw it as a "pro vs. anti-reform" battle in 2018. This implies that even at the onset of the conflict, almost half of the people saw the seeds of failure being sown. As one person puts it that we thought we were fighting for a better government together, but when the police fled, we realized we were only left with our guns and our fears.

The shift to inter-ethnic conflict was now complete, facilitated by premeditated mobilization and the addition of newly trained militias. Although only 53.4% of the total sample population, or 203 respondents, affirmed the ethnic character of this shift, the years that followed 2020 and 2021 demonstrate how attempts by the government, such as the command post in 2020, were actually counterproductive. These years saw the exploitation of religion and the "militarization" of regional security forces, leading to the displacement of over 40,000 people. Most interview participants encapsulated the sense of betrayal felt by many when they said, "The uniforms we expected to protect us became the very tools used to target us; by 2021, we no longer looked for the law, we only looked for our own kind."

The final phase, spanning from 2022 to 2023, is a period of "violent liminality." In 2022, 43.9% (167 respondents) lived in a world of "no war, no peace," which led to the clear and retaliatory logic of ethnic warfare in 2023, supported by 45.7% (174 respondents). This chronology is a self-perpetuating cycle, with each round becoming progressively militarized and socially destructive. Ataye today is a dramatic reminder of how political change is a process that is never ending and leads to a permanent state of insecurity. For peace to become sustainable, it must go beyond the current ceasefire and involve a complete separation of the security forces from ethnic politics and the creation of a neutral system of governance, which can transcend the logic of "collective responsibility" that is currently guiding life in this region.

Figure 8 indicated that from 2018 to 2023, Ataye Town's conflict shifted from hopeful unity in the "Oromara" protests against corruption to entrenched ethnic violence. Initial protests faltered due to government inaction and looting of police weapons, leading to state-backed ethnic warfare in 2019. Escalation continued with a 2020 shooting of an Oromo youth, sparking widespread violence. By 2021, organized attacks targeted Orthodox churches, reflecting ethnic cleansing amid state failure. The situation worsened in 2022 with ongoing clashes and economic collapse, culminating in the 2023 escalated into inter-ethnic conflict.

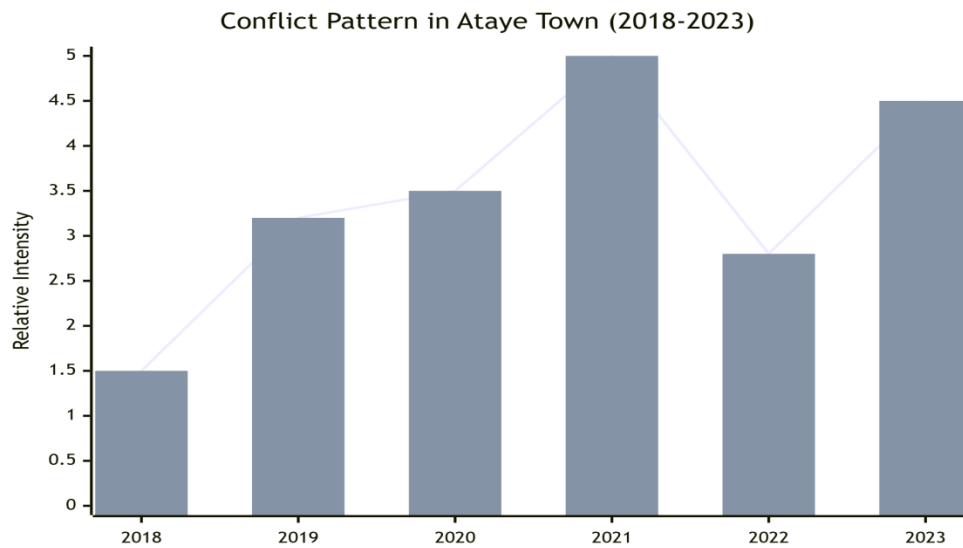


Figure 7: Pattern of Ataye town conflict from 2018 to 2023

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2024

The pattern that has emerged from the armed conflicts in Ataye from 2018 to 2023 indicates a cycle that was predicted in the integrated theory. Initially, the source of the conflict was based on relative deprivation, which stemmed from political and economic exclusion following the administration's changes. These issues were not resolved because they were based on human needs that could not be resolved through political and economic means. Consequently, the situation escalated to armed conflicts. When the situation escalated to armed conflicts, the response from the command posts was based on anomie, which could not solve the issues that were based on human needs. Consequently, the situation led to further feelings of deprivation among the people in the affected areas. This indicates that the situation in Ataye cannot be explained using any single theory but rather the interrelation between the formation of grievances and the existence of threats.

4.4. Summary of Findings

The vulnerability of Ataye Town to recurrent inter-ethnic violence is illuminated through both qualitative and quantitative data, revealing a complex interplay of factors that perpetuate conflict. Quantitatively, key drivers include unresolved victimization and displacement, identified by 90.5% of respondents as contributors to violence; the ethnic-based federal structure, cited by 88.4% as a direct cause of conflict escalation; historical grievances, traced by 83.7% to contemporary violence; and administrative boundary disputes, recognized by 85.3% as significant conflict drivers. Qualitative testimonies enrich this data, illustrating how victims become “incubators for anger” and how the 1991 administrative restructuring

marginalized intermarried communities, rendering them legally invisible. These narratives highlight the ways political elites manipulate historical injustices to mobilize support, thereby deepening divisions within society.

The fragility of Ataye becomes evident through the lens of its structural vulnerabilities, rooted in the ethnic federalism that creates permanent minorities and incentivizes ethnic mobilization. Qualitative insights reveal how many participants feel invisible due to constitutional mandates that force individuals to choose between ethnic identities. Quantitatively, this sentiment correlates with a widespread acknowledgment of the systemic pressures that foster conflict, demonstrating that marginalization is not just a byproduct but also a central aspect of the town's vulnerability. The threat landscape in Ataye comprises an integrated system of ethnic entrepreneurs, religious extremists, firearm traffickers, and social media abusers, as supported by both data types. Statistically, 86.1% of respondents recognize ethnic extremism as a primary conflict driver, while qualitative accounts describe how social media exacerbates tensions, particularly among urbanized youth, transforming local incidents into broader violence. This synergy underscores the multifaceted nature of the threats faced, showing how these actors exploit constitutional vulnerabilities and governance failures to instigate conflict.

From 2018 to 2023, the pattern of armed conflict in Ataye reflects a trajectory from cross-ethnic unity to entrenched warfare, revealing the lack of warning based early response escalate the conflict.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONFLICT RISK MONITORING IN ATAYE TOWN

This chapter on conflict monitoring mechanism focuses on a holistic evaluation of the structure, operational effectiveness, and community-based legitimacy of Ataye's conflict monitoring and Early Warning System. It has conflict indicator, monitoring actors, and conflict monitoring process sections.

5.1. Conflict Indicators

The participants in the interviews and FGD offered brilliant insights into the social unraveling and indicative signs that foreshadowed violent conflict between 2018 and 2023. In interview participant list indicators of conflict in Ethiopia as³¹;

Epidemics and natural disasters like floods and droughts deplete resources, which cause competition and conflict. Environmental degradation aggravates the lack of resources, increasing tensions involving land and water. Social transformation, like transformation of customs and norms, can give rise to conflict, as do instances of group theft and robbery of livestock and property, which lead to spirals of violence. Misrepresentation in political activity incites demands for change and resentment, and unsettled grievances induce grudge. Arming and armament typically signify escalating tensions, and economic inequality breeds discontent among oppressed groups. Additionally, impunity for violence fuels a culture of impunity, and environmental degradation has the potential to drive societies into conflict due to diminishing resources. Violence and murders, smuggling, unemployment at high levels, human rights violations, discrimination of workers, altered cultural practice, denial of opportunities, resource discoveries, anti-peace players, incorrect clustering, wrong protests, group demands for action, insecurity in schools, refugee flows, population displacements, grazing conflicts, safety of transport, national disrespect, abductions, market imbalances in participation, land claims, hate promotion, new religions emergence, disarmament campaigns, weapon acquisition, illegal settlement, border claims, expansionist approach, sports and festival violence, cultural displays, individual conflict, and harmful customs, are all contributing factors to the complex environment of potential conflict.

³¹ Interview with KII S01, January 2024

In reality, these 44 indicators from the Ministry of Peace do not correspond with what the local disaster management office is monitoring, so the warnings either come too late or don't come at all. These quotes point to the important deficiency in which the monitoring efforts of institutional actors were not communicated to the community. Explanation of indicators of conflict by KII³²:

The first indicator was market segregation. We stopped going to the market located on the other end of the city in around 2019 because of insults and hostile behavior, which was clearly telling us that we were not welcome anymore. This was not officially enforced but an invisible barrier, which was telling you 'keep to yourself'. Around 2020, a new trend of young men forming small groups at street corners emerged there wasn't much talk but watching, while carrying hidden sticks or machetes in their bags. Second indicator was lack of involvement of state. By mid-2020, our street saw the disappearance of any kind of police presence. That is when we realized we were truly in for trouble. Towards the end of 2020, even going out to Kemissie became risky due to frequent highway robbery. Thirdly, there was silence. People did not greet each other anymore regardless of their ethnicity. A simple greeting such as good morning could result in verbal attacks or simply be met with silence. "By 2021, even prior to the large-scale killings, we were already fragmented. We had already lost trust in each other. The closure of the market, the gathering of young people with guns, the lack of police presence, the risky roads, and the silence of greeting were not coincidental events.

To support it, Crossing all FGDs on the Ataye conflict (2018-2023), converging themes were found regarding market disruption and displacement of people, cutting across ethnic lines. In regard to market disruption, all four focus group discussions mentioned burning of the main market (FGD1, FGD2, FGD3, FGD4), traders disappearing from shared market stalls ("Both sides stopped sitting together," FGD1; "our trading partners just vanished," FGD3), and armed individuals charging traders with taxes ("They took money from every shop," FGD2; "for even the grains too, they demanded some money," FGD4). With regards to displacement of populations, all four groups mentioned areas of abandoned houses ("Houses with doors hanging wide open," FGD1; "whole street empty come morning,"

³² Interview with KII P06, January 2024

FGD3), unattended cattle ("Goats wandering around for weeks without anyone," FGD2; "no one came to feed them," FGD4), and mass relocation to the lower regions of Afar or Dessie ("Everyone fled to Afar and Dessie," all FGDs agreed).

Notably, gender differences have been seen in regard to security measures related to Ataye (2018-2023). While men used physical sightings as the method of information gathering, for instance, "we saw training behind the hill near the kebele boundary," while others mentioned "special police came from outside Ataye," women focused on indirect perceptions, such as "we heard guns at night during the harvest season," as well as "armed men came to the flour market demanding grain." This indicates that gender differences mean that an Early Warning System based on information gathered by men (FGD1 and FGD3) will identify clear military threats that can be seen and outsiders that come into the area, but not the threats which can be detected only indirectly, such as sounds heard by women in markets, river, etc., before 2019 and 2021.

FGD1-05 added that the signs were there if people were paying attention. First, we stopped sharing public spaces. We used to go for coffee together, and we used to celebrate holidays together with our Amhara neighbors. But by 2020, even going to the same funeral seemed like a risk. Second, access to essential services became an ethnic issue. We stopped going to the clinic on the other side of town in late 2020, even though it was better equipped, because young men on that road would harass us. However, when my mother fell sick in 2021, we spent two hours rather than twenty minutes, as the fear was more terrible than the illness. Thirdly, the process of displacement began earlier than the mass migration that took place later on. In 2021, people began to migrate secretly by taking their children elsewhere while selling off livestock at giveaway prices. In 2021, public discussions were about access to water or kebele boundaries. However, by the end of the year, nobody was talking about water or boundaries anymore. They were talking about blood, about ancestors, about who was here and who was not.

The FGD2-06 added that I quit one of those meetings early in mid-2021. I knew what was coming. When we finally fled with nothing in 2023 no livestock, no photographs, no tools people asked when it started. I told them: it started when we stopped greeting each other in 2019, when the clinic became off-limits in 2020, when the forums turned to blood in 2021,

when the armed youth stopped hiding their weapons in 2022. The burning in 2023 was just the final act. Additionally, Interview participant told indicators of conflict³³;

The first sign was the change in administrative boundaries used as a weapon for coexistence. The boundaries created between 2018 and 2020 fragmented us. Not only were they not just neighbors anymore; they came from other woredas, from other zones, from another ethnicity altogether. We had redone our map, we had remapped our relationships. As they began to fight over the map in 2020, it was no longer over the map but over identity. The second thing was the appearance of militia groups. By early 2021, young people would gather at intersections every evening, not saying much but watching, armed with nothing first except a stick, then a machete, and later with guns concealed under their cloaks. They were not a neighborhood watch. They were getting ready. The third thing was the destruction of dispute mechanisms. In 2019, the elders still mediated a fight. By 2021, having been involved in two years of investigations, without any arrests, any trial, or any compensation, that option was dead. As soon as the OLA came into our region of operations and the Fano hit back, there was not an elder willing to step between them. The fourth measure was that of information war. Since 2020, there have been videos showing attacks on “our people” somewhere else. When the video came to us, where the attack took place did not matter anymore because we felt the pain immediately. There was a need for revenge too. The early warning mechanism was monitoring guns, militias, and rhetoric. It was not monitoring neglected fields, children out of class, half-filled markets, impassible roads, unanswered greetings, or a lack of faith in the government. According to their standards, 2022 was a year of reduced conflict. According to ours, 2022 was the end of civilization and the start of 2023.

Table 22 shows that the consensus among respondents on the identification and agreement of inter-ethnic conflict indicators. A large majority 81% (36.8% agreeing and 44.2% strongly agreeing) shows a strong belief in the recognition and acceptance of these indicators among the actors involved in the conflict. Conversely, a very small minority, 8.5% (3.2% strongly disagreeing and 5.3% disagreeing), disagrees with this view, while 10.5% are neutral.

³³ Interview with S05, January 2024

Table 23: Inter-Ethnic Conflict Indicators are Identified and Agreed upon among Actors

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	12	3.2%
Disagree	20	5.3%
Neutral	40	10.5%
Agree	140	36.8%
Strongly Agree	168	44.2%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The qualitative and quantitative findings converge powerfully to demonstrate that the community of Ataye has a sophisticated real-time diagnostic capability to identify conflict escalation. The overwhelming quantitative finding (81.0% agreement level) statistically confirms that the "red flags" identified in the qualitative findings the ethnicization of political disputes, the collapse of joint social spaces, militia training, hat speech, and the militarization of youth in the context of a security vacuum are not isolated incidents but a community-wide awareness. These indicators conformed by other studies. The fusion indicates that a hybrid model of conflict prevention is required, which combines local diagnostic knowledge with systematic analysis, to develop a community-identified trigger-based Early Warning System that can shift from crisis management to preventive action.

The conflict indicators monitored in Ataye between 2018 and 2023 show that there is an incomplete theoretical understanding of the drivers of conflict. Indicators related to Relative Deprivation Theory, such as economic inequalities, political exclusion, and hate speech, were partially included in the monitoring frameworks. Indicators related to the Basic Human Needs dimensions, such as erosion of community identity, psychological security, and recognition in local governance, were largely absent. Most seriously, Anomie Theory reveals that no indicators were included to monitor the functionality of the monitoring system itself. An interviewee 19 added that we collected reports of rising tensions every week, but we never asked whether anyone was listening. This confirms that monitoring frameworks without attention to institutional anomie are unaware of their own operational failure. The integrated theoretical framework suggests that comprehensive monitoring should also include indicators of deprivation, need satisfaction, and institutional coherence.

5.2. Actors of Conflict Monitoring

The key informant interview participant said that actors commonly involved in conflict monitoring are peace councils, peace clubs, peace forums, inter-religious council, and community field monitors, who all have significant contributions to make in conflict monitoring and management. This section shall discuss these in detail.

5.2.1. Peace Committee

Participants in interviews and FGD emphasized the critical structure of the Peace Committees and their possible use as an Early Warning System for inter-ethnic conflict between 2018 and 2023, while also pointing to deep-seated operational challenges that made them ineffective. Interview participant expressed it as³⁴;

From 2018 to 2023, we were meant to be the eyes and ears of the community in monitoring conflict indicators. If there was a person who began spewing hate speech at the market, if there was a fight over water, if the youth began gathering in a manner that seemed threatening we were meant to be the ones who reported it. Our mandate was not to wait for fire, but to remove the dry wood. However, we struggled with funding and training, which made it impossible for us to do so. We had notebooks that we could use to write down incidents that indicated rising tension, but we had no way of getting to the areas where these incidents were happening. The system was in place on paper, but not in reality. When we attempted to document the hate speech of a politically well-connected individual, we were told to focus on 'small issues.' The implication was clear: some individuals are beyond peace, and their indicators of incitement could not be monitored.

In the same way, the findings of all four FGDs suggest that the Peace Committee was effectively non-existent. This is evident from statements such as FGD1 (Amhara male), who claimed "it met twice in 14 months"; FGD2 (Amhara female), who said, "I never saw them"; FGD3 (Oromo male), who said he "had heard about them but never seen"; and finally FGD4 (Oromo female), who claimed, "I thought it was just a rumor." This convergence of information independent of ethnicity or gender indicates a strong institutional failure on the part of those charged with monitoring the problem at hand. It should be noted that a gender gap was identified when it came to inclusion in the monitoring process. Both FGD2 (Amhara female) and FGD4 (Oromo female) stated that women were not consulted.

³⁴ Interview with P02, January 2024

According to FGD4-03, from 2018 to 2023, our committee sought to track those classic symptoms of conflict, namely hate speech, land disputes, youth movements, and the movement of weapons. However, people started to consider us either irrelevant or informers working for the opposite party. If we asked information from one party about the existence of a conflict, then the other party considered that we are informing on them. The peace committees were intended to provide a platform for all voices at all levels so that everyone had a voice in preventing conflict. Nevertheless, without political support and without being seen as legitimate by the community, we became more of a symbol than a tool. We could see the signs of conflict escalating the rhetoric, the mobilization, the weapons but we had no way of acting on what we saw.

The quantitative findings Table 24 reveal that a significant proportion of 61.1% of the respondents (232) concur that the committees are effective monitors. Nevertheless, a cumulative proportion of 22.7% of the respondents disagree, while a significant proportion of 16.3% of the respondents are neutral. This indicates that although the monitoring role of the committees is acknowledged, their performance is viewed as irregular or inadequate by a significant section of the population.

Table 24: The Peace Committee Effectively Monitors Indicators of Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	44	11.6%
Disagree	42	11.1%
Neutral	62	16.3%
Agree	139	36.6%
Strongly Agree	93	24.5%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

To support it FGD1 participants pointed to the Peace Committees' potential as an Early Warning System for inter-ethnic conflict between 2018 and 2023, while also pointing to deep-seated operational challenges that made them largely ineffective. KII P06 explained their purpose: "The peace committees bring together voices at all levels of society so that everyone has a voice in preventing conflict." This is consistent with research that has found local peace mechanisms to be a key conflict prevention tool when properly resourced (Asmare, 2024). Yet, as with the other communities, participants made it clear that this

potential was undermined by a lack of institutional support. Another KII P01 explained that tend to fight with limited funds and training, which hinders us from responding that members also reported that external political pressures undermined their neutrality when we tried to report hate speech from a politically connected individual, we were told to focus on smaller issues identified as the politicization of local conflicts when perpetrators are not held to account (Worku, 2023). To support it, the FGD3 participants' added that the loss of trust in the community people started to view us as either useless or as spies. In early 2022, we documented fourteen incidents of youth mobilized at night. However, we were unable to hold a meeting since we lacked a suitable venue for meeting without compromising our safety. This is evident in the results of the survey as 61.1% agreed that the committee was effective in identifying conflict indicators while 22.7% disagreed and 16.3% were undecided.

5.2.2. Inter- Religious Council

All FGD respondents reported that the Inter-Religious Council has been described as a proactive and strategically positioned “grassroots sensor,” whose role is to detect the early signs of tension within the conflict situation prevailing in Ataye from 2018 to 2023, with religious connections. Moreover, the KII further explained it as follows³⁵:

In the period ranging from 2018 to 2023, we have recorded eight major surges of attacks in Ataye through our early warning mechanism. We keep track of risk factors including hate speech through local markets, presence of armed groups near the border of kebeles, and dispute over agricultural land on ethnic grounds. These observations help us develop warning signals, which we provide to local administrators, and the command post established following the clash of April 2021. The religious networks offer access to communities that cannot be reached by any member of the government. During the 2021 massacre, whereby hundreds of lives were lost and over 1,500 buildings destroyed, we remained the only group in town offering protection by providing a safe place in mosques and churches as other individuals fled the region. Our members recorded massacres door to door and reported the same to international organizations due to the unwillingness of the government to accept the magnitude of the violence.

All FGD2-06 further noted that our mandate shifted following the events that happened in March and April 2021, which led to the loss of several lives and displacement of

³⁵ Interview with KII D02, January 2024

several more. We began conducting meetings with elders from Oromo and Amhara ethnic backgrounds, appealing to our moral authority to revive trust where official avenues had failed. We provided our information to the federal army stationed at Ataye to allow for quick action when tension was about to break out. Nonetheless, the impartiality of our organization became an issue due to political influence, which each party felt that we were siding with them. By 2022, we lacked funds to a point that we lacked the means to reach the displaced people in Menze and Kemise and pay for communications costs for organizing ourselves against the attacks in OLA in January 2023. We had become moral advocates without any ability to carry out actions.

The quantitative findings, as illustrated in Table 25 below, demonstrate an almost unanimous position where 75.8 percent of the participants (288 individuals) concur that the Inter-Religious Council performs well. The majority is made up of individuals who have a high degree of commitment since the largest single category (47.4%) is comprised of those who strongly agree.

Table 25 : The Inter-Religion Council Effectively Monitors Indicators of Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	32	8.4%
Disagree	15	3.9%
Neutral	45	11.8%
Agree	108	28.4%
Strongly Agree	180	47.4%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The sum of the findings illustrates the credibility and effectiveness, but functional limitation, of the Inter-Religious Council as part of an Early Warning System for conflicts in Ataye. The high level of consensus (75.8 percent agreement) proves the deep-seated trust of the community as indicated by the qualitative findings, providing the council with unique access to "whispers and rumors" type of information. The qualitative narrative explains how such trust is created by using the data collected about hate speech and issuing warnings to the authority. Nonetheless, the qualitative data provides a lot of context for such strength in the sense that it reveals several structural weaknesses that arise from political interference and lack of resources that inhibit the council from fully utilizing its grassroots advantage. It is evidenced by literature (Mekuriaw, 2025; Zelalem, 2024). The triangulation of data therefore

illustrates that although the council is a very important mechanism to complement the state structures, its potential as a peaceful infrastructure remains untapped without partnerships.

5.2.3. Peace Club or Forum

Most interview Participants reported a large gap between the vision expressed in the Ethiopian Peace Club Guidelines and their actual effects on the ground in Ataye, creating a “policy-to-practice gap” that made the peace clubs ineffective for conflict monitoring from 2018 to 2023. However, FGD4 participants’ said that the peace clubs were set up in schools and communities to encourage a “culture of peace” through dialogue and awareness-raising events, they were sometimes unable to address the most pressing ethnic complaints in the community. KII explains it as³⁶;

It was a good idea in the box, but it lived only in the box. We created the peace club in our school using manuals, posters, and dialogue sessions planned to promote a culture of peace. However, when the violence erupted in Ataye in 2018, the peace club was mute; it had not built the strength to handle a genuine dispute. We could discuss peace in the classroom, but we could not construct peace outside. The peace club consisted of both students and teachers, but during the escalation of conflict, none of them called us to lead. It was only the politicians and elders who took the important decisions, leaving us as mere spectators. From 2018 until 2023, during the different attacks, we did not have any means of transportation to reach the displaced people, neither any funds to unite the feuding communities nor any say in the command centers established after the April 2021 mass killings. We were just on paper when the community needed actions from us.

The other KII S05 included the peace club, as the club appeared to advise us to remain peaceful, forgetting why we were so furious. We convened for awareness campaigns and sang songs of unity, but all these did not touch on the issues of land disputes, political alienation, and past injustices that were causing the violence. My friends and I were curious to know who had taken our ancestral land in the kebeles around Ataye and why more than 100 of our people had been killed in the violence of 2021. However, the club only provided us with generic statements about living together, which seemed insincere to us, the youth who were genuinely marginalized.

³⁶ Interview with P05, January 2024

Most FGD participants said that we have been going through difficult times due to repeated security problems in Ataye town. It attacked by anti-peace forces more than 10 times in the past 5 consecutive years, which teaching and learning activities have been interrupted several times. The lack of peace has prevented students from studying and has caused them great psychological pressure from losing their families during the wars and the burning of their family houses is severe. They also said that teachers are providing them with various supports even in difficult times. Teachers are working harder than ever in reinforcement and compensation, laboratory teaching, pre-assessment and continuous monitoring.

KII expressed it as³⁷:

Not only humans but also animals in Ataye and its surroundings have died; they have been injured, and it is undeniable that wealth and property have been destroyed; from now on, we must work to make it stop. The youth is a hot and efficient force; this force is also quick to achieve the cause it is engaged in; perhaps if we do not use its power for good, it will cost the country. We will also work closely with this force for “peace” by avoiding destructive forces and supporting the security structure and making the region peaceful. They asked the youth to cooperate in the efforts to make the region peaceful. A person should be compassionate towards all people; he should not seek his nation where he was not born; he should not be pushed; it is a wrong idea based on racism and should be avoided. He said that working for peace and being at peace in Ataye city has great significance not only for my country but also for the region; for this, he is working with all sections of society; we will continue to strengthen this work. In addition, the path we have taken so far is wrong; through our mistakes, we have caused our mothers to grieve and our neighbors to suffer. All of this is the collective fault of humanity. We call on the government to hold the perpetrators accountable and take action.

Furthermore, KII D04 believed that we tried to ensure that there were no such conflicts within our school by observing the tensions between students from different ethnic groups and reporting these to teachers before violence broke out. We conducted awareness campaigns through dramas and panel discussions to educate students on the risks associated with hate speech and ethnic division. When the OLA attacks displaced families in January

³⁷ Interview with 07, January 2024

2023, we raised donations of clothing, food, and school supplies for displaced children to enable them to go to school despite having lost their homes. However, when the community required leadership in the eight major waves of attacks between 2018 and 2023, we were invisible compared to the elders and religious leaders.

The quantitative findings, as reflected in Table 26, indicate that a clear majority of 52.7% of the respondents (200 people) agree that Peace Clubs are effective monitors. However, this level of agreement is clearly qualified by the fact that the largest single response category is Neutral (27.1%), and a combined 20.2% of respondents are actively disagreeing with the statement.

Table 26: Peace Club & Forum Effectively Monitor Indicators of Inter-Ethnic Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	24	6.3%
Disagree	53	13.9%
Neutral	103	27.1%
Agree	156	41.1%
Strongly Agree	44	11.6%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

This quantitative finding reflects a complex level of community attitudes towards the effectiveness of Peace Clubs in monitoring conflict in Ataye between 2018 and 2023. While a clear majority of 52.7% of the respondents, (200 people) agreed that Peace Clubs are effective monitors; this level of confidence is clearly qualified by the fact that the largest single response category is Neutral at 27.1%, and a combined 20.2% of the respondents are actively disagreeing.

The quantitative findings, as reflected in table 26, indicate that a clear majority of 52.7% of the respondents (200 people) agree that Peace Clubs are effective monitors. However, this level of agreement is clearly qualified by the fact that the largest single response category is Neutral (27.1%), and a combined 20.2% of respondents are actively disagreeing with the statement. The quantitative results indicate a complex degree of community attitudes towards the effectiveness of Peace Clubs as conflict monitors in Ataye from 2018 to 2023. Despite the fact that 52.7% (200) of the respondents affirmed that Peace Clubs function effectively as conflict monitors, this level of affirmation is definitely constrained by the reality that the most common form of response from the respondents was Neutral (27.1%), and the combined

number of respondents who disagreed was 20.2%. This combination of quantifiable and qualitative information clearly shows that even though Peace Clubs hold an official position in society, the reason for their failure to be accepted as conflict monitors stems from their failure to convert awareness into preventive action during periods of rising ethnic conflicts.

5.2.4. Focal Person/ Field Monitor

The majority of those interviewed felt that the field monitors, as being the crucial linkage between the community and the governmental system of Ataye from 2018 to 2023, faced a major crisis of credibility making their role in conflict monitoring largely futile. The FGD1 participants added that the specific function of field monitors is acknowledged as vital; they functioned within a context of deep-seated mistrust that made it impossible for them to gain access to the very information necessary for early warning. Interview participant expressed it as³⁸;

Between 2018 and 2023, I was a community field monitor, but I was assigned a title without the resources to do the work. How can we monitor conflict indicators without training, without phone credit, and without transportation? We were given information about attacks, but by the time we walked to the next kebele to verify the reports, the attack had already happened. We had information but lacked speed to act on it. But worse, the community believed we were government spies, so they never gave us the real information. When we tried to record hate speech, land conflicts, or youth mobilization, they held back everything. We were institutionally mandated by the government but left stranded in the field. By the time the attack on Ataye in 2021 happened, we had nothing to share because we lacked the trust of the community and the resources to get to where the tensions were rising.

Another KII D06 added that from 2018 to 2023, we thought that the field monitors were government informants, so we made sure to keep the problems from them. Why would we tell them about hate speech at the market or youth event with weapons when these monitors had no ability to do anything? They came asking questions with no transportation, no communication equipment, and no ability to solve our problems. The first time the monitors arrived in our village, we felt that they would report back to their superiors on who was causing unrest in our community. It was this lack of confidence that rendered the warning system dysfunctional. We could see the mounting tension each year, but we didn't say

³⁸ Interview with P06, January 2024

anything. It was only during the major attack in 2021 when we realized that the monitors knew nothing since we had been withholding information from them.

The quantitative findings, as shown in Table 26, indicate that a slim majority of 55.2% (210 people) agree that monitors are effective. However, the data also indicates a large degree of skepticism, with a combined total of 21.8% disagreeing and a surprisingly large 22.9% being neutral, suggesting a large degree of uncertainty about their effectiveness.

Table 26 : The Field Monitor Effectively Monitors Indicators of Inter-Ethnic Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	35	9.2%
Disagree	48	12.6%
Neutral	87	22.9%
Agree	143	37.6%
Strongly Agree	67	17.6%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The qualitative, quantitative, and documentary findings all point to the same diagnosis: that the field monitor system is fundamentally flawed and in a state of severe crisis of legitimacy. The qualitative findings about the "trust deficit" and lack of basic resources offer the mechanism for the split in the quantitative findings, where 55.2% recognize the formal effectiveness of the monitors, but the large degree of dissent and neutrality suggests that their operational effectiveness is compromised. Study recognizes a systemic failure in equipping and depoliticizing local peace structures (Villalba and Puttick, 2017). The policy's vision of a decentralized Early Warning System is clearly at odds with the local situation in Ataye, where the monitors are viewed as securitized state actors. Thus, the data triangulates to indicate that in order for the field monitor system to operate as planned, as the "vital heartbeat" of data collection, it must be fundamentally transformed. This means more than simply providing equipment, but also, and more importantly, re-establishing local trust by insulating the role from political co-opting and separating it from state intelligence-gathering activities.

5.3. Conflict Monitoring Process

In all four FGDs, the participants indicated that the monitoring system was flawed in its design and execution. Consistent results show that there were three major flaws in the system. First, the data sources were restricted to the officials without including the communities. Second, the collection procedures did not involve common people. Third, no warning was issued prior to the March 2019 conflict. In FGD1 (Amhara male), the participant expressed that "no warning was issued" because the local authorities were not consulted. In FGD2 (Amhara female), the participant stated, "nothing reached our ears before the attack," and that "no one visited our area." In FGD3 (Oromo male), the participant declared that "there was no warning," and that "even the elders from the hills of Ataye had seen nothing." In FGD4 (Oromo female), the participant explained that "the first warning shot was the gunfire," as she learned about the crisis after gunmen entered her village.

Each group's description indicates an aspect of the same flawed system. In FGD1, the Amhara males were expecting the information from the kebele administration; but no official alert ever reached them. In FGD2, Amhara females traveled through the markets and water sources every day, and none of the data collectors ever thought of collecting information from them about their observations. In FGD3, the Oromo males witnessed the escalating tension from a distance, and yet their observations never came into play in their surveillance activities. In FGD4, Oromo women got wind of things through the rumor mill at the grinding mills and during meal times; and yet these warnings never entered the monitoring system. All in all, it would seem that male, female, Amhara, and Oromo perspectives received no information whatsoever from the authorities concerned. Each one of the participants learned about the March 2019 violence from gunfire alone.

The KII D06 added that the conflict monitoring process in Ataye is structured as a complete four-stage frameworks scanning different sources of data, specific instruments of data gathering, scientific analysis, and alerts to attempt to transform local risk indicators into life-saving policy interventions. The monitoring process undertaken in Ataye is a perfect example of the fragmentation that Anomie Theory proposes will be the hallmark of any attempt at coordination. Indeed, several actors were gathering information on the situation: the zonal peace committees, the woreda administrations, the security forces, and the federal agencies. However, no structure was in place to amalgamate the various information gathering processes. This is a perfect example of the lack of congruence between the socially defined

goal (peace) and the legitimate means (the amalgamation of the information gathering processes) which Merton pointed out. The lack of normative protocols also created a situation where the actors were in a state of 'normlessness,' a term coined by Durkheim.

Correspondingly, most FGD participants' are saying that everyone had their own reporting line. The police reported to their commanders, the administrators reported to the zone, the peace committee reported to the ministry. No one reported to each other.' It is therefore no wonder that the warning signs were not only true but also fragmented and unable to bring about any form of coordination. Thus, this introduction explores how the success of the Ataye peace infrastructure depends on the transition from a one-way reporting system to a two-way dialogue process that verifies local intelligence and ensures that advanced monitoring is converted into effective prevention.

6. Data Sources

Most interview participants have always emphasized that the underlying problem in Ataye is not the absence of conflict information, but a "practice gap" where the key tenet of a multi-source ecosystem ceases to function because of the lack of systematic validation. While discussing the information landscape, the KII participant P03 identified two main sources of information that are currently being used in their present monitoring activities: open source information and reports from the so-called focal persons. Starting with open source information, the participants pointed out that the reach of social media sites, especially Facebook and Telegram, has become so extensive that these have become the main conduits for the dissemination of breaking news and situational reports. While acknowledging the immediacy and reach of these sites, the discussants were extremely skeptical about their credibility.

Similarly, the FGD participants pointed out that these sites are often filled with rumors, fabrications, and user-generated content that are often intended to create ethnic tensions. In the last incident, by the time we got the official report, there were already three different versions of the incident that had gone viral on Telegram, each one pointing the finger at a different community. Adding to the difficulty of working with open sources is the limitation of statements made by focal persons. The KII D02 also described how their existing system is dependent on a chain of appointed focal persons from different kebeles and government line departments. While these persons are very helpful in terms of ground presence, there are still problems with credibility. Focal persons, being government employees, may adjust their

reports to conform to administrative accounts or play down problematic issues to avoid consequences. Others may hail from community organizations and speak on behalf of certain clans or political affiliations, thereby making information pass through lenses tinted with bias. The following is a quotation from another KII³⁹;

The focal point in one community is an honorable man who happens to be a respected elder from the dominant clan. When he says, 'The community is peaceful', one has to ask, whose community does he mean? Are the minorities also part of that community and are they calm, or has he not heard their side of the story?' However, what is worth noting here is the fact that even primary sources of information are subject to positional biases. In light of this, many of the participants in the interviews felt that the mechanism for data gathering is well documented, but due to the absence of proper mechanisms for comparing the open-source information with the statements of the focal persons and verifying the latter with the opinions of the marginalized populations like women in distant hamlets, the process remains fragmented and thus biased.

The quantitative results, as seen from Table 27, reveal that a considerable number of respondents, 63.2% (240 people), believe that multiple source data is utilized efficiently. Nevertheless, a significant number of those neutral (21.6%) and dissatisfied (20.6%) indicates that a considerable number of people in the community have yet to see the efficiency and effectiveness of this approach to data verification.

Table 27 : Data Collected From Multi Sources

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	20	5.3%
Disagree	58	15.3%
Neutral	82	21.6%
Agree	188	49.5%
Strongly Agree	52	13.7%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

A literature review on policy documents together with qualitative and quantitative results shows that there is a serious problem within the framework of the conflict data system of Ethiopia. Qualitative results on verification and quantitative on skepticism, as well as other

³⁹ Interview with KII P03, January 2024

aspects, are symptoms of a more serious problem revealed in some policy documents, including guidelines on the Ethiopian Peace Observatory (De Waal, 2015; Bodea et al., 2019). According to these sources, there is not much uniformity in the process of verification, and there is "an urban and elite bias" whereby the localized information from the countryside is excluded as well as a gender dimension. In order for the theoretically agreed upon cooperation rate of 63.2% to become a reality, there needs to be more to it than mere multi-sourcing as a symbolic action. It will be necessary for the system to adopt proper verification standards and design its data gathering process in such a way as to include marginalized sections of the society.

7. Data Collection Tools

It could be observed that FGD and KII respondents were able to communicate the insufficiency of the employment of quantitative approaches such as household surveys and casualty statistics in capturing the intricate nature of the conflict in Ataye. The employment of interviews was not only considered a complementary process but a vital step towards identifying the factors behind the motivations and emotions that cause conflicts. KII expressed the shortcomings of applying numeric values⁴⁰:

At first, when we started, the donors required numbers. "How many people have been displaced? How many houses were burned? Provide us the numbers." And indeed, we did provide the statistics. However, after the March 2021 attacks, I remember sitting down with an elderly woman who was staying in a makeshift camp. She had lost her son, her house, and all her possessions. The survey questionnaire stated, "How many family members are dead?" She answered 2. But, during the interview, she revealed to me that her son died while he was defending the neighbors' family of another ethnicity. She narrated to me the decades of friendship that have been broken by this act of violence. The statistics provided through the survey help us understand the magnitude of the issue, but the stories gathered through the interviews give us insight into why the people are at war and how they feel. We can quantify the number of houses burned, but we cannot measure the fear left behind by those who managed to escape. Only by talking to them can you begin to understand that.

This view was further strengthened in the interview conducted among the displaced communities, where the participants stressed that narrative approaches enabled them to

⁴⁰ Interview with KII P05, January 2024

articulate aspects of their suffering that were not captured in the assessments. Key informant interview Participant continued⁴¹:

Data collectors came with clipboards and asked, 'Do you have food? Do you have shelter?' Yes, we have food now; we have a plastic sheet over our heads. But they never ask, 'Do you sleep at night? Do your children stop crying when they hear a loud noise? Do you look at your neighbor, the one who used to share coffee with you, and wonder if his cousins were among the attackers?' These things do not fit in their boxes on the paper. But when we sit in a group like this, and we talk, these things come out. That is the real data. That is what tells them what we actually need.

Though the participants validated the importance of interviews, they also went on to describe in detail how the violent context worked to deliberately subvert these very methods. The context of active conflict, with road closures, telecommunications blackouts, and general insecurity, produced what one participant called "conflict data deserts," zones of geographic and temporal exception in which no good information could be gathered. The FGD participant 02 in the most affected area of Ataye framed the problem that you ask about collecting data. Let me tell you about the problem. After the fighting in April 2021, we were trapped. No road in, a road out. The phone towers destroyed. So when the humanitarian people or the researchers want to know what happened, where do they go? They go to the main road, to the displacement camp in the next town that is safe. They talk to the people who managed to escape. They never come here, to the areas where the worst battles took place. Thus, my question to you is: How does one visualize violence when no road links them to us, mobile connections are down, and the researcher fears coming here? Data is always provided from the safer areas, and not from where the worst battles have taken place. Following the attacks in April 2021, our whole Kebele became cut off from the rest of the world. We got no news about what had been going on out there, while out there got no news about what had happened here. Who will tell their story? The government narrative will surely omit the worst cases. The so-called 'tool'? Well, it surely will not work where there's trouble.

⁴¹ Interview with D03, January 2024

The KII described the dilemma in the following manner⁴²:

We know that the information will never be complete. We know that we cannot even reach everyone who was affected by it all. What is the solution? Send your people into active areas and risk their lives getting slaughtered or just wait till the situation is over to obtain retrospective information, which is always prone to errors? It's about working with whatever limitations we have. We train enumerators in safety protocols, we coordinate with local authorities for escorts when possible, and we try to use remote methods like phone interviews. However, when the networks are down, there is no remote option. Therefore, we write our reports, we put disclaimers, and we say 'the situation is fluid' and 'data should be interpreted with caution.' Nevertheless, we all know what that means. It means the worst atrocities, the ones happening in the places we cannot reach, are happening in silence. They are not in any database. They are not in any report.

This statement illustrates the difficulties of estimating the affected population from 2018 to 2023, as the data that is not complete is only a fraction of the affected population. It is dangerous to send teams to combat zones, and waiting for the conflict to cease may provide information that is not reliable. Even with the best efforts to be safe and conduct interviews remotely, some regions are inaccessible, leading to atrocities that go unrecorded.

The findings obtained quantitatively, as presented in Table 28, the level of the response to the particular question/statement, unidentified, is characterized by agreement. In particular, 57.6% of the subjects demonstrated their agreement by selecting "Agree" (45.0%) and "Strongly Agree" (12.6%) options, while only 18.1% selected the "Strongly Disagree" (6.3%) or "Disagree" (11.8%). A significant number of respondents (24.2%) were neutral regarding the particular issue as well, which indicates their ambivalence.

⁴² Interview with KII P01, January 2024

Table 28 : Scientifically Mixed Methods Are Effective For Conflict Analysis

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	24	6.3%
Disagree	45	11.8%
Neutral	92	24.2%
Agree	171	45.0%
Strongly Agree	48	12.6%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

Triangulation of the data obtained in the qualitative study, documents analysis, and survey reveals an underlying paradox of monitoring conflict in the context of unstable conditions like in Ataye. According to the survey results, 57.6% of the subjects indicated their agreement with the idea of the effectiveness of the existing equipment for collecting data, which indicates a rather moderate level of stakeholders' satisfaction with the current situation. Nonetheless, these findings have become highly complicated in light of the qualitative findings indicating methodological difficulties.

The qualitative findings provide some insight into the parts of the survey data that could not possibly be quantified. It indicated that it was through the numbers generated by the survey that we were able to identify where the issue was prevalent; however, it was through the narratives obtained during the interviews that we were able to understand why people were fighting and how they felt. This is an important point in analyzing the 24.2% neutrality in the survey, which can be seen as a sign of ambivalence by the respondents who recognize that, despite some data collection, the information was deliberately excluding those who were most vulnerable (Amnesty International, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022). The 18.1% negative feedback to the survey may have been a small minority; however, these voices were directly correlated with those in the most affected regions. How do you map violence when the roads are blocked, the phones are dead, and the researchers are too scared to come? The data is always from the safer areas, not from where the worst fighting is." This is reflected in the lived experience of the April 2021 violence, which displaced 330,000 people and resulted in a situation where comprehensive data collection was impossible (OCHA, 2021; UNDP Ethiopia, 2022). However, 57.6% of the survey respondents did agree that the current methods are valid.

The respondents to the interviews have consistently shown that the most valuable data is that which is gathered through deep narrative engagement. "We write our reports, and we put disclaimers, and we say 'the situation is fluid'... However, we all know what that means. It means the worst atrocities... are happening in silence." This reflects the main finding of this work: that methodological complexity is not sufficient to overcome the challenge of safe access, and the worst violence is therefore systematically under documented.

8. Data Analysis Methods

The FGD and interview participants said that the early warning officers' used different data analysis techniques. To explain it, FGD participants' described thematic analysis as the main way of taking raw stories and turning them into important results about the Ataye conflict. This is a way of finding and analyzing themes in qualitative data. Similarly, another key informant interview participant explained it as⁴³;

When we are finished collecting our interviews, we have hundreds of pages of transcripts. You cannot just read them once and get it all. We do thematic analysis. We read and re-read, we code sections, and we look for themes. If ten different people say that land disputes are the cause, then that is a theme. The themes come out of the data itself. They did open coding, where they coded the information directly from what the participants said, and axial coding, where they took the open codes and made them into bigger themes. We are constantly meeting, discussing our interpretations, going back to the recordings to verify whether we interpreted it correctly. It is slow-going, but it is the only way we can guarantee that we are not just looking at what we want to see. The importance of triangulation in gaining credibility was also highlighted, where the researchers verified data from different sources, using different methods, and among different researchers to look for patterns that were not skewed by interpretation.

The interview participants also spoke of the psychological and practical difficulties involved in analyzing conflict data. As KII D05 said that, the analysis stage is actually harder than the fieldwork sometimes. In the field, you are busy, you are on the move. But when you are alone with the transcripts, reading again and again about atrocities, it hits you differently. You are sitting with a mother, who has just seen her children die, and you have to listen and you have to write and you have to be professional. Nevertheless, at night, those stories are in your head. Correspondingly, KII P03 described how researcher subjectivity must be deliberately

⁴³ Interview with KII P01, 2024

controlled. He said that we are not machines. We come from these communities; we have our own experiences, our own pain. We practice reflexivity we write memos about our own positions, we discuss our reactions with colleagues. The goal is not to be objective, because that is impossible. The goal is to be transparent about our subjectivity. Likewise, the KII S05 participants described how team diversity could help mitigate subjectivity. We build diverse teams' different ethnic backgrounds, different genders. When we analyze together, someone will say wait, you are interpreting that through your own experience, but listen to what the person actually said. We challenge each other respectfully. Despite these difficulties, participants were adamant that the end goal of data analysis is to better inform humanitarian response and conflict resolution.

From the quantitative data provided in Table 29 above, one can conclude that there is an important problem related to conflict data analysis, as less than half of the respondents (48.1%, or 183 individuals) agree on the efficiency of technical approaches for conflict monitoring and analysis. More importantly, the "Strongly Disagree" category (18.7%) records the largest number of negative responses compared to other categories of monitoring techniques, and 22.6% of respondents have neutral attitudes, suggesting a lack of knowledge and trust in those approaches.

Table 29 : Scientific Data Analysis Tools Are Effective For Monitoring

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	71	18.7%
Disagree	40	10.6%
Neutral	86	22.6%
Agree	145	38.1%
Strongly Agree	38	10.0%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

On the contrary, qualitative methods receive a very positive welcome from the community, as 57.6% of respondents agree on the efficiency of mixed approaches, with many participants actively engaging in discussions regarding the need to interpret stories. This is evidenced by Interviewee statement that qualitative approach helps us to understand conflicts, which in turn makes it easier to discover potential solutions and to interpret the history, culture, and politics behind the story. As seen from the results above, people in the community trust

stories, discussion, and human interpretation, but doubt technical approaches software platforms, algorithms, and indicators used to interpret qualitative data.

The strong disagreement rate with technical tools is likely a reflection of the "conflict data desert" experience that community members have known firsthand. As FGD participants complained that how can we map violence when the roads are closed, phones don't work, and researchers are afraid to come? The data is always from the safer areas, not from where the worst fighting is. When technical tools are used to create maps and data visualizations that reflect blank spaces where the most violent conflict is taking place or when they are used to create alerts that never lead to safety, it is no wonder that community members come to distrust the technology itself (Mercy Corps, 2022; OCHA, 2021). The 22.6% neutral response also indicates that many community members may never have seen how the technology works or what it produces the machinery of analysis is hidden, humming away in offices and humanitarian hubs far removed from the charred houses of Ataye and its displaced residents (Belay, 2024). The quantitative finding reveals not merely a preference for qualitative methods but a profound skepticism toward the technological systems that often operate invisibly and unaccountably in conflict zones, producing assessments that may reach humanitarian headquarters but never protect the people who provided the data.

9. Conflict Warning

None of the key informants or those participating in the FGDs accused the community of Ataye of lacking conflict warning based on their analysis of the data collected. As stated by FGD1-01, conflict warning involves the continuous exchange of information gathered by field workers at the Kebele, Woreda, zone, regional levels and even the federal level. Information exchange is also used to de-escalate any existing conflicts between parallel structures. Any conflict warning signals and any situation that will lead to violence must be conveyed immediately to the appropriate conflict early warning unit. The task of analyzing information on conflicts received falls mainly on the next level of management after the unit receiving the information. The KII expressed it as follows⁴⁴;

A multi-level early warning reporting system in Ataye, designed to feed local risk information upwards from Kebele monitors through Woreda and Zonal administration to the Federal Ministry of Peace via online platforms such as

⁴⁴ Interview with S06, 2024

WhatsApp and Telegram. However, a key structural weakness was repeatedly pointed out: the toxic "feedback gap." While information flows upwards effectively, local monitors reported a virtually complete lack of any kind of return guidance or acknowledgement from higher authorities. We submit the reports, but never hear back. It is like shouting into a well. How do we know if anyone is listening or if it matters? This one-way system threatens to demoralize local actors and call the integrity of the entire system into question, as early warning becomes moot without a visible early response to match.

Similarly, as a key informant interviewee P05 pointed out, “We have peace council and monitors on paper, but once the tensions began to rise, there was no clear signal given to us, the common man.” They have used some confusing indicators where, on one hand, the police give one message, and on the other, the peace committee gives a different one. To further complicate this problem, the KII D01 felt that the lack of coordination among the monitoring agencies directly affected the preparedness of the communities. A peace club member from KII P03 stated that we would get rumors of impending attacks, but no warning came officially. When we reported suspicious activities, different agencies gave us conflicting information some told us our concerns were unfounded, while others said they did not have a mandate to respond. Another KII P04 further clarified that the conflict has been recurring between 2018 and 2023, but each time we were caught off guard. The alarm system is not serving its purpose because it is disjointed and cannot communicate in a language that we can comprehend. The above statements highlight the issue of systemic failure discussed in the study because the paralysis of institutions coupled with the absence of standard measures left the population defenseless.

The quantitative information provided in Table 30, based on survey respondents in Ataye, provides a complex and nuanced set of information that both complements and contradicts the findings of the qualitative interview analysis on the effectiveness of conflict early warning and mitigation guidance. The information provided indicates that 65.3% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the guidance is issued effectively, indicating a degree of institutional confidence among the population. However, this trend is contradictory to the findings of the key informant interview analysis, where the warning system was described as "poor" and "fragmented." The minority response, consisting of 24.7% of the

neutral respondents and 10% of the respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed, is more in line with the findings of the interview analysis.

Table 30 : Warnings Guidance is Issued on Time

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	2.6%
Disagree	28	7.4%
Neutral	94	24.7%
Agree	172	45.3%
Strongly Agree	76	20.0%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

As expressed by most FGD participants the Early Warning System is only on paper. In reality, the warning either comes too late or does not come at all indicating the view of the 34.7% who did not strongly agree that the guidance system is effective. This discrepancy indicates that institutional stakeholders may rate their communication as sufficient but that a large section of the population feels that the warnings are inaccessible, late, or irrelevant to the realities on the ground.

The results from Ataye are consistent with the existing body of literature on conflict Early Warning Systems in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa (Woldetsadik & Wandere, 2024). A study on communal conflicts in the peripheral regions of Ethiopia, observed that although Early Warning Systems are in place, their efficiency is systematically thwarted by what he calls "the last mile problem," the inability to convert national-level warning indicators into community-level communication. This corresponds to the complaint of the Ataye respondents that the 44 indicators from the Ministry of Peace do not correspond to what the local disaster management office is monitoring. These comparative analyses not only confirm the Ataye respondents subjective experiences but also suggest that the 65.3% level of agreement represent an acknowledgment of institutional effort rather than actual preventive success a distinction clearly exposed by the qualitative data.

5.4. Summary of Findings

This conflict monitoring in Ataye town between 2018 and 2023 shows a paradox in that, although the community has an extraordinary ability to recognize early warning signs of inter-ethnic conflicts, with 81.0% of the respondents able to recognize these signs, the mechanisms established to address the problem are critically ineffective. The research has shown that the lack of standardized conflict indicators in the community was a critical

weakness, as the community's awareness alone cannot address the fragmentation of monitoring agencies. This has been a recipe for disaster, as witnessed in the April 2021 conflict where death, destruction of property, and the displacement of over half a million people occurred.

With regard to the different actors, the research indicates that the most trusted monitor of hate speech and community rumors is the Inter-Religious Council, which received approval from 75.8% of respondents on its effectiveness as a monitor of hate speech and community rumors due to its strong network at the grassroots level. Unfortunately, this trust is compromised by the influence of politics and lack of resources, making it difficult to react effectively to any situation arising. Other monitors include peace committees and clubs, which are associated with distrust and inefficiency in their operations. The lack of integration "institutional fragmentation without functional integration" meant that despite the creation of warnings, the existence of several actors without means of coordination led to contradictions or lack of any response at all.

First of all, it should be mentioned that conflict monitoring revealed certain critical flaws in the system, which, first of all, refer to the lack of necessary feedback mechanism which is essential for verifying information received by the community and taking necessary action. Although 65.3% of participants understood the necessity of warning mechanisms, the fact of their disillusionment with the lack of appropriate response led to the loss of trust in such monitoring systems. With no appropriate feedback channel established and no institutional steps taken to implement the knowledge gathered from community intelligence, Early Warning System in Ataye will remain nothing but an empty threat to those predictable violent outbreaks occurring repeatedly in this community.

CHAPTER SIX: CONFLICT RISK COMMUNICATION OF ATAYE TOWN

This chapter analyzes the critical role of conflict communication in preventing violence in Ataye Town, synthesizing survey data, interviews, with academic literature. It is organized into existence of communication strategies, media coverage of conflict, reliability & credibility of communication, divisive media framing, and the state of credible two-way communication.

6.1. Conflict Communication Plan

The result of interview and FGD participants' showed the existence of a contradiction in the communication strategy of the Ministry of Peace from the viewpoint of its own representatives. A KII expressed conflict communication system of the Ministry of Peace as follows⁴⁵:

We are trying to push forward our organization with the right media publications and build a bilateral communication platform in promoting dialogue and knowledge sharing among the communities affected by conflict. This is our vision for how the Ministry should operate during a crisis like what happened in Ataye between 2018 and 2023. Nevertheless, here is the contradiction the leadership does not have the right understanding of communication as a field of study. They do not understand that conflict communication is a field that requires specialized knowledge, quick response, and messaging to the communities affected by conflict. Rather, whatever communication there was during the Ataye attack was handled by other entities the leader of the Command Post, the regional peace and security administration, and the North Shewa zone administration handled everything. The Ministry of Peace, which should have been in the lead, was not there because our own leadership did not understand their mandate.

Similarly, across all FGDs, three convergent failures were evident in the conduct of the government prior to the Ataye violence that occurred in March 2019. First, there was total lack of activity from the Ministry of Peace: FGD1 (Amhara male) argued, "we never saw them come", implying that no peacebuilding efforts such as reconciliation meetings and early warning visits were conducted in their kebele. FGD3 (Oromo male) pointed out, "they sat in Addis", indicating that none of the ministry officials visited Ataye. Second, there was poor framing by the government: FGD2 (Amhara female) explained, "they called it petty crime,

⁴⁵ Interview with Po1, January 2024

not war", while FGD4 (Oromo female) observed, "They understated everything to the last minute". Third, vulnerable groups had no access to information: FGD2 indicated that elderly women were given no radio warnings while FGD4 emphasized that illiterate farmers remained uninformed.

The FGD4- 01 added that the Ministry of Peace does not have a special department for conflict communication, which is very important to solve our problems during crises. When the violence erupted repeatedly from 2018 through 2023, we received no official information from them no warnings about impending attacks, no guidance on where to flee, no updates on government interventions. The Government Communication Service is supposed to inform us, but they barely touched on the ongoing Ataye conflict. We knew the April 2021 killings through hearsay and information on social media because the government did not use its communication strategy. The Command Post spokesperson provided some information, and the administrator occasionally reported on the situation, but the Ministry of Peace failed to do the same. Such a vacuum in institutions left us in confusion; we did not know where we could feel safe, what was happening in terms of military involvement, or how to help those in need. Without a communication structure specifically meant to manage a conflict like that, we were left in the dark while the town was burning.

Table 31, one finds out that the respondents were quite confident in their belief that 54.7% of them strongly disagreed with the idea that the peace actors communicate according to a planned arrangement, since the largest number of respondents at 37.9% selected the option of "Strongly Disagree". The positive responses for this particular question amount to merely 20.0% while the number of respondents who marked "Don't know" was quite considerable (25.3%). This makes it the worst response for any of the institutional mechanisms examined.

Table 31 : Ethiopia Peace Actors Communicate Based On a Formal Communication Plan

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	144	37.9%
Disagree	64	16.8%
Neutral	96	25.3%
Agree	52	13.7%
Strongly Agree	24	6.3%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

It would be safe to state that the lack of confidence in the Ministry of Peace when it comes to their communication is reflected in this particular question, where the majority (54.7%) strongly disagrees with the notion that the peace actors communicate according to the plan, and that as much as 37.9% of respondents chose the option of "Strongly Disagree". Such views are consistent with the findings of a number of studies, which have identified systemic problems, including the absence of social media policies (Afesha, 2022; D. C. Mengistu, 2021). In this regard, the Ministry of Peace is causing confusion and disorganization among citizens through messages from different officials, thus reflecting the need for an urgent conflict communication department.

The lack of a coordinated conflict communication plan in Ataye between 2018 and 2023 presents compelling evidence of anomie. Anomie Theory, in its institutional form, posits that when there is a conflict between roles and norms, coordinated efforts will be impaired. This was confirmed in the data. There were multiple actors who gathered and relayed information on conflicts; however, there was no documented protocol on how information was to be shared between and among institutions, which was to receive which information in warnings and the format required for different types of information. This lack of norms this anomie meant communication was happening in silos. The Ministry of Peace received information through their channels, security agencies through their channels, and DRM councils through their own channels. As Relative Deprivation Theory and Basic Human Needs Theory would suggest, the information communicated highlighted grievances and threats to identity; however, the lack of communication protocol meant this critical information was never communicated to actors who had the power to address the root causes.

6.2. Conflict Communication Tactic

Interview and FGD participants said that conflict Communication tactic refers to a particular and intentional way of dealing with information and stories within a situation that is characterized by a number of factors, such as media attention, accuracy, stories, and feedback loops, with the aim of resolving or mitigating a conflict, and thus is of great importance within a situation where there is a conflict. In all four FGD sessions, it emerged clearly that there was a total lack of any effective communications strategy prior to the outbreak of violence in March 2019. Systematic failure can be highlighted through four issues identified in all four FGDs as follows: a lack of channels or inaccessible channels, untrustworthy information, absence of two-way communication and the inability of people to report.

Interestingly, all the groups indicated that the elders and religious leaders were ready to intervene, yet no formal mechanism ever invoked them. As FGD1 (Amhara male) explained, "they were ready but not used," meaning that even though he was able to witness the ability of his local elder to solve the issue of land conflicts for decades, the local authorities had never contacted them officially. Likewise, as per FGD3 (Oromo male), "our jaarsa was not consulted," referring to the fact that while his local Oromo customarily acknowledged leader remained on the sidelines despite the rising conflict, he had never been invited officially to mediate. Similarly, as per FGD4 (Oromo female), "the religious leaders tried but failed," since they were attempting to hold peace talks in collaboration with each other yet without any official support or information. Therefore, this uniformity across ethnicity and gender shows that even though there were available resources that could be capitalized upon, they were overlooked intentionally. In FGD4, Oromo female stated the exclusiveness of communication strategies as follows: "women don't have access to radio because men control the radio in households and batteries are costly." Thus, all women are completely unaware of growing conflicts. In FGD2, Amhara female rhetorically asked: "who would we tell?" As she explained, when they tried to contact some officials like local clerks, they refused to help stating that they could do nothing for them. The FGD1 participant from Amhara male group stated: "there is no number, no office and no person to talk to."

The other KII D02 added that communication tactics used in Ataye demonstrate the extent to which anomic communication environments contribute to the escalation of the very conflict dynamics they are intended to alleviate. In the few instances, that communication of the emerging conflict trends actually reached the relevant authorities, fragmented communication environments, the response communication to these emerging trends was usually conveyed through security measures such as military mobilization, announcements through command posts, and police operations. Basic Human Needs Theory helps to explain why this communication strategy was actually detrimental to the alleviation of the emerging conflict dynamics. Communities that felt threatened and were seeking security and identity received a message that their security and identity issues were being addressed through military and police operations, not through recognition, dialogue, and participation. This, therefore, reinforced their perceptions that the state did not recognize their basic human needs. Relative Deprivation Theory also helps to explain why this communication strategy was detrimental to alleviating the emerging conflict dynamics. This communication environment, therefore, not only failed to convey the emerging conflict trends but also contributed to the escalation of the

grievances through communication that conveyed the message that the communities' deepest needs were not recognized.

6.2.1. Accessibility of Communication

Most interview and FGD participants agreed on unavailability of information during the Ataye conflict showed a complete operational failure of the official communication channels of the Ministry of Peace according to the key informant interview participants. Among interview participants participant expressed it as⁴⁶;

The Ministry of Peace prides itself on having a multi-platform communication strategy. They speak of their 962-call service line, their Facebook page, their YouTube channel, and their Telegram and WhatsApp accounts. However, during the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023, all of these things were utterly useless to us. When the worst attacks occurred in 2020 and 2021, people tried to call 962 for assistance or information, nothing. Dead silence. We checked their social media accounts for updates or emergency information. Nothing posted. It failed to warn us about the Ataye dispute prior to its occurrence, during the dispute itself, and even after the attack took place. It appeared as if there was no ministry at all. It was more than simple carelessness it was a lack of strategy that resulted in casualties. No information was provided regarding alternative safe paths, any impending attacks, and, in general, no information whatsoever. We had been completely left to fend for ourselves despite being under the protection of those who should have ensured our safety.

Similarly, in FGD2-04, it was mentioned that in case of power cuts and network disruptions, oral culture and community discussions serve as a means of communication. While this testimony is indicative of the resilience of the community in the face of institutional failure, it essentially verifies that the communication structure of the Ministry was inaccessible not only through silence but through a complete lack of foresight in the conditions under which the communities actually required access to information about the conflict.

⁴⁶ Interview with DO6, January 2024

Another KII added as⁴⁷;

We needed information all the time during these years. When was the next attack? Where could we go for safety? Was any assistance coming? Nevertheless, from the official sources, we got nothing. The 962 number was never functional for anyone I knew. The ministry's social media accounts talked about other areas, other crises, but never about Ataye. Moreover, when they did talk about something that concerned us, their messages were of no use to us. They were composed in Amharic, which older people in our area could not understand. They neglected the fact that a good number of people around here communicate in Oromo as their mother tongue. They failed to consider that not all of them could read, not all of them could use the internet, not all of them could comprehend official language. However, we were supposed to have announcements broadcast via radio in various languages. We were supposed to have information disseminated via television. But we got none of these things. We went back to the old methods of messenger and rumour mill used by our grandparents.

Table 32, shows the results of the quantitative analysis, and demonstrates the complete failure of the process: 73.7% of the respondents (280 individuals) completely disagree that information can reach diverse audiences using several different communication channels. Figure 33 illustrates that almost half of the total number of respondents (46.6%) selected "Disagree," and one-quarter of the total respondents (27.1%) chose "Strongly Disagree." Positive agreement was only 20.0%, while exceptionally low neutral answers (6.3%) indicate that this was not a case of uncertainty, but rather an obvious negative experience shared by all those surveyed.

Table 32 : Information Disseminated Through Multiple Channels and Languages

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	103	27.1%
Disagree	177	46.6%
Neutral	24	6.3%
Agree	44	11.6%
Strongly Agree	32	8.4%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

⁴⁷ Interview with C11, January 2024

Qualitative evidence from the testimonies of the participants, proving that there was no institutional communication because the official channels "did not communicate Ataye conflict before, during and after the conflict via these Medias," is supported by the quantitative data, which demonstrates the complete failure of the process: a total of 73.7% of the respondents (280 individuals) completely disagree that information can reach diverse audiences using several different communication channels.

The large discrepancy between respondents who chose "Disagree" at 46.6% and "Strongly Disagree" at 27.1%, against only 20.0% of positive responses, clearly demonstrates a strong dissatisfaction that matches their claims about generic information that fails to inform many, indicating a serious flaw in the Ministry's approach towards communication, considering almost 70% of the male population and 80% of females receive communication through various platforms. The research findings highlight the importance of varied communication channels in increasing coverage, which was evidently lacking on the part of the Ministry (Adera et al., 2022; Gebeyehu, 2023). Moreover, the use of oral communication practices in case of a lack of power further emphasizes how the Ministry has failed to address the concerns of the community, as poor communication from traditional sources causes people to look for any other platform. Studies have highlighted the fact that this often leads to the spread of misinformation and increase in ethnic tensions, particularly in platforms like Facebook, resulting in ethnic conflicts (Chekol et al., 2023).

6.2.2. Media Coverage

Most interview participant said that emerged from the participants of the interviews indicates a problematic media environment surrounding the Ataye conflict that is fragmented and shows a great disparity between the regional and federal media. An interview participant who has been observing the escalation of the conflict since 2018 commented on the importance of regional media coverage in the absence of coverage by federal media⁴⁸:

Amhara Television was the only mass media that showed what was happening in Ataye from 2018 to 2023. While federal media was treating our town as if it didn't exist, Amhara Television was at least trying to record our destruction. They showed pictures of displaced families and houses that were burned down during the worst attacks in 2020 and 2021. Their journalists came when they could, and we were grateful that someone was trying to tell our story. However,

⁴⁸ Interview with S04, January 2024

even that was sporadic. They came after an attack, filmed for a couple of days, and then left us alone for months. We knew they did not have many resources, but when you are living through years of attacks, it's hard to feel like you are not being abandoned. You want the media to be with you, not just come when it is convenient for them. Nevertheless, without them, our pain would have been invisible.

Among interviewees who experienced multiple displacements between 2018 and 2023, KII described⁴⁹:

We kept hoping that at some point the federal media will tell us what was going on in Ataye. Then the year 2019 came and people experienced large-scale displacement for the first time. We believed that this year, finally, our story would attract attention from the national press but nothing of the kind occurred. Then 2021 happened, and after the massacres, it was said that investigations will be carried out and we were promised to receive updates through federal media outlets. We waited for them to come in 2022, then in 2023 and no reports appeared. We heard nothing about our families, nothing about our neighbors, our children, and our houses. The government receives regular alerts regarding the ongoing conflict and knows what happened to us. Instead of informing us about the situation in our community through federal media outlets, the government spreads its propaganda and focuses only on the political news which makes it look better.

Similarly, most FGD participants added that the effects of this disjointed coverage went beyond the simple deprivation of information, as the lack of authoritative coverage was directly attributed to public anxiety and the spread of dangerous rumors by participants. The vacuum of consistent information created by the lack of official communication was quickly filled by the unverified and inflammatory information available on social media sites, furthering communal suspicions and leaving citizens without any factual foundation to stand on in an increasingly hostile conflict environment. The participant's use of "oral tradition and communal meetings to relay information" in the case of infrastructure failure is indicative of the complete abandonment of formal systems. The qualitative evidence also indicates that the media coverage was not only a failure to inform but also contributed to a culture of confusion and a lack of trust in state institutions. From the experiences shared by the participants, the

⁴⁹ Interview with C05, January 2024

media has been selectively involved such that there has been emphasis on political issues as opposed to humanitarian issues. The combination of disorganized media reporting and lack of action from the institution shows clearly that the failure by the Ministry of Peace to ensure proper communication during the conflict had left the communities without the required information to cope with the conflict.

The Table for the result 34 illustrates a clear and commanding consensus on dissatisfaction: 64.7% of the total number of respondents (246 people) strongly disagrees that government media gives enough coverage to the conflict. Only 18.5% agree positively, while the neutral group stands at 16.8%. It is evident that this is not an issue of any uncertainty but rather a matter of shared negative experience.

Table 34: Government Media Provide Sufficient and Long Coverage of Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	92	24.2%
Disagree	154	40.5%
Neutral	64	16.8%
Agree	47	12.4%
Strongly Agree	23	6.1%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

It should be noted that the qualitative findings of the participants who have described the situation of government media operating under a "near-total silence and selective framing," while regional media like Amhara Television occasionally report on victims, are corroborated by statistical data demonstrating a commanding consensus on dissatisfaction: a combined 64.7% of the total number of respondents (246 people) strongly disagree that government media gives enough coverage to the conflict, agreeing positively only to 18.5%, with the neutral group being 16.8%. This is one of the strongest denials of institutional performance as measured in the study. The result that participants believe federal media is focused on "political news instead of informing the public about ongoing issues" is consistent with Moges's (2017) observation of a "strategic silence" in state-affiliated media during delicate ethnic conflicts, in which media chose not to focus on the issue in order to mitigate political risk. Other study further develop this explanation with the idea of "selective amplification," showing that federal media is focused on stories of national development and unity while ignoring communal violence in orders to avoid exacerbating ethnic conflict(Moges & Skjerdal, 2024a). Moreover, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) has a dual role as

a public service broadcaster and as a government mouthpiece. This dual role has often led to delayed, minimal, or censored reporting of disasters, focusing more on the security measures taken by the government rather than the humanitarian aspects (Chekol et al., 2023).

The qualitative result show that the government crime investigation team conducted but nobody accountable for it. The private media communicate the 2021 attack of Ataye by armed group. This similar with the finding of Moges (2017) those journalists are in the circle of fear and self-censorship resulting in the exclusion of ethnic-related conflict stories. This systematic limitation of conflict coverage can thus explain why the participants perceived the media coverage as absent rather than informative. The quantitative result of 64.7% dissatisfaction with government media coverage can thus be said to appear not as an isolated grievance but as a form of community validation of academic documentation of strategic silence, selective amplification, dual mandates, and the weaponization of information environments during Ethiopian conflicts.

6.2.3. Accuracy and Credibility Information

Most interview participants with respect to the Ataye conflict in North Shewa zone between 2018 and 2023 indicate a problematic media environment that is highly fragmented and reflects a large gap between regional and federal media. Most FGD3 participants added that Regional media, especially Amhara Television, was appreciated for its more direct coverage of the Ataye conflict, with one participant admitting that "during the times of conflict, Amhara Television was one of the few mass media that gave coverage when needed to highlight the tragic effects on our communities in Ataye. However, even this appreciation tempered by the admission that the coverage was not consistent throughout the period of the conflict from 2018 to 2023.

An interview participant expressed it as follows⁵⁰;

In 2018, we had hope for change. Nevertheless, by 2019, when trouble first arose in Ataye, the silence began. When conflict breaks out in other places, the news is everywhere in an instant. However, for us nothing. In 2020, when attacks escalated and families fled, we waited for the media to share our story with the world. Nothing. In 2021, when the most severe attacks occurred and we buried so many, federal media reported nothing. None! None at all! Even as late as 2023, there was no coverage at all. Five years now, and yet nothing. You start wondering if the

⁵⁰ Interview with D05, January 2024

media is purposely ignoring us since it does not want us in their narrative. That silence is killing us! It says that our lives do not matter, and we do not have anything newsworthy. Moreover, that silence for five long years is something that you will never forget.

Moreover, the other KII P06 pointed out that there were many repercussions from the limited coverage of Ataye's conflict other than the mere withholding of facts from the parties as they saw a direct correlation between the failure of the proper coverage of the conflict in Ataye and the fears that came about because of dangerous rumors being spread about. There was no proper coverage of the conflict in Ataye from 2018 to 2023, and as such, a vacuum developed in terms of proper information, leading to dangerous information on social media.

Moreover, the additional comment by FGD4 participants' indicated that "the only way to pass information about what was going on in Ataye owing to failures in the infrastructure was through using oral tradition and community meetings" which proves that there was no other alternative than foregoing all types of formal channels in this regard. Also, according to the results of qualitative research, one can note that media coverage of the Ataye problem could not be considered ineffective since it led to further frustration and distrust in public agencies among the citizens of the town. Furthermore, another key informant D04 indicated that due to selective approach towards media reporting in Ataye, we lacked reliable information necessary for analyzing the situation in our town and had to rely on oral tradition, which is powerful yet not sufficient in the context of intense violence in Ataye between 2018 and 2023.

Quantitatively, as illustrated in Table 33, the findings show almost an equal division of opinions in terms of the perception of the community with respect to communication, where 46.9% of the respondents (178) agree that communication is credible and accurate, 40.3% (153) disagree, and 12.9% are neutral. Clearly, this does not represent a consensus, but a very polarized society which is a clear reflection of how divided the society is with regard to trusting communication in general. With regard to the qualitative data derived from the interviews, there is clear evidence of an extremely polarized information context with respect to the Ataye conflict; this finding is well corroborated quantitatively, with 46.9% of the respondents (178) agreeing that communication is credible and accurate, 40.3% (153) disagreeing, and 12.9% being neutral.

Table 33: Conflict Communicated Clearly, Credibly, and Accurately to the Public

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	77	20.3%
Disagree	76	20.0%
Neutral	49	12.9%
Agree	136	35.8%
Strongly Agree	42	11.1%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

This does not represent a consensus but a clear polarization that represents communities divided by trust in the information provided by the government. The polarization among these communities is clearly represented by the articulation used by the participants in describing their polarization based on experiences. While some of the participants appreciated the efforts made by the regional media, noting that during conflict, "Amhara Television" was one of the few mass media sources covering "the tragic effects on our communities in Ataye," other participants were very skeptical, noting that although the "government is receiving critical conflict alerts from Ataye, they tend to react politically rather than informing our townspeople of the ongoing situations." This polarization represents what Taye (2022) calls "communities developing alternative information networks due to failure of the information network provided by the government." These represent communities who through their direct experience of "reality gap" have noted that things happening at the grassroots level are different from what is reported officially and consequently consider government communication as misinformation.

The polarization demonstrated by this data in particular is deeply rooted in existing academic research on media and conflict in Ethiopia. Specifically, the important study by Skjerdal & Moges (2020) concerning media and ethnicity in Ethiopia discusses how a significant quantitative difference exists between dominant ethnic groups within the region rating federal media as credible compared to the negative perception that minority or rival groups have toward that same coverage, which they describe as biased propaganda. Particularly relevant in this instance is the diversity that exists in Ataye, in which case any media reportage cannot be expected to satisfy all residents of the community ethnically. Another critical study of Chekol et al. (2023) examining the Ataye-Metekel conflict in particular emphasizes how the "strategic ambiguity" adopted by the government in their approach to communications prioritizes demonstrating stability above providing accurate information concerning territorial

losses, deaths among civilians, or military defeat as a root cause for this credibility gap noted by participants in the qualitative data. Other found that “Facebook discourse is ‘characterized by hostilities and animus, which are prone to promoting ethno political radicalization and deepening the schism among ethnic and political groups,’ so that ‘exposure to opposing views does not lead to partisans becoming less committed to their positions (Gessesse & Moges, 2025). The close division between Ataye’s 46.9% trust and 40.3% distrust, therefore, reflects not confusion but a sensible reaction to an information environment.

6.2.5. Framing of Issues

The key informant interview participants have repeatedly described the media framing of the conflict in Ataye between 2018 and 2023 not as a matter of neutral reporting but as a powerful tool of political mobilization that deliberately fueled ethnic polarization in the town. The KII P05 have explained how the stories were dichotomized strictly along ethnic lines, constructing two irreconcilable realities that ruled out any possibility of understanding between the diverse populations of Ataye.

Likewise, FGD participants described the Amhara media frame that Amhara media prefer to frame our society as victims of aggression by the Oromo Liberation Army, demanding strong military response against aggressors attacking us in Ataye. An equally strong Oromo media frame challenged the narrative of victimhood. It frame the conflict in Ataye as a struggle for self-determination of our people downplaying the violence perpetrated by OLA and blaming government soldiers for hostility towards our community. These two competing media frames of "survival struggle" and "historical injustice" thus trapped the communities of Ataye in two opposing and self-justifying worldviews, each of which saw itself as the wronged party and the other as the usurping aggressor in the conflict period. The effects of this polarized framing did not merely stop at perception but actively worked against the resolution of the conflict in Ataye. The actors noted how the elite political discourse incorporated and reinforced these media frames, further polarizing the town. An interview participant described how the contradictory statements of the regional governments directly corresponded to the polarized media environment⁵¹:

The Amhara regional government made statements on their Facebook page and via their communication bureau that directly accused the Oromo Liberation Army and what they termed “remnants of TPLF” for the violence in Ataye. They promised an

⁵¹ Interview with P01, January 2024

investigation but never produced any results. Meanwhile, the administrator of the Oromia Special Zone appeared on Oromia Broadcasting Network and told a totally different story he said the violence began when an Oromo man was shot leaving the mosque in Ataye, killed by Amhara Special Forces. Then we tried to solve the matter by speaking to elders in the community to advice calm and patience but that did not succeed.” So you had the Amhara regional government blaming OLA and TPLF, while Oromia officials were explaining how their people were killed by regional forces. Both were official government statements, both were aired on regional media, and both told totally opposite stories about how the killing began in Ataye.

This direct testimony illustrates how media narratives are incorporated into official discourse, forming what was termed a “fixed distrust” that forecloses any possibility of dialogue between the communities of Ataye. Supplementary FGD2-03 directly associated this sensationalized, event-driven coverage with actual violence in the town, stating that it resulted in “armed confrontations, attacks on civilians in Ataye, and the erosion of essential services for our people.” As a proposed solution arising from this experience, participants called for a “radical change to a multi-channel communication strategy that empowers local actors in Ataye” and seeks to promote solution-oriented discourse rather than victimage, recognizing that the media must change from a “weapon of conflict to a tool of reconciliation” if Ataye is to move past the violence of the years between 2018 and 2023.

The quantitative findings, Table 34, indicate a strong consensus of skepticism: 56.9% (216 individuals) of respondents strongly disagree that media framing de-escalates conflict. Positive agreement is a mere 23.1%, with a neutral group of 20.0%. This pattern represents a strong public judgment that media is not a peace-building factor but a conflict escalation participant. The high strongly disagree response rate (35.8%), the highest single category, reflects strong conviction in this judgment.

Table 34 : The Media Framing of Conflict Issues De-Escalates the Conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	136	35.8%
Disagree	80	21.1%
Neutral	76	20.0%
Agree	56	14.7%
Strongly Agree	32	8.4%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The qualitative evidence from the participants indicates that media framing of the Ataye conflict was a political mobilization tool that actively contributed to ethnic polarization, a finding that is supported by the quantitative evidence that a total of 56.9% of the respondents strongly disagree that media framing de-escalates conflict, with a high "Strongly Disagree" response of 35.8%. FGD3 Participants presented bifurcated narratives, one of which was: "Amhara media like to portray our society as victims of aggression from the Oromo Liberation Army," and FGD2 participant said, "Oromo media frame the conflict as one of self-determination... minimizing the violence by OLA."

This polarization is consistent with study who concluded that Ethiopian television stations use antagonistic narratives that undermine the development of tolerance(Eranfeno et al., 2024). The quantitative result that more than half the community believes media contribute to conflict rather than resolution supports the participants' views on how polarized media framing obstructed resolution. A KII D04 illustrated the contradictory claims of the regional government and the zone administrator: Amhara regional government accused "the Oromo Liberation Army" while the Oromia Special Zone administrator stated an Oromo man "killed by Amhara Special Forces." Research on Amhara and Tigray Television indicated that both media "approached the conflict with a bias towards their respective ethnic groups.

6.2.6. The Two-way Communication

Key informant interview and FGD participants believe that two-way communication is crucial factor for conflict prevention, but reported its complete absence in practice, resulting in a demoralizing and inefficient reporting process during the Ataye conflict. A KII explained it as follows⁵²;

⁵² Interview with P05, January 2024

We are supposed to be the eyes and ears on the ground, to fill out the necessary forms and send them up the chain of command every time we notice tensions rising between communities or every time we hear whispers of armed groups mobilizing around Ataye. We do all of these because we want to protect our communities. Then we stop. It is a monologue, not a dialogue. We send the information to the woreda, to the zone, to the federal government, but we never get a word back. We have no idea whether they verified what we were saying, whether they dismissed it as false information, or whether they just ignored it altogether. When you call to report, a fire and no you know when the fire engine comes and nobody ever explains to you why? Well, eventually, you stop calling the fire department. That is precisely where we are right now. After years of this between 2018 and 2023, through multiple waves of violence, we have learned that our reports are symbolic. It looks to the government like they have an Early Warning System in place; but in fact, it is a one-way street to silence. We are essentially throwing a stone into a well and waiting to hear the splash of sound from it. We never hear it.

Likewise, most FGD2 participant discloses that the Early Warning System is merely a monologue that requires local labor without any governmental feedback or validation. This leads to feelings of futility, which makes the locals wonder about the importance of their risk-taking behavior. The speaker uses the analogy of "dropping a stone into a well" to emphasize that symbolic reporting has become more of an illusion than an actual means of preventing conflicts. The locals are still as vulnerable as they used to be. Another interview participant on the absence of dialogue and the resulting vulnerability⁵³;

True communication is not just about transmitting information upwards; it is about receiving guidance, context, and communication back down. We are not seeing any of that here. The government is treating communication as if it is a broadcast system, where they broadcast what they want, and we are supposed to listen and follow what they are saying. Nevertheless, if we want to talk about the situation in Ataye, what we need is a bridge, not a broadcast tower. We need a communication system where a leader from North Shewa can talk to a leader from the Oromia Special Zone and confirm what they know, and we, the people, can sit down with the administration and say, "This is what we know, what do you know from your end?"

⁵³ Interview with S05, January 2024

We are not seeing that; what we are seeing is disjointed communication, perhaps a meeting or two, but no follow-through on how to keep the communication going. We are just left high and dry. However, as soon as rumors begin circulating about an attack from a neighboring kebele, we have nowhere to turn for confirmation. We cannot pick up the phone and get a response. We cannot turn on the radio and hear a statement from both sides that clears up the confusion. The absence of a dialogue creates a void, and that void is filled with fear and doubt. We are not just reporting into a void; we are living in one, completely out of the dialogue that could save us.

The evidence presented shows that in order to reach this point, there is a need for more than just a new technology it is necessary to change the culture from seeing communication about conflicts such as Ataye as a risk to be managed to seeing it as a trust-building process that is necessary for preventing future violence.

The quantitative findings, as shown in Table 35, indicate that the majority with 45.0% (171 respondents) strongly disagrees that an effective two-way communication system used for verification. Positive agreement is at 35.8%, with a significant neutral group of 19.2%. This pattern suggests that although reporting mechanisms formalized on paper, they viewed as ineffective in terms of their responsive and dialogical nature, which is the hallmark of two-way communication.

Table 35 : A Two-Way Communication System Used for Verifying Conflict Information

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	52	13.7%
Disagree	119	31.3%
Neutral	73	19.2%
Agree	112	29.5%
Strongly Agree	24	6.3%

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The qualitative evidence provided by the participants indicates a good understanding of two-way communication as a necessary component for conflict prevention but a complete absence of the same, as evidenced by the quantitative findings that indicate 45.0% of the respondents strongly disagree that an effective two-way communication system is used for verification, with positive agreement at 35.8%. The vision was expressed by one of the participants as follows: "A strong two-way system has the potential to bridge the divide between officials

and communities and provide an accurate flow of information." Nevertheless, another participant regretted: "Information relayed up the administrative chain from Ataye very rarely leads to constructive conversation, leaving us wondering if anyone is listening." This is consistent with the study conducted on the Ministry of Peace, which concluded that "public relations practitioner's communication on social media is following a one-way communication flow (Dessie et al., 2025). Study established that "lack of coordination between early warning mechanisms and decision makers" and "inability to take action on collected conflict information" are key challenges (Alemneh, 2025). The challenges mentioned by the participants, namely government interference, infrastructure, a lack of qualified staff, and a culture of fear, are also present in the wider institutional environment of Ethiopia. In a study on public diplomacy, it was discovered that "media is used primarily for information and persuasion purposes rather than two-way communication.

6.3. Summary of Findings

The Ministry of Peace conflict communication system in Ataye between 2018 and 2023 can be marked as lacking vision and capacity, resulting in an institutional gap that left communities without proper information during crises. While a representative of the Ministry spoke of their vision to "establish a bilateral communication platform," the same representative confessed, "the leadership often lacks an appropriate understanding of how communication works as a discipline." This institutional gap was tragically proven at the community level, where interview participants said that the Ministry of Peace does not have a special department for conflict communication, which is very important to solve our problems. The existence of this gap within the institutions was mathematically demonstrated when 54.7 percent of those surveyed disagreed that there is structured communication within peace organizations, and it was the most negative result obtained regarding any of the institutional mechanisms. It meant that communication was provided through unstructured participants.

Concerning media coverage of the conflict, the study found that the fragmented nature of coverage between regional and federal news sources resulted in a very poor information environment. In terms of regional news sources, specifically Amhara Television, these sources received conditional recognition as "one of the few mass media giving coverage when necessary... to bring to attention the tragic consequences of these conflicts on our people." Federal sources, however, were critiqued for poor coverage and framing, as highlighted by one interviewee who stated, "It [the government] tends[s] to act politically

instead of informing people about the happenings." More ominously, poor coverage of the issue extended to accountability journalism as well, with one interviewee highlighting how, "since the attack in Ataye in 2021, we were promised updates on the investigation... [but] this is rarely reported." In terms of quantitative results, strong dissatisfaction with federal sources prevailed, as 64.7% of the respondents strongly disagreed with government media sources being sufficient sources of conflict coverage. The information vacuum that arose due to the lack of any accountability reporting created a scenario in which "oral tradition and communal meetings to disseminate information was essential" making any accurate information "one of the casualties of the conflict."

Lastly, it found that the information landscape of Ethiopia involved an extremely polarized environment, contributing further to the inter-ethnic conflicts. According to the quantitative results, there was only a minor gap in the degree of trust in the community regarding the information dissemination: 46.9% of respondents felt that communication is credible and trustworthy, but at the same time, 40.3% of them had a negative attitude towards the matter. This was because each ethnicity presented a certain point of view: for example, Amhara news channels referred to communities as victims of aggression of Oromo Liberation Army, whereas Oromo media considered the conflict as an act of self-determination and minimized the level of violence within it. In such a way, both groups were stuck within their perspectives, and 56.9% of respondents actively denied any impact of media on the de-escalation of conflict: only 35.8% of respondents selected "Strongly Disagree".

However, while the theoretical concept of "the two-way communication system can play a key role in bridging the gap between government administrators and communities" was not reflected in any of the responses, the respondents stated that "the information fed into the administrative chain from Ataye rarely initiates any form of discussion, making us wonder if anyone ever listens". Moreover, even the quantitative analysis showed that 45.0% of the respondents were completely against the concept of an effective two-way communication system that would be used for verification purposes. To conclude, in all areas analyzed, the inefficient communication system has played its part in creating public mistrust, misinformation, and heightened inter-ethnic tensions, and has become a significant source of danger during the years of conflict from 2018 to 2023.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONFLICT EARLY RESPONSE ACTORS IN ATAYE TOWN

This chapter discusses the effectiveness of conflict early response actors in the case of Ataye town conflict. The first section assesses the effectiveness of DRM actors in providing early response. The second section analyzes the effectiveness of security actors for early response. The third section discusses the effectiveness of peace actors to early respond to it. Finally, a comparative analysis of the peace, security and DRM actors is conducted.

7.1. Disaster Risk Management Actors

The key informant interview participant from DRM actors in Ataye consistently talked about how structural and institutional challenges affected the effectiveness of the DRM Council. KII described the core challenge⁵⁴:

The draft law for the National Incident Management System has been stuck in draft form for two years now. We have been unable to get ministry heads to agree and actually sign off on it. Without the legal framework, coordination would be more a principle rather than an actuality. In fact, the issue was specifically highlighted in their way of working together. When efforts were made to coordinate the Incident Command System, three separate ministers from line ministries did not approve the collaborative agreement. According to them, they were answerable to their respective ministers and not DRM.

Similarly, all FGD participants felt that the House of Federation and Ministry of Peace were ineffective and that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms had been rendered obsolete. FGD1 (Amhara male): "shimgillina was ignored," FGD3 (Oromo male): "jaarsa had no power," and FGD4 (Oromo female): "politicians replaced elders." This consensus on the breakdown of indigenous mechanisms among members of both communities shows that the weakening of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms was an objective reality and not a subjective perception. On the other hand, there were conflicting views regarding aid distribution and criminal justice. Amhara participants felt that aid was provided to the Oromo, while the Oromo felt that aid was provided to the Amhara. In a similar vein, each group felt that the criminal justice system was partial against them. The symmetry in the perceptions of victimization by each group of the same institutions is an indication that regardless of whether these institutions were truly unbiased or not, their perception will be

⁵⁴ Interview with D01, January 2024

that they were victims of them in a politically polarized situation. FGD1-01 talk about how being part of the system limited their effectiveness. He said that the Disaster Prevention Committee is actually housed in the Bureau of Agriculture. Our offices are basically in the same building as the crop extension workers. We use every tool we have, every indicator we have, designed specifically to monitor drought. We had no way of tracking displacement when conflict arrived; we had no way of engaging with security forces.” Dominance of security actors was another issue that stood out. Another KII DO3 in Bahir Dar recounted that the Emergency Coordination Center was up and running for precisely eleven days before the security sector established their own parallel command center. They did not share their information, did not participate in our coordination meetings, and controlled all access routes to Ataye. We could identify some 5,000 households that needed food aid, but the security command would say, “Not today, it is not secure,” and we had no mandate to argue that point.

A KII expressed the conflict impact as follows⁵⁵;

In the attacks in Ataye and its surroundings, 281 people lost their lives and 197 were injured, 3,073 houses were destroyed in the war, and 1,787 hectares of crops and permanent crops were damaged. The attacks caused many deaths, injuries, property damage, and psychological harm. 246,818 people were displaced. In Ataye alone, 1,529 houses were destroyed. In addition, four schools and 3 health centers were destroyed. 23,000 people were left without drinking water due to the attacks. Government institutions where the public receives services were destroyed, including courts. 7 religious institutions, private organizations, 11 hotels, a grain warehouse, 350 shops, and 43 mills were damaged. In addition, 61 farmers' water pumps (generators) were destroyed and 582 animals were stolen. As a result, 237,157 people are being supported outside the shelter and 9,661 people are being supported inside the shelter. For rehabilitation, 11.5 million birr is needed to rebuild livestock and veterinary medicine in the farmers' area, 162 million birr to rebuild government institutions, 107.2 million birr to rebuild private businesses and service providers, 12.5 million birr to rebuild schools, and 18.7 million birr to rebuild health facilities. The total rehabilitation cost is 1.5 billion birr.

⁵⁵ FGD participation 01, February 2026

Another KII thought about the council's lack of concern about conflicts,⁵⁶

We are experts in calculating the precise amount of wheat needed and can identify precisely where the supply chain will get bogged down. But nobody ever taught us how to think about the conflict itself, why are these two ethnic groups fighting, and how might our food aid inadvertently support one militia over another? We are technically competent but politically naive, and in that environment, that makes us irrelevant.

The frequencies of response in Table 36 represent the diversity of opinions, with most respondents either disagreeing or agreeing with the statement. In particular, the total number of respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed is 45.3%, while the total number of respondents who agreed with the statement is 40%. The total number of respondents who agreed with the statement is the sum of the number of respondents who agreed and those who strongly agreed, which is 27.9% and 12.1%, respectively. The total number of respondents who chose the neutral option is 14.7%.

Table 36: Distribution of Participants' Views on the DRM Council

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	84	22.1
Disagree	88	23.2
Neutral	56	14.7
Agree	106	27.9
Strongly agree	46	12.1
Total	380	100.0

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

Triangulation through qualitative interviews, survey data, and documents presents a consistent story about institutional contradictions in the Ataye case response by the DRM Council. Survey results showing a negative-positive dichotomy 45.3% vs. 40.0% indicate that, in line with interviewees' explanations, the DRM Council carried out procedures correctly to perform its humanitarian role and provided localized benefits for some members of the community. However, this did not solve the underlying conflict dynamics causing the disaster. This contradiction is evident in the contrast between procedural correctness and strategic irrelevance. The documentation confirms that the DRM Council's use of Impact Assessments, Emergency Coordination Centers, and Service Clustering was done according

⁵⁶ Interview with D06, January 2024

to National Incident Management System protocols; however, as shown by Alemu (2021) and Devereux (2020), this procedural correctness happened in a "political vacuum" where security institutions took over the DRM functions, and decision-making was based on security priorities, rather than humanitarian needs. The council's institutional history focusing on agriculture and operating under the Bureau of Agriculture made it unable to understand the ethnic and political nature of the Ataye violence (Kebede, 2019; Wolde-Georgis et al., 2022).

The Early Warning System failures identified in South Ethiopia chronic underfinancing, inter-agency data silos, and community engagement deficits directly mirror the legitimacy and coordination failures manifest in Ataye, confirming that the council's inability to anticipate or de-escalate conflict was not site-specific but systemic (Tora et al., 2025). Study the absence of a formal conflict early warning mandate, combined with institutional blindness to socio-political indicators, ensured that the DRM Council would remain perpetually reactive efficiently distributing aid after violence erupted but powerless to prevent its occurrence (M. A. Abebe, 2021b). The council thus emerges from this triangulated analysis as an institution that performs its mandated functions with demonstrable technical competence yet remains fundamentally unequipped for the conflict environments in which it is increasingly deployed.

7.2. Security Actors

Interview participant said that it referees to Security Council, security task force, state of emergency command post for conflict early response. The majority of the FGD participants agreed that the Security Council was ineffective, the command post was more like a concept, informal structures had taken over from the formal, there were delays in the deployment of security, and capacity was very inadequate. According to FGD1 (Amhara male), "the militia was the actual command". On the other hand, FGD3 (Oromo male) indicated that "the special police commanded", while FGD4 (Oromo female) stated, "there was no one in command." The agreement between the two ethnic groups regarding this critical point, that is, the replacement of the formal structure of security arrangements with informal structures of force, implies that by the time of the March 2019 incident, the state had already lost its monopoly on legitimate use of force. The FGD1 participants felt biased against Amhara, while those in FGD3 felt that the security forces were biased against Oromo. Thus, their response was ineffective in addressing the unmet basic human needs arising from denied identity and participation.

7.2.1. Security Council

Key informant interview participant from security actors said that the Security Council's structural strengths were always acknowledged in conjunction with the revelation of deep-seated operational weaknesses. KII S06 spoke approvingly of the institutional framework that the Security Council is effective because it is operating on multiple levels federal, regional, and local. This is no small feat in a country this large with this many regional states. The framework is in place; the communication nodes are established. Nevertheless, this approbation was immediately followed by complaints about vertical coordination failures. An interview spoke bitterly⁵⁷:

We had to wait for federal assistance that did not come on time. The information we provided was not acted upon. When the federal security forces arrived at Ataye, the relocation process had been completed, and the destruction process had ended. We were faced with the consequences when the federal government was still deliberating its instructions. It became clear from this case study that one of the major factors contributing to the level of frustration felt by the respondents was that their intelligence was collected and sent to the higher levels of government but not acted upon. It was a consistent theme in the narratives of the respondents that security policy making had become political.

The other KII S04 pointed out that confidentiality is crucial in our meetings. It is not just an issue of protocol; it is an issue of survival. However, at times, confidentiality may be used as a weapon, depending on political influence. There is intelligence regarding the activities of militia A, but we are instructed to focus on militia B. Our threat analysis is not based on security information; it is based on which ethnic federation the militias are claiming affiliation with. In this regard, we lose our legitimacy in the eyes of the community, who know very well what is happening. The problem of resources shortage was aggravated by the crisis of legitimacy, according to one of the participants, because there were insufficient personnel and equipment. Ideally, we should be having early warning contacts in every kebele, but we cannot afford paying informants, cannot provide fuel for rapid deployment, and our communication equipment is obsolete.

⁵⁷ Interview with S06, January 2024

The community understands that we are present but useless. Reporting stops because they understand that nothing will be done. The role that the council plays in the community is thus a symbol of the failure of the government rather than its protector. As stated by the key informant interviewee S06, the irony of this situation is that even though the mandate to protect exists, the structures and meetings exist, the lack of trust remains the problem, and when you do not have trust, you are not a council of security but merely a bureaucracy reporting about dead bodies.

As can be seen from Table 37, the majority of the respondents were positive regarding the question of whether the Security Council is effective in handling conflicts. Indeed, 54.2% of the respondents agreed (including the ones who strongly agreed). Specifically, 34.7% agreed, while 19.5% strongly agreed. Conversely, "disagreed" represented 26.9% of the respondents, including 13.2% who strongly disagreed, and 13.7% who disagreed. Therefore, the findings show that many respondents do not believe in the effectiveness of the Security Council. Finally, "neutral" responses made up 18.9% of the total sample size.

Table 37 : The Security Council Effectiveness to Respond the Conflict

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	50	13.2
Disagree	52	13.7
Neutral	72	18.9
Agree	132	34.7
Strongly agree	74	19.5
Total	380	100.0

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

All key informants uniformly recognized the Security Council's structural strengths while simultaneously revealing deep-seated operational weaknesses that compromised the conflict management capacity of the Security Council in Ataye. Correspondingly, FGD participants' stating that multi-level coordination between federal, regional, and local levels of government was "not a small achievement in a country of this size, with this many regional states. But this was quickly negated by issues in vertical coordination as a security bureau chief in the region harshly noted that it was not until after destruction had taken place that the federal security forces came into action, leaving the local administration "to handle the aftermath even though there were discussions on mandates at the federal level." The issue in the timing of actions by

locals in detection and federal response was clearly seen to be an important reason for dissatisfaction, considering broader complaints about the Ethiopian National Security Council, which is criticized for its failure to address the severity of security issues in Amhara and Oromia regions, where "killings, displacement, abduction, and human rights violations are committed by both sides," while issuing vague claims of progress (International Crisis Group, 2023).

The politicization of security-related decisions was evident from participant accounts, wherein one council member at the Woreda level stated, "the threat assessments have been influenced by which ethnic federation the militias belong to instead of [security] information," thus eroding the community's trust. This lack of legitimacy was further exacerbated by resource shortages; according to survey respondents, communities stopped communicating with the council since "they know we cannot do anything," given that it lacks funds for informant payments, vehicle fuel, and communication equipment. Survey results showed relatively positive views of the council's effectiveness (54.2%), while the substantial number of negative attitudes (26.9%) and neutral views (18.9%) suggest that there exists an ambivalence that reflects the internal paradox noted by many participants in their interviews, namely that, although "we have the mandate to protect people, we have the structure and we have the meetings, the reporting process and all that," what it does not have is the trust. And without trust, "you are no longer a security council, but simply another bureaucratic organization reporting on corpses." These conclusions are consistent with assessments that have identified flaws within the Ethiopian security system framework, particularly the "inconsistent and inadequate" approach to security sector reforms, the absence of "real inclusivity" within the national dialogue processes, and the government's tendency to employ "heavy-handed" approaches (Workneh, 2019).

7.2.2. Security Task Force

It is noteworthy that one of the KII S01 participants from the Security and Intelligence Task Force emphasized the importance of the advanced technological capabilities as well as multi-agency approach as some of the greatest assets. Our strength lies in diversity and the fact that the task force includes representatives who can deal with unique conditions in different regions. We have the NISS to provide us with intelligence. Another KII P04 mentioned the community's strong skepticism toward the task force's holistic mission. In particular, he said, "It is not only a matter of enforcing the security, but we engage the community to tackle the

underlying cause of conflict. We have worked with elders, humanitarian organizations; we have tried mediation.” However, this description did not match community members' perception. According to another KII C05 from Ataye, “They come armed, not equipped to solve the problem. They arrive with their vehicles, not their trust. They talk of cooperation, but when they visit our Kebeles, it feels like occupation. They track us with their technological advances.” Another participant stated⁵⁸:

We learn about the existence of this task force from the radio, about how technologically sophisticated they are and how fast they act. But the reality is that they respond to the panic of the government, not the panic of the people. In response to Oromo militias, we see them acting quickly; in response to Amhara self-defense groups, we see them acting after days.

The perception of partiality was real or imagined but had completely hampered the effectiveness of the task force's operation, no matter how technologically advanced it was. The responses Table 38 regarding the effectiveness of the Security Task Force in managing the conflict indicates a divided perception among participants. Although 40% agreed, (with 32.1% agreeing and 7.9% strongly agreeing), a sizeable 44.3% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating considerable doubt regarding the effectiveness of the Task Force. The neutral percentage (15.8%) indicates that there are individuals who are neither sure nor unsure regarding the Task Force's performance.

Table 38 : Security Task Force Effectiveness in Conflict Response

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	80	21.1
Disagree	88	23.2
Neutral	60	15.8
Agree	122	32.1
Strongly agree	30	7.9
Total	380	100.0

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

In conclusion, although the task force is very efficient and well-coordinated operationally, it exhibits major flaws when it comes to strategic issues. The fact that out of the total respondents, 44.3% gave a negative response and only 7.9% considered the task force highly

⁵⁸ Interview with S02, January 2024

effective means that there is still a large discrepancy between the capabilities of the security apparatus and its ability to achieve results among the community it aims to serve. As pointed out by the interviewees, the "securitized bubble" is characterized by the invisibility of those high-tech solutions meant to enhance security. Secondly, despite the claim that it had taken a more holistic approach to its activities, the security and intelligence task force seems like a federal power mechanism as opposed to a security entity with no biases. They come with guns, not with solutions. Again, the fact that the consent of the locals has never been sought makes any collaboration difficult as disarmament campaigns are viewed as punishment for everyone.

7.2.3. State of Emergency *De Facto* Command Post

Most FGD participants' said that *defacto* command post refers to are official decrees or constitutional provisions that define its powers and term of operation. The de facto command post, on the other hand, derives its power from the urgency of the situation. All the key informants across the board described the de facto command post in similar terms: it was something that resulted from a legitimacy crisis and continued to exist due to a cycle of dysfunction. Additional KII P04 described the situation that it just showed up overnight. No proclamation, no council meeting, no public announcement. But it functioned like an emergency power. There was no legal foundation for it. We were supposed to enforce orders that had no legal basis. We knew that from the beginning. How do you demand compliance when you don't have a single law that gives you authority? That immediately ground things to a halt.

To support it FGD4 participates said that the response of security actors to the Ataye conflict (2018-2023) is a case in point regarding the ineffectiveness of security-driven interventions in conflicts arising from unmet basic human needs. Basic Human Needs Theory argues that conflicts arising from unmet basic human needs, such as denied identity and participation, can only be addressed through non-violent and non-coercive means. In Ataye, security actors addressed the symptoms of the conflict, including violence and displacement. However, the unmet basic human needs were completely ignored. The other KII S03 argued that they sent soldiers to stop the fighting, but they never sent anyone to listen to why we were fighting. This meant that security actors' responses to the Ataye conflict only addressed the symptoms of the conflict. Anomie Theory explains the ineffectiveness of security actors' responses to the Ataye conflict. According to the theory, security actors were only trained to provide

security and fulfill security needs. This meant that their response to the Ataye conflict was limited to security and security alone.

Correspondingly, FGD2 participants said that there were command posts in nine districts and five cities in South Wollo, North Shewa Zone and Oromo National Administration. They explained that the command post is working to reopen the roads that were closed due to the crisis and resume the interrupted social, economic and administrative activities. It has worked to return displaced citizens to their villages and identify and hold accountable those who should be questioned in the crime. As stability has been restored in the area, transportation services and social and economic activities, Telephone, water and electricity services have been restored. The security situation in the area, work is being done to hold individuals suspected of crimes accountable in the law. The local community has also worked to expose the perpetrators and provide information. The conflict has involved domestic and foreign entities, some political organizations and some officials under the government structure. Another key informant described the situation like this⁵⁹:

If Ataye needed assistance, they were told they had not been ordered to do so. If they wanted to mobilize a militia, they would call for that. That would be reported. Then we would deliberate in the command post. Then it would be referred back and forth between woreda, zone, federal level and back down. By the time we got that order, the attack would already be over. The attackers would already be gone. We were not resolving that conflict. We were just filling out paperwork and people were dying.

The bureaucratic layering that as being Ethiopia's hallmark its legally murky command structures was in Ataye a systemic failure dressed in the trappings of procedure (Jemal, 2020).

The perception of ethnic partiality was identified as the most damaging and universally corroborated of the failures. Similarly, FGD 02 added that the command post established to govern North Shewa, South Wollo, and Oromo Special Zone administrations'. It declared prohibited to carry weapons on the road from Debre Sina to Kombolcha, within 20 kilometers to the left and right of the road. Moreover, destroy individual homes and property, including

⁵⁹ Interview with S06, January 2024

churches and government institutions, including blocking roads. The elder of the affected community during interview explained with evident frustration⁶⁰:

Our own militias were instructed to disarm. There was forced disarmament. The aggressors were free to do as they pleased. We watched them move from one Kebele to the next, with their arms, their mobility, and their freedom to act. The command center knew where they were. The command center had intelligence about their locations. The command center did nothing. And then they demanded that we surrender our own defense mechanisms. This is not peacekeeping. This is not impartiality. This is unilateral disarmament masquerading as impartiality.

Moreover, FGD3 participants' indicated that the toll of the perceived ethnic partiality of the security forces on the security personnel themselves. He explained that we are not machines. We see the atrocities. We see the ethnic pattern of the response. We see the rules being applied differently to different people. Many of my colleagues are emotionally exhausted. Some of them refuse to leave their vehicles. Some of them refuse to make eye contact with the people we meet. There is shame in enforcing rules you know to be unjust. Then there is the matter of the gun. When you carry a gun but cannot defend the innocent, the gun becomes a liability, not an asset. The FGD3-07 corroborated the feelings of alienation: "We detain suspects because we believe them more than we believe the police." The armed men who attack us are criminals. Yes. The armed men who occupy our roads are criminals. They simply wear a uniform and answer to Addis. When your only choices are between two armed groups, neither of which will protect you, you choose the group to which you speak the same language, to which you share a history, regardless of what the law says.

Table 40 shows that the responses regarding the effectiveness of the de facto command post in managing the conflict reveal that the participants' perceptions are predominantly negative in nature. A significant 63.2% of participants were in disagreement, out of which 42.9% disagreed and 20.3% strongly disagreed. Conversely, only 17.9% of participants agreed, out of which 11.6% agreed and 6.3% strongly agreed that the de facto command post is effective in managing the conflict in Ethiopia. The results also show that 18.9% of the participants were neutral in their perceptions.

⁶⁰ Interview with C08, January 2024

Table 39 : *De Facto* Command Post Effectiveness in Conflict Management

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	77	20.3
Disagree	163	42.9
Neutral	72	18.9
Agree	44	11.6
Strongly agree	24	6.3
Total	380	100.0

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The analysis reveals that the de facto command post is not only ineffective in managing the conflict in Ethiopia but also acts in a manner that is counterproductive to resolving the conflict in the country. This is revealed in the high percentage of negative perceptions, which is the highest in comparison to other institutions surveyed in the country. The participants' perceptions were based on issues of illegitimacy, bureaucratic paralysis, and ethnic bias in the command post, which are in line with Abbink's argument that command posts act as "states of exception" in which laws are arbitrarily applied (J. Abbink, 2022). The illegality also creates a lack of compliance authority and delays in operational responses, as revealed in the analysis (Bekele, 2020; Salemot, 2021). Security activities are not seen as peacekeeping but are instead tools of federal control as also revealed in the participants' perceptions that the command post is unilateral disarmament dressed as neutrality (Fiseha, 2019). The participants also revealed that they trust suspects in the community more than the police, which is an indicator of the high level of alienation from the command post in the country. The command post is also characterized by illegitimacy in that its members do not interact with the community and see their equipment as liabilities, which is an indicator of a legitimacy crisis in the command post in Ethiopia.

7.2.4. State of Emergency *Dejury* Command Post

All key informant interview participants acknowledged the de jure command posts enhanced legal status while simultaneously exposing the jurisdictional contradictions that undermined its operational effectiveness. Additionally, the FGD 02 participants articulated that constitutional ambiguity at the institution's core that the proclamation was issued to ensure order, but the legality of the proclamation is in question since this kind of jurisdiction is traditionally reserved for the federal government. There was no established precedence of either regional legislation or federal authority to serve as the basis for our actions. In other

words, each and every decision was about the establishment of authority itself, not the execution of security-related decisions. The ambiguity created by such circumstances resulted in the emergence of delays that have been described above.

Likewise, the FGD4-03 informants claimed that whenever the local government reported OLF *Shene* threats to the regional government, there was a lack of action, which is why federal intervention was needed. However, the initiation of a federal intervention entailed yet another layer of bureaucratic red tape to be handled. Seventeen days elapsed before federal forces were deployed. Seventeen days while militias mobilized openly. The institutional response to this paralysis the subdivision of operations into geographic clusters demonstrated technical sophistication but could not compensate for political deadlock. As key informant interview participant explained⁶¹:

We subdivided our response into five clusters, where the Yifat cluster faced the Ataye conflict directly. Each cluster had its own command line, its own intelligence flow, and its own resource allocation. Technically, it was sound textbook incident management. Politically, each cluster became a microcosm of the federal-regional dispute. Cluster heads received conflicting instructions from Addis and Bahir Dar. We optimized the structure for efficiency, but efficiency requires singular authority, and we never had that.

The other KII D03 added that securitized character of community engagement emerged as the *de jure* command post's most intractable legitimacy deficit. A participant responsible for inter-regional liaison emphasized the collaborative framework that our partnership with the Afar and Oromo regions has been critical in designing joint operation plans. We held coordination meetings, shared intelligence, and synchronized patrol schedules. Institution-to-institution, the cooperation functioned. Yet this institutional coordination did not translate into community trust.

Most FGD participants' described the paradox of securitized recruitment that local youth were actively recruited by regional and federal security forces through community recruitment. They received uniforms, weapons, salaries. But this was not integration it was conscription. The same youth who were recruited during the day were suspected as militia informants at night. They belonged neither to the community nor fully to the security forces. They existed in a liminal space, and this liminality bred resentment on both sides.

⁶¹ Interview with S04, January 2024

Additionally, KII S04 added that the compensation of security actors on job disaster is very low. This a police member or officer dies in an act of war or while on active duty, a compensation of 150,000 (one hundred and fifty thousand birr); in case of rendered completely incapable of performing his duties or suffers permanent total physical disability as a result of the act of war or while on active duty, a compensation of 100,000 (one hundred thousand birr), in case of suffers permanent partial physical disability as a result of the act of war or while on active duty, a compensation of 80,000 (eighty thousand birr) paid to his legal heirs. One interviewee stated⁶²:

They set up committees following the conflict committees that would investigate the destruction of both human and material assets. We participated in these activities; we shared our experiences; we shared our testimonies. Yet, when the committees compiled their report, it was never seen by us. These reports were sent from these committees all the way to Addis, but not to us. They used our suffering as intelligence information, not for anything else.

The above illustrates how the engagement process through participation was merely an instrument of an authoritarian regime that continued to exist regardless of the legalization of the command post. This was the view shared by FGD4 members in regard to the 2021 command post, where it had been legalized through a proclamation.

From Table 40 below, the de jure command post seems to possess more perceived effectiveness among the people. Over half of the population seems to agree with it (39.2%) and strongly agree (11.6%). Nevertheless, on the other side, quite a sizeable percentage of the population disagrees with the de jure command post, with 31.1% pushing back against it. This indicates that even in the case of the de jure command post, the people are unsure of its effectiveness in resolving the conflicts.

⁶² Interview with D03, January 2024

Table 40 : De Jure Command Post Effectiveness in Conflict Response

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	77	20.3
Disagree	41	10.8
Neutral	69	18.2
Agree	149	39.2
Strongly agree	44	11.6
Total	380	100.0

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

In summary, the analysis of the de jure command post shows a moderate performance in relation to effectiveness in conflict resolution. A marginal improvement can be seen, but structural issues still exist. It has a high level of perceived effectiveness at 50.8%. While this is better than the de facto command post's perceived effectiveness of 17.9%, this level of perceived effectiveness is not high enough to allow for conflict resolution especially where security is at stake. The people have cited the unclear jurisdiction of the post and the federal-regional deadlock, which undermine its power. The inaction of the post, which was more a result of bureaucratic negotiation rather than logistics, shows a lack of accountability in the system of emergency governance.

The post, although technically advanced, adopts the pattern of coercive governance in the eyes of the people. The people feel that the post only coerces them to join the conflict resolution process rather than allowing them to genuinely join in the resolution of the conflict. Although the post was able to collect testimonial evidence from the people in the post-conflict damage assessment, it was unable to translate this to actual legitimacy due to the lack of transparency and accountability. The lingering dissatisfactions at 31.1% and the substantial percentage of the population at 18.2% who chose the neutral category show that the people view the de jure command post as an instrument of coercive control rather than a partner in the resolution of the conflict. In the final analysis, the de jure command post, although able to ensure compliance with procedure, does not have the trust of the people or the ability to bring about lasting peace.

7.3. Peace Actors

Interview participants defined it as House of Federation, the Ministry of Peace, Criminal Justice System and Indigenous Conflict Resolution for conflict resolution. Most FGDs found that the peace infrastructure within the Ataye community had totally broken down prior to the outbreak of violence in March 2019. Similar results obtained from the four focus groups have identified four breakdowns: the Peace Committee was non-operational, elders had been sidelined, religious leaders were ineffective, and there was total absence of civil society actors. FGD1 (male Amhara) noted, "They [committee] only met twice and then stopped meeting because of fear of reprisal attacks," since members would receive intimidating phone calls. FGD2 (female Amhara) said, "Our elders used to resolve everything for us but no one pays attention to them," as young armed men took over leadership of age-set groupings. FGD3 (male Oromo) said, "Both Imam and priest tried together but their efforts were ignored," indicating the ineffectiveness of religious leaders in conflict prevention. Lastly, FGD4 (female Oromo) noted, "There were no NGOs, no clubs, nothing," meaning that there was total absence of civil society groups.

Remarkably, however, both women mentioned attempts to organize self-peace efforts, but without any institutional backing whatsoever. According to FGD2 (Amhara woman), "we tried but no support," as she herself and five other women from her community started going to Oromo houses, drinking coffee and calming down the people there. However, no one ever came and asked them what they heard from these visits, or helped them organize a larger campaign. In the same vein, FGD4 (Oromo woman) said, "We did form our own, but too late," as she organized a group of early warnings women just two weeks before the attack on March. These two women clearly demonstrated that informal networks are able to pick up on signs of rising tension early, but were not connected with any formal institutions. KII P04 said that peace actors in Ataye found to hold a paradoxical position through the integrated theoretical framework.

On one hand, they were found to share a similar understanding of the conflict drivers with Basic Human Needs Theory. Peace actors consistently emphasized issues of identity, recognition, and participation as key drivers of the conflict. We knew this was not about land alone. It was about respect, about belonging, about being heard. This placed the peace actors in a position where they were potentially effective at addressing the basic human needs that Relative Deprivation Theory proposes drive conflict. However, Anomie Theory explains why

this was not the case. Peace actors were not mandated or resourced to address the conflict drivers; they were also marginalized in the response structure with their concerns and warnings not taken into consideration by security actors. This finding confirms the theoretical assumption that institutional anomie prevents the actors who are best placed to address the conflict drivers from contributing meaningfully to the response, resulting in a superficial response with conflict drivers left unaddressed.

7.3.1. Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

All key informant interview participants' said the people on both sides of the communities stressed the legitimacy and deep roots of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in Ataye. This is evident in the words of interviewee participant, who said⁶³,

This is an inclusive meeting where we, the elders, women, religious leaders, and even the youth were there. Not as representatives of opposing sides, but as people of Ataye, coming together with only one aim: to decrease the conflict. The government structures could not have organized such a meeting because they are not impartial. We are viewed as fathers. However, our authority does not matter to the official legal system. We negotiated a reconciliation agreement. Both sides agreed to terms, restitution was made, apologies were given. Then, without consulting us, without even notifying the families of the victims, the federal prosecutors released the OLF suspects from prison. Our whole process was made irrelevant in one night. The community asked us, 'Why should we negotiate when the government just undoes everything we've accomplished?' We had no answer. They look up to us until the government reminds them that we have no actual power.

To support it FGD2 participants added that the gaps of indigenous conflict resolution mechanism that the elders are revered, but they are men, and they are all over sixty years old. The young men with guns do not sit under the tree. The women who know the names of the missing are not called to speak. I sit in these meetings because I refuse to be silent, but I am often the only woman in a room full of bearded men. They listen to me politely, but when it is time to act, they revert to their ways. Indigenous does not mean whole; it means we are products of the society that developed us, and that society did not allow everyone a voice. The young men with guns do not care what the elders decide, because they were never

⁶³ Interview with C15, January 2024

included in the decision. The mothers who buried their children know more about compromise than any elder does, but we are expected to prepare the food for the reconciliation ceremony and then go back to our homes. We must adapt, or we will reconcile the dead, and the living will continue to fight.

Key informant interview participant expresses the benefit of indigenous conflict resolution as⁶⁴;

The elders do not wait for announcements from above. They hear of a conflict, meet under a tree, send out messengers, and open talks in a matter of a few hours. Before the security forces finish their risk analysis, the conflict is already resolved. This is exactly why they work well; they act quickly, and the government is still in discussion mode. Nevertheless, quickness will not solve the problem; there is an open wound that will not go away in either community. During our conversations, the Oromo elders mention the year 2018; the Amhara elders speak of 2020. Both sides have their history of being victims. While we strive to look towards the future, it seems that the past is always between us when we come together. The main problem we have to deal with is the victim mentality because it doesn't allow any compromise. How can you ask somebody to forgive you when he sees himself as the one who had been wronged? The elders may prevent violence on any given day, but they can't erase the memories of that fight.

Equally, FGD4 participants added that traditional conflict resolution mechanism plays a significant role in community peace-building and conflict resolution. However, in recent years, these indigenous organizations and influential individuals have been struggling to gain political and legal support and an institutional framework to implement their decisions, and their influence has been waning. Therefore, it would be important for these organizations to receive legal, policy and operational support and play their own constructive role in ensuring sustainable peace. A KII participant summarized the role of traditional conflict resolution mechanism for Ataye conflict resolution as⁶⁵:

The effectiveness of the traditional mechanisms depends on the ability of those mechanisms to adapt to modern institutions. We have the legitimacy, but we do not have the enforcement power. We can persuade, but we cannot compel. We can mediate, but we cannot guarantee security. Without the state backing our

⁶⁴ Interview with C05, January 2024

⁶⁵ Interview with C10, January 2024

agreements, we are voices under a tree respected but easily ignored. This assessment led directly to prescriptions for integration of I strongly urge the city administration to closely collaborate with neighboring districts. When our council identifies a brewing conflict, the local government should deploy mediators, provide security for dialogue venues, and publicly endorse our recommendations. Not to replace us, but to amplify us. We know the community; they have the resources. Alone, we are insufficient; together, we could be transformative. These elder council member's account shows that while traditional mechanisms have better legitimacy and inclusiveness than government structures, their authority is still fatally susceptible to unilateral government actions that can annul all reconciliation efforts.

Equally, the accounts given by FGD1 subjects reveal yet another major shortcoming associated with the traditional processes: the subject believes that such processes have been created through history as a result of exclusion of women and youths in society, hence failing to address the grievances of the individuals who are responsible for or victims of the conflict. The account provided by the community member shows that although the efficiency of the traditional process has some advantages over that of the governmental system, it also suffers from the 'calendars of victimhood', which is a mental challenge not easily overcome by speed.

According to Table 41, most of the respondents (57.9%) who included those who agreed (46.8%) and those who strongly agreed (11.1%) confirmed that the traditional conflict resolution techniques were effective within the Ataye setting. Only 28.9% of the total number of respondents disagreed to this statement (10.5% strongly disagree and 18.4% disagree). The remaining 13.2% respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this perception. With 57.9% respondents confirming the effectiveness of the traditional conflict resolution techniques in Ataye against 28.9% who disagreed with this statement, we can conclude that traditional conflict resolution methods enjoyed some level of legitimacy in the eyes of many community members irrespective of the failure of many institutions mentioned earlier within the other focus group discussions.

Table 41 : Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms were Effective

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	40	10.5
Disagree	70	18.4
Neutral	50	13.2
Agree	178	46.8
Strongly agree	42	11.1
Total	380	100.0

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The analysis of the responses reveals that the indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are the most trusted yet least utilized resource in the Ataye community in responding to conflicts. The percentage of those who have a positive view of the statement, i.e., 57.9%, is higher compared to the state institutions. The participants have noted the inclusive nature of the elder councils, the efficiency of the process, and the cultural acceptability of the mechanisms in resolving conflicts. The fact that the state institutions have failed to respect the reconciliation mechanisms, such as the release of OLF suspects without the consent of the community, has been noted by the 28.9% of the total population. The issue of inclusiveness of the elder councils in terms of age and gender has also been noted, which shows the limitations of the mechanisms in fully addressing the conflict. The fact that the mechanisms have been able to establish a cease-fire in the region does not mean that they can handle the complex security situation in the region. The limitations of the indigenous mechanisms in fully addressing the conflict have been noted in the analysis of the responses, which affirms Pankhurst's claim of the indigenous mechanisms being overwhelmed by the national issues (J. Abbink, 2022; Graham et al., 2012). There should, therefore, be a conceptualized partnership between the indigenous mechanisms and the state institutions in order to enhance the effectiveness of the mechanisms in conflict resolution. The effectiveness of the indigenous mechanisms in conflict resolution can only be achieved through collaboration with the state institutions.

7.3.2. The House of Federation

Most FGD participants' questioned the effectiveness of the House of Federation (HoF) in the management of ethnic conflicts. Similarly, KII participants expressed it as⁶⁶;

The House of Federation lacks basic mechanisms such as a conflict monitoring system, which are very basic mechanisms that any institution that is serious about peace-building should have. How can any institution lay claim to responsibility for interpreting the constitution and intergovernmental relations without investing in the mechanisms to actually be able to see conflicts coming? We are dealing with recurring violence in Ataye from 2018 to 2023, yet the House acts as if its role begins only after a formal appeal has been lodged. It acts like an appellate court, responding to decisions that have already been made by regional councils instead of actively engaging in the resolution of conflicts at the grassroots level. By the time a conflict reaches the House of Federation, the violence has already occurred, the killings have already happened, and the House's intervention is merely a post-mortem examination instead of a life-saving intervention.

Another KII C03 added that the response of the House of Federation to claims based on identity has been marked by bias towards the interests of the regions over those of minorities. When the conflicts in Ataye erupted, we have seen that the House of Federation has always sided with the interests of the larger regional states rather than with the vulnerable minorities trapped between them. Most importantly, the House of Federation has completely failed to address the underlying issues that are fueling the conflict, namely the claim of self-administration by the minority community in Ataye and the administrative boundary dispute that has left our territory in constitutional limbo for years. These are constitutional matters that are squarely within the mandate of the House of Federation, and yet every year, they continue to be left unaddressed.

Similarly, FGD1-04 added that the House of Federation does not have an Early Warning System that would alert them to potential tensions along regional boundaries before they erupt into violence. Rather, their system is only triggered when a case is referred to them on appeal from a decision of a regional government council, and even then, they do not take the initiative to contact the communities. They carry out their research by engaging scholars from Addis Ababa University to give academic input to their final decision on the constitution,

⁶⁶ Interview with P01, January 2024

which means that the people living through the conflict are not heard in the entire process and cannot give input on their lived experiences to the decision-makers. However, the most painful truth is that the conflict issue in Ataye town was never presented to the House of Federation. The people living through the conflict, deaths, and displacements from 2018 up to 2023 could not access this institution despite the years of conflict, deaths, and displacements. There is a lack of communication link or channel between the HoF and regional states, and the absence of joint committees that can help ensure communication with the people, which makes it impossible for the HoF to get information from the people, mediate conflicts before they arise, or gain the people's trust as an inaccessible entity.

Additionally, the KII P03 further stated that the minority communities in Ataye quickly realized that their appeals to the House would be in vain because the House's prejudice in favor of the region's power-wielding authorities would ensure that their voices would never be given equal weight, and that their fundamental demands about where they belong and how they are governed would never be given a fair hearing. When the body entrusted with safeguarding the constitutional rights of citizens and adjudicating interregional disputes becomes a champion of regional rights, a spectator to boundary disputes, and an institution so remote that citizens cannot even get their cases before it, where do the minorities go?

As can be seen from Table 42, attitudes towards the effectiveness of the HoF in conflict resolution have, generally speaking, been negative. Almost 60% (43.2% disagreed and 15.8% strongly disagreed) found the work done by the House insufficient and ineffective. However, only about 24% (10.5% agreed and 13.7% strongly agreed) had positive opinions about it. As for the remaining 16.8%, they were neutral, which means that some respondents were unsure how to characterize its effectiveness.

Table 42 : House of Federation's Effectiveness in Conflict Resolution

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	60	15.8
Disagree	164	43.2
Neutral	64	16.8
Agree	40	10.5
Strongly agree	52	13.7
Total	380	100.0

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The triangulation analysis of qualitative interview findings along with quantitative research results demonstrates that the respondents' attitude to the effectiveness of the HoF in managing ethnic conflicts is extremely negative. The key issues identified during the interviews are similar to those revealed through the survey. Thus, one informant stated, "the HoF doesn't have the necessary mechanisms such as the conflict monitoring system to promote proactive conflict resolution."

In addition, the perception that "the reaction of the HoF to the issue of identity was biased in favor of regional interests at the expense of minorities" is in perfect congruence with the result of the survey that found 58.9 percent of those surveyed to strongly disagree or disagree with the statement that the HoF helped conflict resolution. The survey's strong focus on deficiencies in communication, especially "lack of communication channel between the HoF and regional states and absence of joint committees," serves to reinforce the findings of the survey, which found 16.8 percent to have a neutral position towards the question whether the HoF helped to resolve conflicts in the area. This suggests that some members of the community might not be fully aware of what the HoF does because of their lack of connection and outreach. Finally, the gap between 58.9 percent of those who disagree with the effectiveness of the HoF and 24.2 percent who agree with its usefulness constitutes the most negative opinion among all institutions surveyed.

This overlap reinforces the participants' description of the House acting only as "an appellate court that reacts to decisions made by regional councils but does not actively mediate grassroots conflicts," making the organization inherently unable to tackle the problem of ethnic violence at the root level. According to research on federal governance in Ethiopia, the inherent flaws in the constitutional setup of the House of Federation favoring regional representation over minority protection mechanisms have led to systematic biases exhibited in both the actions taken by the institution and the perceptions about it held by people (Fessha, 2020), whereas the lack of an established system of conflict monitoring points to systemic failures in Ethiopia's Early Warning Systems, which were observed across various sectors of the country's governance (Afesha, 2022; T. Bihonegn, 2015; Mengie, 2022). This triangulation makes it clear that the House is a governmental body that failed to live up to its constitutionally-given task of handling conflicts in.

7.3.3. The Ministry of Peace

The KII participants emphasized the multi-level mediation process that the Ministry of Peace (MoP) adopted in resolving the Ataye conflict. KII participant pointed out that⁶⁷,

The Ministry of Peace held their first meeting with leaders from Ataye and North Shewa Zone after our town had been attacked eight times since 2018. I attended these meetings because I watched our whole population displaced and our town burned in April 2021. At that point, we were aware of the Ministry's newly launched Conflict Early Warning/Rapid Response System in 2019, which established a system from kebele to federal level where community field monitors and citizens could alert authorities through SMS to a free call center, with a requirement that all signals and incidents must be responded to within 24 hours. However, this system never functioned in Ataye. We had no field monitors, no one answered our calls, and the 24:00 reporting requirement was a cruel joke, especially since violence occurred with regularity. We appreciated the facilitation of brainstorming sessions by the Ministry, but how do you trust your mediator when his or her own Early Warning Systems failed to give any kind of prior warning before our town burned? An organization that arrives after eight attacks, with all its sophisticated systems not functioning within our reality, cannot hope to separate its mediator from its failed structure.

For the same reason, FGD4-02 added that peace officers deployed between 2018 and 2023, we knew the technical design of CEWs well. We knew it was designed to receive reports from kebele field monitors and community SMS messages through a free call center, and signals and incidents would be escalated through the woreda, zone, and regional levels within 24 hours of receipt of signals and incidents and finally to the Ministry if necessary. This was the theory. In practice, Ataye had slipped through every crack in the design. By January 2023, after the eighth attack, we had to admit to ourselves that the response pathway from kebele to woreda to zone to region to federal level, which the CEW system was designed to facilitate, existed only on paper. We organized meetings and drafted agreements, but without the Early Warning System in place and without responders to the signals and incidents responding to our calls and reviewing our cases, the Ministry's responses remained

⁶⁷ Interview with P04, January 2024

disconnected from the very system we had designed to make them effective. Similarly, KII participant one of them expressed it as⁶⁸;

A joint peace and development forum between the North Shewa Zone and the Oromo National Administration of the Amhara Region was held in Ataye city under the theme “From Ramadan to Ramadan; From Resurrection to Resurrection”. The forum was attended by senior leaders and national defense officers from Ataye and Sanbete cities, as well as from Efrata and Gedem districts, and from Jile Tmuga district. He said that the area had been destroyed by anti-peace forces for a long time, and that the work done on it has now brought peace. He mentioned that they have started trading together after getting out of the chaos they were in. He said that during the Ramadan activities carried out with neighboring districts last year, Ataye city and its surroundings have been restored to peace and have moved towards development. He explained that now, by coming out of the conflict, they have been able to create a situation where youth can organize sports competitions and trade together. He said that the region has shifted to development activities as the work that has been done involving the people has yielded results. He also stated that the two neighboring zones are working together to eliminate those who want to create conflict in the region. We are working to build a strong peace in the region and make it a development area. The lands that were destroyed in the previous conflicts have been brought into production by cultivating them. He also stated that the destructive groups should refrain from their actions and follow the peace option.

The findings presented in Table 43 on the role of the Ministry of Peace in addressing the root causes of inter-ethnic conflict in Ataye depict a mixed but supportive view. 47.2% of the total participants expressed a level of agreement with the statement, with a further 31.1% agreeing and a further 16.1% strongly agreeing. However, 29.5% of the total participants expressed a level of skepticism about the effectiveness of the Ministry of Peace in addressing the root causes of inter-ethnic conflict in the region. The neutral responses, which made up 23.4%, depict a level of ambivalence or uncertainty about the effectiveness of the ministry.

⁶⁸ Interview with KII S03, 2024

Table 43 : Assessment of Ministry of Peace's for Inter-Ethnic Conflict in Ataye

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	42	11.1
Disagree	70	18.4
Neutral	89	23.4
Agree	118	31.1
Strongly agree	61	16.1
Total	380	100.0

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The analysis of the findings from the qualitative study on the role of the Ministry of Peace in addressing the root causes of inter-ethnic conflict in Ataye, in addition to the quantitative study, reveals a complex situation. The fact that the people appreciate the structure of the Ministry of Peace in promoting dialogue in the region, in addition to the fact that a total of 47.2% of the total participants agree with the statement, a further 29.5% express skepticism about the effectiveness of the Ministry of Peace in addressing the root causes of inter-ethnic conflict in the region, and a further 23.4% remain neutral about the effectiveness of the ministry, depict a situation where there is a need for the Ministry of Peace to enhance its credibility . It is supported by other studies include(Bersunega, 2019; Gebeyehu, 2023; D. C. Mengistu, 2021) .

7.3.4. The Criminal Justice System

The participants in the interviews offered scathing criticisms of how the criminal justice system handled the Ataye conflict. KII participant expressed it as follows⁶⁹;

I was part of the crime investigation committee formed specifically to deal with the atrocities committed during the attack on Ataye in April 2021, where more than 300 people were killed and the whole town was set on fire. The committee was made up of federal police, regional police from Amhara and Oromia, zonal security forces, and public prosecutors from different jurisdictions. However, despite the severity of the crimes we were dealing with, we were unable to come to a consensus on who had the power to investigate, which had the power to arrest, and who had the power to prosecute the offenders. Consequently, no arrest and prosecution occurred. Nobody was held accountable for the massacre. The jurisdictional conflict between the federal and regional governments completely

⁶⁹ Interview with S05, January 2024

crippled our efforts. To add to our woes, even when court directives were finally issued in some of the cases that limped along, the prisons refused to carry out the directives because they did not have the jurisdiction over prisoners from other regions. We saw guilty men walk out of prison not because they lacked evidence, but because the criminal justice system was unable to determine which government had the crime.

To support it the FGD1-03 further explained that the classification of crimes related to the Ataye conflict became a political issue rather than a legal one. From my vantage point as a representative of the regional interests, we argued consistently that the crime is an aggravated homicide, and it is within our jurisdiction to investigate. We had the evidence, we had the witnesses, and we had the constitutional authority to prosecute crimes committed within our territory. However, the federal authorities would not defer to us, and the Amhara regional authorities had a claim of their own regarding crimes committed against their citizens. This is never about legal semantics; it is a political strategy of localization or nationalization of conflicts depending on which level of government would benefit from it. The victims in Ataye did not care whether the federal or regional prosecutors pursued their cases; they cared about justice. However, the justice system failed them completely because the battle over classification sucked up all the energy that should have been devoted to investigation. Between 2018 and 2023, through various waves of violence, we have witnessed the failure of the criminal justice system because of these battles over jurisdiction, with the perpetrators taking advantage of the gaps created by our competing authorities. Key informant interview participant said it⁷⁰;

What happened to us in Ataye from 2018 to 2023 doesn't neatly classify under anyone's law, and it's because of this in definition that we have never received any semblance of justice. The federal government has called it civil war, implying we are victims of war between insurgents and the state. The regional government has called it aggravated homicide, implying we are victims of a series of individual murders. Neither of these classifications fits the ethnic cleansing, massacres, and displacement we experienced. Ethiopia has a gaping gap in the law where international crimes are supposed to be categorized. We have no law to prosecute systematic ethnic violence. This classification conflict

⁷⁰ Interview with P04, January 2024

has essentially rendered the entire legal system useless. The energy of the investigators was spent on debating Article 240 versus Article 538, instead of gathering evidence and protecting the victims. The absence of an impartial, atrocity-centered legal framework meant that the quest for justice was derailed by the same ethnic and political conflicts that the justice was supposed to address. We have buried more than 300 people since April 2021 alone, and not a single perpetrator has been brought to book because the law does not have a vocabulary for what they did to us.

Correspondingly, KII P04 said that the Amhara Scholars' Advisory Council press release also called it genocide than conflict. One of the participants recalled it as⁷¹;

It said that deeply saddened by the loss of life and property caused by the genocide. The advisory council urged the Amhara regional state and the federal government to take appropriate action against the militants who were directly involved in this act and the organizers of the terrorist and identity-based attacks in the Oromo Nationality Zone Administration. It said that the priority duty of the government is to protect the security of citizens, and the regional and federal governments should fulfill this duty properly. The advisory council indicated that the ongoing serial and coordinated attacks are part of a conspiracy to destroy the Amhara people, to harass the Amhara people and to disrupt peace, to weaken and destroy the regional government in various directions, and to weaken the regional Special Forces. The federal government, all regional governments, and the administrations of the two cities, while observing the continuous and unceasing acts of genocide against the Amhara, have failed to openly condemn the attacks by their correct names, the advisory said, and the Amhara people are deeply saddened. It called on the people to actively monitor the attacks that are being carried out in a systematic and coordinated manner, to defend themselves in an organized manner, to stand by the security forces, and to help the affected parties in every way they can. It added that appropriate systemic and structural adjustments should be made, including amending the regional constitution, to permanently stop the repeated acts of genocide and terrorism.

⁷¹ Interview with D06, January 2024

Besides, FGD4-06 added that the one thing that damaged the faith of the community in the justice system more than anything else has been the dismissal of charges in the name of public interest. We observed numerous instances of investigations, arrests, and political directives to discontinue the cases, dropping the charges against the armed groups. In fact, the dismissal of cases for public interest takes place without giving any compensation to the victims or providing any reason. Moreover, we have observed cases being dropped despite evidence because it was politically unfavorable to continue the case. The result of such behavior from the government authorities was a continuous cycle of violence, investigation, dropping of cases, followed by more violence.

Moreover, according to KII S06, when the dismissal of cases in public interest occurs, it does not take place on any principles of restorative justice; rather, it happens through political bargaining, trading off justice for security. When the government itself condones impunity through its legal process, it becomes an encouragement to engage in violent self-help and revenge. The community's confidence in the justice system has been completely undermined, and reconciliation has become impossible because the victims know that their attackers will never be held accountable. The criminal justice system failed not only by doing nothing but by actually contributing to the escalation of the conflict by making it clear that serious crimes would not be punished, thereby forcing our community to seek alternative ways of getting justice. Similarly, most FGD participants' said that we can see that the public's rate of reporting crimes to the police is steadily declining because they have seen that, in the past, they have not been given the proper justice, so why should they be reported again. Therefore, the community organized, trained and procured weapon for self-defense from attackers.

The data provided in Table 44 indicates that 51% are doubtful about the system's effectiveness since 32.6% disagree and 18.4% strongly disagree. However, only 33.2% (22.4% agree and 10.8% strongly agree) are of the view that it is effective in ensuring accountability among criminals. The 15.8%, who are neutral also show a level of ambivalence by participants regarding the system's effectiveness.

Table 44 : The Criminal Justice System Ensures Rule of Law

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	70	18.4
Disagree	124	32.6
Neutral	60	15.8
Agree	85	22.4
Strongly agree	41	10.8
Total	380	100.0

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The qualitative and quantitative data show a high level of skepticism regarding the criminal justice system's effectiveness in addressing inter-ethnic violence in Ataye. In the qualitative study, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system as being chaotic and ineffective in addressing violence in their region. The participants cited conflicts between federal and regional governments that have led to stagnation in addressing violence. For example, a member of the investigation committee cited a situation where a crime investigation team failed to reach a consensus regarding a case, leading to a lack of prosecution and arrests. This is also evident in the quantitative study where 51% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that the criminal justice system ensures accountability among criminals. The participants also cited difficulties in enforcing court orders as a way of showing the system's inefficiency. Inconsistency in the classification of violence by different levels of government, as cited by a regional representative, also shows how politics have affected the conflict. The inefficiency of the legal system to deal with "unmodified atrocity crimes" also indicates a problem with legal frameworks.

7.3.5. Comparative Analysis of Nine Conflict Response Actors

The conflict early response actors rated by the respondents include the DRM Council, Security Council, Security Task Force, De Facto Command Post, De Jure Command Post, Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms, House of Federation, Ministry of Peace, and Criminal Justice System. Due to the nature of the data collected from the respondents, which was ordinal, as well as the nature of the study design, which was a repeated-measures design, the Friedman test was used as the main statistical tool for analyzing the data. This was followed by the use of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for performing post-hoc tests after the Friedman test, with a Bonferroni correction for controlling Type I error rates. The results

showed that there were statistically significant differences between the nine conflict early response actors in terms of their perceived level of effectiveness.

The Friedman test Table 45 shows compare the effectiveness ratings between the nine actors. The results show that there is a significant difference between the actors, as the p-value is less than .05, rejecting the null hypothesis that the distribution of the data is the same for all the actors. There is a significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of at least two of the nine actors.

Table 45 Friedman Test Results

Test Statistic	Value
N	380
Chi-Square	187.42
Df	8
Asymptotic Sig.	< .001

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2024

The ranking and statistical data presented in Table 47 shows the rankings and statistical data that provide insights into the distinct perceptions regarding the effectiveness of various conflict response institutions in managing conflicts. The traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are ranked first with a median rating of 4.0, a mode rating of 4, which corresponds to “Agree,” and a mean rating of 6.82. The De Jure Command Post ranks second with the same median rating of 4.0, but its mean rating is 6.54, showing similar levels of support for its effectiveness. The Security Council and the Ministry of Peace also perform well, with median ratings of 4.0, along with mean ratings of 6.21 and 5.87, respectively. On the other hand, the DRM Council receives more divergent perceptions regarding its effectiveness, with a median rating of 3.0, a mode rating of 2, corresponding to “Disagree,” and a mean rating of 4.95. The Security Task Force also receives some level of agreement, but the mean rating is lower, at 4.78. On the other hand, the Criminal Justice System, the House of Federation, and the De Facto Command Post receive low ratings, with all having a median rating of 2.0, corresponding to “Disagree,” along with lower mean ratings.

Table 46 Comparison of the 9 Conflict Early Response Actors

Rank	Institution	Median	Mode	Mean
1	Traditional Conflict Resolution	4.0	4 (Agree)	6.82
2	De Jure Command Post	4.0	4 (Agree)	6.54
3	Security Council	4.0	4 (Agree)	6.21
4	Ministry of Peace	4.0	4 (Agree)	5.87
5	DRM Council	3.0	2 (Disagree)	4.95
6	Security Task Force	3.0	4 (Agree)	4.78
7	Criminal Justice System	3.0	2 (Disagree)	4.12
8	House of Federation	2.0	2 (Disagree)	3.45
9	De Facto Command Post	2.0	2 (Disagree)	3.26

Note: Median based on 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

Table 47 shows the post-hoc pairwise comparisons via Wilcoxon signed-rank test with Bonferroni correction show statistically significant differences in perceived effectiveness for the conflict early response actors, with all comparisons satisfying the very conservative adjusted significance level of $p < .0014$. The results show, in all cases, the superiority of Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms, which outperformed significantly both the De Facto Command Post ($Z = -12.34$, $p < .001$) and the Security Task Force ($Z = -7.89$, $p < .001$), reflecting the community's deep-rooted confidence in culturally embedded institutions rather than formal or quasi-formal ones. Following suit, the Security Council emerged as significantly more effective than the Criminal Justice System ($Z = -10.92$, $p < .001$) and DRM Council ($Z = -8.21$, $p < .001$). The implications of this finding are that even some of the formal actors who operate on a mandate are held in higher regard compared to bureaucracy and less effective formal institutions.

This point is important to mention considering the existence of a significant difference between De Jure and De Facto Command Posts ($Z = -10.45$, $p < .001$). It goes without saying that it demonstrates how crucial legality is since the entities under a legal system are perceived much more favorably compared to those that do not belong to a legal system. Overall, the findings presented above clearly show that in terms of institutional trust in Ataye, a hierarchical structure exists where traditional instruments, alongside formal actors within a legal system, are at the top end of the hierarchy.

Table 47 : Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test with Bonferroni Correction

Comparison Pair	Z-score	Adjusted Significance
De Facto Command Post vs. Traditional Mechanisms	-12.34	< .001
House of Federation vs. Traditional Mechanisms	-11.56	< .001
Criminal Justice System vs. Security Council	-10.92	< .001
De Jure Command Post vs. De Facto Command Post	-10.45	< .001
DRM Council vs. Security Council	-8.21	< .001
Security Task Force vs. Traditional Mechanisms	-7.89	< .001

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2024

There was a statistically significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of the nine conflict early response actors ($\chi^2 = 187.42$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the respondents distinguish between trusted institutions and non-trusted institutions. Three of the conflict early response actors perceived to be the most effective with a median score of 4 (Agree) are the Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms (mean rank = 6.82), Security Council (mean rank = 6.54), and De Jure Command Post (mean rank = 6.31). The reason for the high ranking of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms can be attributed to the fact that, according to Murithi (2006), traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Africa are still effective because of the values instilled in the people. This was evident in the Key Informant Interview conducted with the elders C08 in Ataye who remarked that when the government cannot solve our problems, we resort to the elders. They know our culture, our families, and our land. His or her judgment is not written down anywhere, but everybody knows it by heart.

Table 48 Friedman Test Results for Early Response

Actor	Median	Mean Rank	χ^2	Df	p-value
Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms	4.00	6.82	187.42	8	< .001
Security Council	4.00	6.54			
De Jure Command Post	4.00	6.31			
Ministry of Peace	3.00	5.18			
DRM Council	3.00	4.96			
Security Task Force	3.00	4.85			
Criminal Justice System	2.00	3.87			
House of Federation	2.00	3.42			
De Facto Command Post	2.00	3.05			

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2024

Another FGD1-05 contributed that the Security Council comes with guns and orders. The elders come with coffee and wisdom. Which one do you think brings lasting peace? Such qualitative insights help to contextualize the quantitative results, implying that cultural proximity and familiarity with process are essential factors in determining perceived effectiveness. At the other extreme, three actors received the lowest median rating of 2 (Disagree): the De Facto Command Post (mean rank = 3.05), the House of Federation (mean rank = 3.42), and the Criminal Justice System (mean rank = 3.87). The profoundly negative perception of the De Facto Command Post, which was significantly lower than Traditional Mechanisms in pairwise tests ($Z = -12.34$, $p < .001$), reflects the underlying concerns of the community with institutions that function outside of legal structures.

Furthermore, KII conducted with C015 was revealed that the De Facto Command Post is just a name for armed groups who take the law into their own hands. They are not accountable to anyone. When they 'resolve' a conflict, they simply impose their will, and the community lives in fear. This is similar to the study about the problematic nature of hybrid governance arrangements involving the involvement of armed groups in the provision of security, without the corresponding level of accountability (Menkhaus, 2010). Moreover, the low rating of the House of Federation contradicts its constitutional mandate as the ultimate arbiter in inter-ethnic conflict situations. To support it FGD4-04 said that we once sent our grievance to the House of Federation. After a year, we received a response in legalese that was beyond our understanding. The conflict was already at an advanced stage at that time. They are too far from us, in Addis Ababa, deciding our lives. These sentiments resonate with study argument that there are often legitimacy challenges to federal institutions in Ethiopia at the local level because of centralization and bureaucratic inaccessibility (Wondimu & Gebresenbet, 2018).

The moderate group, which includes the Ministry of Peace (mean rank = 5.18), DRM Council (mean rank = 4.96), and Security Task Force (mean rank = 4.85), appears to be a group that reflects a degree of ambivalence from the public, as indicated by their median rating of 3 (Neutral). These organizations seem to be in a state of limbo, as their activities may not be consistent. This was corroborated by KII D05 from the DRM Council admitted that we have success stories in some kebeles, but in others, people do not even know we exist. Our resources are limited, and we cannot be everywhere at once. When we arrive late, the damage is already done, and we are blamed for not preventing it. This corroborates the quantitative

results that showed that the mean rank for the DRM Council (4.96) places them in the middle tier, as they are not at the lower end of the scale. The Security Task Force, despite their operational role, seems to be having similar challenges. Another KII C09 offered that the Security Task Force arrives when there is fighting, but they do not address the causes. They only treat the symptoms, not the disease. When they leave, tension still remains, and we know another fight will occur soon. This statement is also similar to the general peace-building literature that stresses the importance of looking beyond violence to resolve conflicts (Alemneh, 2025).

The glaring divergence between traditional mechanisms and formal institutions gives rise to basic questions regarding their legitimacy and efficacy in addressing conflicts. Similarly, the FGD participants' vividly captured the dilemma that the government asks us to trust their courts and their councils. Nevertheless, we ask them: do you know our customs? Do you know who offended whom and why? They come with books and laws written in Amharic, but our conflicts are not about books; they are about relations. The quote above illustrates the inadequacy of strictly law-based approaches in societies where social capital and relations are at a premium. On the other hand, the somewhat higher rating of the Security Council compared to other formal actors' points to the potential that, when state institutions appear to be functioning well and are accessible, trust from the local community can be built. Another KII CO2 said that last year, the Security Council responded quickly when there was a potential ethnic conflict that started over a market dispute. They listened to both sides of the story, made a fair decision, and I changed my opinion of them after that.

The CJS system's low rating (median = 2) is also a concern, considering its importance in maintaining the rule of law. A legal aid worker interviewed for this study had this to say about the CJ system: "Many people in Ataye do not believe that justice is served by the courts, especially when there is a conflict between different ethnic groups. They think that the system is biased, or that the 'other' side has connections. So, they keep quiet, or they take things into their own hands. But either way, the conflict continues." This is also echoed by Aalen & Tronvoll's (2009) empirical study on the politicization of ethnicity in legal institutions in Ethiopia, which often results in a lack of public confidence in justice being served (Aalen et al., 2019). Another KII S05 who had a personal experience of inter-ethnic violence narrated: "The people who attacked our village were arrested, but then they were

released after one month. I do not know why this happened. This is another mystery for me. However, I don't inform the police on anything anymore."

The findings presented herein hold substantial significance for policy and practice in Ataye and similar contexts. First, traditional conflict resolution processes ought to be acknowledged as valuable contemporary institutions rather than merely as romanticized remnants of the past. It is imperative for authorities to consider their incorporation into early warning mechanisms, to allocate necessary resources for their functioning, and to establish institutional links between these traditional entities and state apparatus.

Second, the existing state institutions including the *De Facto* Command Post, the House of Federation, and the Criminal Justice System necessitate a comprehensive transformation aimed at enhancing transparency, accessibility, and a sense of justice. As indicated by FGD3-02, the House of Federation should adopt a decentralized approach by conducting hearings in the localities affected by conflicts. Such actions would signify to citizens that their opinions are valued, addressing the current lack of visibility.

Third, moderately ranked institutions, such as the Ministry of Peace and the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Council, possess significant potential for growth through capacity building, enhanced visibility, and sustained community interaction. As articulated by key informant P03, "We desire to place our trust in these institutions. We require them to operate effectively. However, they must demonstrate their value through tangible actions." This must be accomplished not solely through verbal assurances but through a clearly defined roadmap that delineates their commitments and objectives.

7.4. Summary of Findings

The comparative analysis clearly indicates the existence of a hierarchy in the perceived effectiveness of the conflict response actors in the study area. The result of the Friedman test ($\chi^2 = 187.42$, $df = 8$, $p < 0.001$) confirms the rejection of the null hypothesis, validating the existence of different tiers in the perceived effectiveness of the nine institutions in the study area. The post-hoc pairwise tests conducted using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, incorporating the Bonferroni adjustment, established that there are statistically significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of each pair of actors, thereby affirming the hierarchy of institutional trust in the Ataye community. As expected, Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms emerged as the most trusted actor, significantly outperforming the

De Facto Command Post ($Z = -12.34, p < .001$) and the Security Task Force ($Z = -7.89, p < .001$). The Security Council emerged as the second most effective actor, significantly outperforming the Criminal Justice System ($Z = -10.92, p < .001$) and the DRM Council ($Z = -8.21, p < .001$). Perhaps most interestingly, the comparison between the command centers established that legally established institutions have higher confidence levels than their de facto counterparts, since the De Jure Command Post was rated significantly higher than the De Facto Command Post ($Z = -10.45, p < .001$). These findings affirm that traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and formally constituted institutions have the highest confidence levels in the Ataye community, while the perceptions of de facto entities and poorly performing formal institutions have the lowest effectiveness in responding to conflict situations.

The research findings decisively demonstrate that institutional legitimacy in Ethiopia is not derived from legal or constitutional authority, but from public perceptions of impartiality, accessibility, cultural relevance, and effectiveness in protecting communities. Indigenous approaches, such as elder councils using Shimglina and Gadaa systems, succeeded because they were inclusive, swift, and focused on restoration rather than punishment. In stark contrast, state security institutions like the Security Task Force and De Facto Command Post performed poorly, with the latter receiving a 63.2% negative assessment. These bodies were seen as tools of suppression, plagued by bureaucratic paralysis, political selectivity, and a "securitization trap" that reduced complex socio-political issues to law-and-order problems. Their coercive approaches merely delayed conflict, failing to address root grievances and often leaving communities more polarized and traumatized after their interventions.

The most constitutionally significant institutions the House of Federation and the Criminal Justice System were found to be in the midst of deep legitimacy crises, with 58.9% and 51.0% negative perceptions, respectively. Criticisms included partiality, jurisdictional disputes, an inability to enforce judicial orders, and a politicized handling of crime classification, all of which reinforced the notion that justice serves only the powerful and perpetuated cycles of extra-constitutional revenge.

CHAPTER EIGHT: EFFECTS OF EARLY WARNING ON EARLY RESPONSE

This chapter deals with the effects of early warning, which refers to conflict risk knowledge monitoring, and communication on early response. Hence, it examines effect of risk knowledge, monitoring, and communication is paramount for facilitating timely and effective responses to conflict.

8.1. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Most KII said that Early Warning Systems (EWS) are not just technologies; they are complex socio-technical processes designed to trigger effective early response. At the heart of the core effectiveness of any EWS lie the three supporting and interlinked pillars of Risk Knowledge, Monitoring and Forecasting, and Warning Communication. Nevertheless, the question of just how these different pillars contribute to the successful early response is a complex one that demands a level of understanding by policy-makers and disaster response managers that only Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) Analysis can hope to fulfill.

To explain it more KII D01 said that if the speed, scope, and efficiency of the Early Response process are specified as the dependent variable, a relationship can be established to define the manner in which it is influenced by the quantified attributes of the three pillars specified as independent variables, i.e., Risk Knowledge (X_1) quantified by the level of perception of the people in the community and the accuracy of the historical data; Monitoring & Forecasting (X_2) quantified by the reliability of the technical system and the accuracy of the lead times; and Warning Communication (X_3) quantified by the clarity of the message, the diversity of the communication channels, and the level of trust in the source of the communication. The MLR model $\text{Early Response} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$ - helps to transcend the limitations of the qualitative approach by providing a quantitative measure of the influence of the individual pillars while controlling the influence of the other two.

The qualitative part of the study, which employed key informant interviews with 39 key stakeholders in Ataye town, also generated important and profound insights into the system failures that result in the warning-response gap. The KII participants expressed frustrations over the gap between the early warning and the actual response or preventive action. Among

them KII participant from Ataye described the gaps between the early warning and response in the following words⁷²:

We gather data on a daily basis from the kebeles. We have our field monitors who brief us on the tensions related to grazing land, conflicts related to water points, and hate speeches during coffee ceremonies. We submit these reports to the zonal offices through the proper communication channel. Nevertheless, nothing happens. We wait until blood starts flowing. It is as though we are watching a fire burn and waiting for the fire to consume everything before we call the fire brigade.

It highlights the presence of the knowledge action gap since there is knowledge about the issue but not a desire to take action. An interviewee has been working as a field monitor in North Shewa for more than a decade, and he has highlighted the difficulty of responding to the issue due to institutional fragmentation. The main problem is not that the actors lack knowledge about the issue, but the fact that different institutions base their judgment of the seriousness of an issue on a different set of indicators. For instance, while the law enforcement authority will wait for some physical fights to happen, the Peace and Security Bureau requires a written report by the administrator while the disaster management unit looks into displacements figures as an indicator of the seriousness of the issue. This means that once all these indicators are met, violence might have happened. A need therefore exists for an integrated mechanism rather than a fragmented one. Statement is justified by KII P03 in which it was revealed that the 44 indicators identified by the Ministry of Peace were different from the indicators used by the police and disaster management, hence causing inconsistency in monitoring activities. Without common standardized indicators, parallel structures have been formed which do not work together hence overlooking important indicators of warning.

The following explanation is from a police officer in Ataye Police Station who gave a detailed explanation of how the perspective of the peace actors and security actors are different when it comes to monitoring conflicts⁷³.

As a police office, we have our own crime risk profile, which also indicates conflict. Nevertheless, our indicators are not similar to those of the Ministry of

⁷² Interview with P02, January 2024

⁷³ Interview with P05, January 2024

Peace. Our monitoring activities are carried out through previous assault cases, troublesome persons, weapon confiscation, and physical fighting. The Ministry of Peace speaks of social cohesion and hate speech. These are valid points, but these are not crimes. Thus, when they alert us to “increasing tensions,” we cannot take any action because our legal mandate is to have evidence of criminal intent or conduct. We need specific intelligence about planned attacks, not general assessments of community mood.

This testimony highlights the major problem of institutional misalignment, wherein security actors work under a legal framework that demands different levels of action than the social levels monitored by peace actors. Another interview participant continued to explain the dual systems of monitoring that exist in the security sector⁷⁴:

The intelligence office monitors the conflict indicators using different methods, such as the interception of communication from suspected persons, crime statistics data, and the use of informants. In addition, we have a 24-hour reporting obligation to the federal police, as well as the reporting of certain events as they happen. If we arrest a person suspected of inciting violence, for example, we collect the necessary information from the interrogated suspect and witnesses. This information is then analyzed by the police intelligence department before it is forwarded to the crime prevention unit as a conflict warning for a potential police operation. This is to say that security actors operate on the basis of the intelligence reports they have gathered and not the conflict warnings received from the peace actors.

This description explains a significant aspect of the warning-response gap, specifically the existence of parallel and unconnected monitoring systems. Security actors engage in interventions through intelligence-based frameworks that yield response-oriented information, whereas peace actors undertake interventions via community-based frameworks that generate warning-oriented information. These frameworks operate independently of one another, resulting in the response-oriented information from security actors not benefitting peace actors and the warning-oriented information from peace actors not being utilized by security actors.

⁷⁴ Interview with S04, January 2024

The FGD3 participants indicated that a member of the youth peace club shared insights regarding the absence of communication from the community level to decision-makers. Following the incidents of violence in 2021, they organized peace forums that facilitated dialogue among youth from both sides, addressing rumors circulating in the marketplace and identifying individuals who propagate hatred within the community. This information was subsequently relayed to the peace council. However, decision-makers, stationed in offices in Debre Birhan or Bahir Dar, do not engage directly with the community and are consequently unaware of the concerns shared by residents. As a result, when community members indicate that danger is approaching, decision-makers often perceive these warnings as exaggerations until violence manifests. This situation underscores a critical deficiency in the communication of information from the community to decision-makers. The subsequent quote from an interview participant further illustrates this predicament⁷⁵:

I receive reports on a daily basis. Some of them are genuine, some are exaggerations, and some are politically motivated accusations. I have to make judgments on what is an emergency and what is not. Moreover, judgments take time. Meanwhile, I have to manage resources. I have only five vehicles for the entire zone. I don't have a response fund. Even when I want to respond, I have to seek budgetary approval. Moreover, by the time I get resources, the situation has escalated. This is a clear indication that it is not only a matter of response to the warnings, but also a matter of capacity that leads to delay even when the warnings are accepted.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of the fragmentation of institutions is the following testimony from an interview participant⁷⁶:

The Ministry of Peace is not a member of the National Security Council. They are also not members of the security task force and the Disaster Risk Management council at the federal level. This means that when decisions on national security are made, the ministry that deals with peacebuilding and early warning is not in the room. The warnings that they produce do not feed into the security operations. However, at the level of the Amhara region, there is a different story. The Peace and

⁷⁵ Interview with P06, January 2024

⁷⁶ Interview with P03, January 2024

Security Administration heads what we call the mini security council this is the executive body that brings together peace actors, security actors, and administrators. Nevertheless, here is the critical gap: The Disaster Risk Management council is not a member of this mini security cabinet. This means that even at the regional level, the actors who deal with disaster response, which includes conflict-induced displacement, are not part of the security decision-making body that decides on preventive measures.

This testimony shows a critical level of structural dysfunction, given that the institutional framework for early warning and response is split at multiple levels. At the federal level, the Ministry of Peace is not part of the national security decision-making structures. At the regional level, the Disaster Risk Management council, which would coordinate the response to conflict-related emergencies, is not part of the mini security cabinet. This implies that the early warnings from peace actors are not directly fed into the security operations and that the response coordination structures are not linked to the response actors. Quantitative analysis offers empirical validation to the qualitative narratives and also shows the exact order of factors affecting the effectiveness of early response strategies.

Table 49 shows the value of the multiple correlation coefficient ($R = .830$) shows a very strong positive relationship between the predictor variables and the dependent variable. More importantly, the value of the R Square (.688) shows that the entire components of the Early Warning System collectively contribute to the explanation of 68.8 percent of the total variance in the efficacy of early response strategies. This value does not significantly differ from the adjusted R Square value, which is .686, and shows a reliable value without inflation effects, which may not generalize to the entire population. The value of the standard error of the estimate is relatively low at .37692, indicating that the predictions made by the model regarding the efficacy of early response strategies are relatively precise with narrow confidence intervals. This finding supported by study asserts that effective Early Warning System is the outcome of risk knowledge, monitoring, communication and early response. It also verified the assertion that the higher the predictive results and higher the transparency/accessibility scores, the higher the system's performance (Ishola et al., 2025). The positive correlation between monitoring actors and the effectiveness of Early Warning Systems ($R = 0.917$) established in other studies to explain 84.1% of the variance in the results supports the findings of this study.

Table 49 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.830a	.688	.686	.37692

a. Predictors: (Constant), Conflict Communication, Risk Knowledge, Monitoring

b. Dependent Variable: early response

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The findings in Table 50 regarding the ANOVA test show compelling evidence regarding the statistical significance of the regression model. The regression sum of squares (117.865) far outweighs the residual sum of squares (53.419), thus providing evidence that the model accounts for a significant proportion of the total variation in conflict early response. The model also yields a highly significant F-statistic of 276.541 with only 3 degrees of freedom for the regression model and 376 for the residuals. The p-value of the model (.000) thus indicates that the model predicts conflict early response significantly beyond chance levels. This suggests that at least one of the predictors, or all three predictors combined, significantly contribute to the model's ability to explain variations in early response effectiveness. Such findings are thus in line with methodological research that stresses the significance of using ANOVA in regression analysis to validate the overall significance of predictor variables in regression models.

Table 50 : ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	117.865	3	39.288	276.541	.000
	Residual	53.419	376	.142		
	Total	171.284	379			

a. Dependent Variable: conflict early response

b. Predictors: (Constant), conflict communication, risk knowledge, monitoring

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The regression coefficients shown in Table 51, there is a clear ordering of the relative importance of conflict early response, which is essential for understanding which aspects of early warning are most important. The Conflict Communication variable emerges as the most critical among all the variables considered in the analysis with an exceedingly high standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = .567$; $t = 10.925$; $p < .001$). This implies that

enhancing conflict communication through clarity in messages, varied channels, and credible sources has the biggest impact on the mobilization process. For every one standard deviation increase in the effectiveness of conflict communication, there is a corresponding increase of 0.567 standard deviations in the effectiveness of early response, after controlling for other variables. This quantitative finding says a lot about the qualitative findings that were offered by the youth peace club participant who complained that "the people who make decisions sit in offices... they do not hear what we hear." The statistical preeminence of communication reinforces the finding that the most important leverage point for improving response effectiveness is to bridge the spatial and social divide between information sources and decision-makers.

The Conflict Monitoring shows a large positive effect ($\beta = .356$, $t = 6.217$, $p < .001$), which again emphasizes the significance of data collection and the reliability of technical systems as key supporting columns of early warning. This is in line with the testimony of the field monitor regarding institutional fragmentation the fact that monitoring exists is not sufficient, and it is essential that the indicators are standardized and coordinated to trigger the response. The testimony of the police officer regarding the parallel systems of monitoring that use different indicators further enhances this finding of the statistical analysis, where despite the existence of monitoring, its effectiveness is undermined by the lack of standardized indicators.

It is important to note that, despite being statistically significant, Conflict Risk Knowledge has the lowest impact ($\beta = .272$, $t = 2.543$, $p < .001$). This finding highlights a critical aspect of the Early Warning System. Although the system is statistically significant, its low coefficient indicates that a high awareness of the root causes of conflict does not necessarily lead to effective action. This aligns KII P04 said that we collect information daily but often, nothing happens. The response is only received after there is bloodshed. This implies that whereas the importance of knowing the risk is significant, it is not enough without an effective mechanism of communication and monitoring to make use of the identified risks. A synthesis of the qualitative and quantitative findings creates a coherent story regarding the warning-response gap in Ataye. The pattern where communication was the most influential variable, followed by monitoring and then risk knowledge is evidence of what the respondents experienced. For instance, the statement made by the peace council member

indicating that "the report goes out... but nothing happens until there is violence" is in line with the finding that the communication of information ($\beta=.567$) makes a difference.

It is for this reason that the fragmentation mentioned by different participants explains the significance of the influence of conflict monitoring ($\beta = .356$), but its influence cannot be compared with that of communication. In this regard, the police officer indicated that there were two separate monitoring systems, as police were using crime risk profile analysis, communication interceptions, and interrogations, while peace actors were using their own monitoring tools. The discrepancy in this case proves that monitoring alone is not able to make any meaningful contribution.

This is the reason why the fragmented views on the issue of monitoring provided by various players have highlighted the importance of the impact of conflict monitoring ($\beta = .356$), although it cannot be equated with the impact of communication. In this context, the police officer stated that there were two different monitoring systems; the police, which comprised of crime risk profile analysis, communication interceptions, and interrogations, whereas the peace actors used the other, were using one. The difference in the matter shows that monitoring alone cannot play any significant role.

Table 51 : Coefficients

Rank	Predictor Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)
1 st	Conflict Communication	.567	10.925	.000
2 nd	Conflict Monitoring	.356	6.217	.000
3 rd	Conflict Risk Knowledge	.272	2.543	.000
a. Dependent Variable: conflict early response				

Source: Researcher's survey, 2024

The account by the regional officer on institutional exclusion highlights the process through which such a structural separation comes to be. It is clear that the Ministry of Peace does not feature in the National Security Council, the security task force, or even the Disaster Risk Management Council. In the regional structure, while the Peace and Security Administration heads up the mini-security council, the Disaster Risk Management Council does not feature in its composition. This means that peace players are left out of the discussion in case of security and vice versa. Nevertheless, the somewhat smaller impact of conflict risk knowledge ($\beta =.272$) also holds statistical significance, implying that having knowledge about risks does not mean engaging in actions. In this respect, it can be stressed that the

problem is reinforced by the practices used by the police officer in conducting observations, such as intercepting communications, utilizing informants, analyzing crime statistics, interviewing witnesses, as well as questioning those individuals who are caught during the arrests. The theory of the "knowledge-action gap" is empirically proven. The process between acquiring knowledge about risks and taking corresponding actions is neither simple nor automatic.

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis show relationships consistent with the integrated theoretical framework's predictions regarding the effectiveness of CEWS in Ataye. Conflict communication was found to have the strongest predictive effect on the effectiveness of early response ($\beta = 0.567$, $p < .001$). This strongly supports Anomie Theory's core proposition regarding the importance of information flow in coordinating response to overcome anomie. Conflict monitoring was found to have a strong predictive effect on response effectiveness ($\beta = 0.356$, $p < .001$). However, this makes sense in light of Anomie Theory's proposition regarding the limitations of information collection in an environment of anomie. Conflict risk knowledge was found to have the least predictive effect on response effectiveness ($\beta = 0.272$, $p < .001$). This supports the propositions of Relative Deprivation Theory and Basic Human Needs Theory regarding the importance of understanding conflict risk knowledge. However, the results of this regression analysis show strong explanatory power for the integrated theoretical framework. This demonstrates the importance of understanding conflict risk knowledge based on relative deprivation and basic human needs, as well as the importance of information flow to overcome anomie in the institutional environment.

The witness statement of the zonal administrator provides an illustration of the limitation in resources and the decision-making involved when there are no standard thresholds. It demonstrates that the implementation of warning is not possible through monitoring alone unless there is a reliable communication system in place that builds trust and outlines the response protocol. Even where there is confidence in the warnings, the lack of standard thresholds and adequate resources may result in delayed response when it is already too late.

The results obtained in Ataye and other regions have profound implications for future policy and practice. First, the considerable effect of Conflict Communication (0.567) on early warning indicates that any attempt at intervention must be centered on improving the communication link between local information gatherers and policymakers. Secondly, it is

crucial to clarify the messages and enhance public trust in the sources of warning as well as provide alternative communication channels that will enable reaching vulnerable groups. This is consistent with literature that emphasizes the importance of warning communication, early action planning, and vulnerability analysis in early warning efforts.

Nevertheless, it is essential to understand that there would be no effective communication without institution-based integration. Experience provided by a police officer on two separate systems as well as experience shared by the regional official on the issue of exclusion from the security council shows that although the communication of peace actors with the community may take place seamlessly, a response would not be possible if the peace actors were not members of the institutions that could develop a response. The absence of the Disaster Risk Management Council from the mini-security cabinet also demonstrates that despite effective communication concerning a disaster, the required peace actors can be missing.

In order to fill the identified gap in the early warning and response system, the number of interview participants will be⁷⁷:

Firstly, there must be harmonization between the Ministry of Peace, security, and disaster management players. This will lay down a consistent framework for the identification of conflicts. Secondly, there must be incorporation of peace players in the country's and regional security coordination platforms, including the National Security Council and security teams, to promote cooperation. Thirdly, disaster risk management boards must be included in the mini security cabinets to ensure that coordination of response is an integral part of the process. Fourthly, there must be well-defined thresholds that would automatically activate the response mechanism, thereby eliminating the need for personal discretion at critical times. Lastly, it may be prudent to set up a response fund that could be immediately accessed after meeting these thresholds.

Based on the results of multiple linear regressions, strong empirical evidence exists that proves conflict communication, monitoring, and risk knowledge together contribute to 69% of the effectiveness of the early response to conflict in Ataye. In the hierarchical analysis, the strongest variable is communication, then comes monitoring while risk knowledge plays a

⁷⁷ Interview with KII S01, January 2024

smaller role. These findings provide an important guide as to how one can use these variables to create a strategy to overcome the gaps between warning and response. Moreover, the testimonies provided further clarify the roles played by institutions and individuals with regard to the dynamics between conflict communication, monitoring, and risk knowledge.

Specifically, the testimonies show several problems: frustrations of members of peace councils when their warnings are ignored, cases where police monitoring functions alone without integration with the response mechanism, insights of field monitors about the fragmentations of institutions, opinions of local youths who understand the situation but have no connection to those making decisions, problems of people who have the dilemma of giving warnings without having the means to make the response, and marginalization of peace and response actors in the decision-making process.

Such findings bring together the various theories behind Early Warning Systems and stress both the numerical relevance of their importance and the practical difficulties involved due to institutional obstacles. In this case, the implications suggest that focusing on establishing communication channels, standardizing the indicators used for monitoring, enabling participation of peace actors in security coordination processes, and building trust between communities and government might prove to be the most productive approach to ensure the prevention of further violence in Ataye. The aforementioned omissions, namely the absence of the Ministry of Peace in the National Security Council and the Disaster Risk Management Council in the mini security cabinet, point to an important structural problem that needs to be resolved to maximize the efficiency of Early Warning Systems.

8.2. Summary of Findings

Findings from the mixed method study conducted in the town of Ataye indicate that there is an evident difference between early warning and the resultant reactions to conflicts. Through the regression analysis, it is shown that Conflict Communication is the best predictor of success in the early reaction to conflict ($\beta = 0.567$). Next come Conflict Monitoring ($\beta = 0.356$) and Conflict Risk Knowledge ($\beta = 0.272$) which together explain 69% of the variance in successful early reaction to conflict.

However, there is evidence from peace councils and officials through qualitative research that there are institutional and structural challenges in the early warning and response system, and which the regression analysis does not directly capture. Many peace actors have reported that

there are unheeded warnings, thus demonstrating the disconnect between peace actors and the security actors. It means that depending on statistical predictors is not enough to ensure that responses are made effectively. The findings show that there are challenges in the early warning and response system due to the multiplicity of institutions involved, hence creating multiple systems that are not integrated enough. Security actors rely on intelligence systems, while peace actors use social indicators that do not interact with the security actors' systems.

It is necessary to consider adopting a multi-level approach in order to ensure more efficient responses. Technically, it is necessary to consider investing in better communication networks and developing standard indicators for monitoring, and it should be recognized that the existence of risk knowledge can only be meaningful in conjunction with adequate means of communication and monitoring. What is really important, however, is to reconsider the institutional design in order to create opportunities to integrate peace actors within security coordination systems. In particular, the National Security Council should be reconsidered to include the Ministry of Peace. Moreover, the participation of Disaster Risk Management councils in the decision-making process needs to be guaranteed. Establishing response thresholds and setting up response funds is another critical aspect at regional and local levels. Without making these fundamental changes, even the best Early Warning System cannot result in an appropriate response; for instance, Ataye community would still be exposed to violent conflicts.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter outlines the conclusions, and recommendations derived from the key findings of the study and the discussions presented in the preceding chapters.

9.1. Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of early warning and early response mechanisms in managing conflict in Ataye Town, structured around five specific objectives: assessing conflict risk knowledge, evaluating conflict risk monitoring, analyzing conflict communication, examining the effectiveness of conflict response actors, and determining the effect of early warning on early response. The findings reveal a complex interplay of community awareness, institutional fragmentation, governance failures, and structural barriers that collectively shape the warning-response gap.

9.1.1. Conflict Risk Knowledge

The study establishes that conflict risk knowledge in Ataye Town is remarkably high, with communities demonstrating sophisticated awareness of both vulnerabilities and threats. Key vulnerability factors include uncompensated victimization (90.5%), an ethnic-based federal structure that creates permanent minorities (88.4%), unresolved historical grievances (83.7%), and boundary disputes (85.3%). These vulnerabilities are compounded by governance failures characterized by the absence of neutral institutions and the prevalence of partisan governance, which transforms any localized dispute into an ethnicized crisis. The threat landscape is equally well-recognized, with communities identifying ethnic entrepreneurs, firearm traffickers, and social media abusers as primary drivers of violence. Notably, religion emerges not as a fundamental cause but as a tactical instrument exploited by conflict actors. The temporal analysis of armed conflict from 2018 to 2023 reveals an evolving pattern from state failure and elite manipulation to religious narratives, violent liminality, and ultimately federal government inaction suggesting that communities possess not only static risk knowledge but also an understanding of conflict dynamics over time. However, this high level of risk knowledge does not translate into effective prevention, indicating that awareness alone is insufficient without institutional mechanisms to act upon it.

9.1.2. Conflict Risk Monitoring

The study reveals a paradoxical situation in conflict risk monitoring: while 81.0% of participants demonstrate the ability to identify early warning indicators, this capacity fails to prevent violence due to systemic weaknesses. The Inter-Religious Council emerges as the most trusted monitoring entity (75.8%), leveraging community networks to track hate speech and rumors. However, its effectiveness is substantially undermined by political interference, compromising the integrity of the monitoring process. Other entities, including Peace Committees and Peace Clubs, are perceived as ineffective and biased, contributing to what the study terms "institutional fragmentation without functional integration." The monitoring process encompasses data collection, analysis, and dissemination, yet critically lacks an integrated feedback and follow-up system. While 65.3% of the population acknowledges the importance of early warnings, the absence of open communication or verification mechanisms renders community intelligence ineffective. This gap ensures that warnings, however accurate, cannot interrupt the cycle of violence transforming potentially valuable community intelligence into what participants described as a "paper tiger." The finding that unaddressed warnings sometimes lead to violent incidents, such as the April 2021 events, underscores the fatal consequences of monitoring without responsive action.

9.1.3. Conflict Communication

Conflict communication emerges as the most critical yet most deficient component of the early warning system. The Ministry of Peace, mandated to lead conflict-induced disaster management, lacks both clear vision and institutional capacity, creating a significant gap where communities receive no timely information during crises. Although a "bilateral communication platform" was discussed, leadership acknowledged that communication as a discipline was poorly understood. Quantitative data reinforces this assessment: 54.7% of respondents strongly disagreed that peace organizations communicated according to a formal plan, highlighting the absence of proper communication infrastructure. Media coverage is notably deficient—while regional media like Amhara Television reported on the situation, federal media faced criticism for minimal and poorly constructed updates. Accountability journalism is particularly lacking, with respondents indicating minimal reporting on investigations into the 2021 Ataye attack (64.7% strongly disagreed that government media provided adequate conflict reporting). Consequently, oral traditions and community meetings became primary information sources, leaving proper updates as casualties of the conflict. The information environment is highly polarized, with competing narratives from Amhara and

Oromo media depicting each other as aggressor or secessionist. The majority of respondents (56.9%) disagreed that media framing contributes to peace, and 45.0% strongly disagreed that effective verification-based dialogue exists. This communication breakdown fundamentally undermines trust, inter-ethnic relations, and the potential for conflict de-escalation.

9.1.4. Effectiveness of Conflict Early Response Actors

The comparative analysis reveals a clear hierarchy of effectiveness among conflict response actors. Traditional conflict response mechanisms rank highest, with the highest mean rank (6.82) and 57.9% agreement on their effectiveness. These indigenous resolution processes are perceived as more legitimate and effective than formal security systems. Among formal state actors, the Security Council and De Jure Command Post show moderate effectiveness, while informal security structures rank lowest. The Friedman test confirms significant differences among the nine actors ($\chi^2 = 187.42$, $df = 8$, $p < 0.001$). The De Facto Command Post receives the worst assessment, with the lowest mean rank (3.26), only 17.9% agreement and 63.2% negative evaluations. The House of Federation similarly performs poorly (mean rank 3.45, 24.2% agreement). Correlation analysis indicates that traditional processes align better with the Security Council ($r = 0.42$) and De Jure Command Post ($r = 0.38$), while distrust is more associated with the De Facto Command Post ($r = -0.15$). Even the better-performing Security Council achieves only 54.2% agreement, highlighting persistent issues of vertical coordination and partisanship. These findings suggest that while traditional mechanisms offer a foundation of legitimacy, they face challenges regarding coordination with formal structures. The situation demonstrates the need for a triple nexus approach integrating peace, security, and disaster risk management actors to create a coherent response framework.

9.1.5. Effect of Early Warning on Early Response

The study definitively establishes that the warning-response gap extends far beyond the technical capabilities of early warning systems. Regression analysis identifies conflict communication ($\beta \approx 0.57$) as the most important predictor of response quality, followed by conflict monitoring ($\beta \approx 0.36$) and conflict risk knowledge ($\beta \approx 0.27$). Together, these factors explain approximately 69% of the variance in response effectiveness. However, qualitative narratives reveal institutional and structural barriers that the quantitative model cannot capture including warnings that are heard but not acted upon, disconnects between peace actors and security forces, and security actors' tendency to rely on their own intelligence reports rather than early warnings from peace actors. This finding underscores that technical

improvements to early warning systems, while necessary, are insufficient without addressing the political and institutional dimensions of response. The study demonstrates that even when communities possess risk knowledge, monitoring systems function, and communication exists, the translation of warnings into timely, appropriate responses is blocked by governance failures, partisan interests, and institutional fragmentation. The warning-response gap is therefore not a failure of information but a failure of political will and institutional coordination.

Taken together, these five objectives paint a comprehensive picture of Ataye's early warning system. The study reveals that while communities possess sophisticated risk knowledge and monitoring capabilities, these assets are neutralized by deficient communication systems, ineffective response actors, and structural barriers that prevent warnings from translating into action. The regression analysis confirms that communication is the most powerful predictor of response quality, yet it remains the weakest link suggesting that investments in communication infrastructure, transparency, and accountability could yield the greatest returns in closing the warning-response gap. The hierarchy of response effectiveness, with traditional mechanisms outperforming formal structures, suggests that hybrid approaches combining community legitimacy with state capacity offer the most promising path forward. However, the study also underscores that technical solutions alone cannot resolve the underlying governance failures, partisan institutions, unresolved historical grievances, and the ethnicization of conflict that transform manageable tensions into protracted violence. Closing the warning-response gap in Ataye, and similar contexts across Ethiopia, requires not only strengthening early warning systems but also rebuilding trust through neutral institutions, transparent communication, accountable leadership, and genuine commitment to addressing root causes. Without these fundamental changes, early warnings will remain, as participants described, "paper tigers" unable to protect communities from recurring cycles of violence.

9.2. Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings and theoretical insights derived from this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of conflict Early Warning Systems (CEWS) in Ethiopia. These recommendations are organized according to the study's five specific objectives and are informed by the identified gaps in risk knowledge, monitoring, communication, response mechanisms, and the warning-response nexus.

9.2.1. Conflict Risk Knowledge

The House of Federation should organize conflict early warning system like ministry of peace. The House of federation should prioritize the rights of minority groups, particularly self-governing rights in the Amhara and Oromo regions. It should also mitigate boundary-related conflicts; administrative boundaries should be delineated through participatory processes that meaningfully involve local populations, ensuring that community voices are heard in decisions affecting their security and identity.

The Ministry of Peace, Police commission, in collaboration with the Disaster Risk Management Commission, should establish comprehensive conflict risk profiles, conflict mitigation plan, and contingency plan at the Ataye town level.

The Federal Police Commission, Ministry of justice and the court should ensure rule of law over participants of such inter-ethnic conflict. The Federal Police Commission and Ministry of Peace should establish a well-organized joint peace and security force with balanced representation from Amhara and Oromo ethnic group. This joint force should be mandated to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of hate speech and ethnic incitement, ensuring that legal frameworks are not merely symbolic but actively enforced. The establishment of such a force would address the governance failures and lack of neutral institutions that this research has identified as critical vulnerability factors.

9.2.2. Conflict Risk Monitoring

The Police Commission, Ministry of Peace, and the Disaster Risk Management Commission should develop a standardized set of cross-agency conflict indicators complete with clear thresholds for action addressing the fragmentation that this study found undermines monitoring effectiveness. Additionally, they should integrate their conflict monitoring actors, provide capacity building in terms of material resources, budget allocation, and legal

coordination frameworks. Training programs should focus on early warning indicator identification, data analysis, rapid verification techniques, and the translation of monitoring data into actionable intelligence.

The Ministry of Peace should create institutionalized feedback loops that connect warnings to action, including legally binding timelines for verification, escalation, response, and community communication updates. Public dashboards should be implemented to display warnings, responses, and outcomes, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability. These dashboards should be accessible to communities in multiple languages and formats, ensuring that even marginalized groups can access information about conflict risks and response efforts.

9.2.3. Conflict Communication

The Ministry of Peace should establish a specialized department for conflict communication with clear mandates, adequate staffing, and appropriate budget allocations. This department should be responsible for developing and implementing communication strategies. The Ministry should also implement a participatory feedback system that engages communities through public dashboards and multilingual alerts. This conflict communication department must develop a strategic plan that includes media coverage before, during, and after conflicts, provides regular feedback to communities, and delivers balanced reports that counter polarization and misinformation.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Government Communication Service Office should ensure media independence and the safety of journalists, particularly those covering conflict-sensitive issues. It should also build a cross-media coalition to disseminate verified peacebuilding information and enhance public media literacy by providing context about sources and biases. This coalition should include federal, regional, and community media outlets to ensure diverse perspectives are represented while maintaining a commitment to fact-based reporting. Additionally, mechanisms for holding media accountable for misinformation and hate speech should be strengthened without compromising press freedom.

9.2.4. Effectiveness of Conflict Early Response Actors

The House of People's Representatives should enact legislation to formally integrate indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms with the government criminal justice system to

resolve armed conflict induced crimes. This integration should respect the cultural legitimacy of traditional mechanisms while ensuring they operate within constitutional frameworks and human rights standards. Additionally, there should be systematic capacity building initiatives for these indigenous mechanisms in terms of training, infrastructure, and budget support. Training should focus on human rights principles, documentation of proceedings, and coordination with formal legal institutions, addressing the challenges of legitimacy and coordination that this study identified.

The House of People's Representatives should issue a proclamation to regulate the collaboration between peace actors (including the House of Federation, criminal justice system, and indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms), security actors (including the Security Council, security task force, command posts both de facto and de jure and disaster risk management agencies) during disaster risk management, particularly in relation to incidents like the armed conflicts in Ataye Town. This legal framework should clarify roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms for all actors involved in early response.

The Ministry of Justice should enact directives governing the withdrawal of criminal prosecution of suspected individuals based on public interest, facilitating conflict resolution and reconciliation processes where appropriate.

The Amhara Regional Government should adopt the Ethiopian National Incident Management System, which consists of a multi-agency coordination center, an emergency operation center, and an incident command post. This system would provide a standardized framework for coordinating response efforts across multiple agencies and levels of government, addressing the vertical coordination and partisanship issues that this study identified.

9.2.5. Effect of Early Warning on Early Response

To achieve an integrated warning and response system in Ataye, the Ministry of Peace and the Police Commission should standardize monitoring indicators and develop a common data platform featuring real-time dashboards. They should also establish partnerships with academic institutions, civil society organizations, and international partners to invest in effective conflict-communication systems that allow for rapid verification of warnings.

The House of People's Representatives should amend the National Security Council proclamation to include the Ministry of Peace and Disaster Risk Management commission as members.

The Security Council should ensure accountability in case of ineffectiveness of early warning system to prevent escalation of conflict into violence and war.

9.2.6. Future Academic Studies

The following directions should be explored in future research on Conflict Early Warning Systems (CEWS) in Ethiopia in comparison with selected countries' practices. These research agendas are derived from both the empirical findings and the theoretical insights generated by this study. A multi-theoretical approach is necessary to effectively guide the design of conflict Early Warning Systems in multi-ethnic and politically sensitive contexts. Future research should develop and test such integrated frameworks across different conflict contexts in Ethiopia. Future research should undertake comparative analyses of CEWS in Ethiopia and other conflict-affected countries, particularly those with federal systems and ethnic diversity.

REFERENCES

1. Books

- Aaron, K. K. (2015). *Relative deprivation and insurgency: What lessons from Nigeria's flawed federalism?* International Area Studies Review.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Fekadu Beyene. (2009). *Property rights conflict, customary institutions and the state: The case of agro-pastoralists in Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa University Press.
- Moges, M. A., & Skjerdal, T. (2024). *Media and religion in Ethiopia*. Fojo Media Institute at Linnaeus University Sweden.
- Williams, A. J., & Gordon-Gibson, A. (2024). *Conflict and development*. Routledge.

2. Book Chapters

- Abbink, J. (2022). The looming spectre: A history of the 'state of emergency' in Ethiopia, 1970s–2021. In *Routledge handbook of the Horn of Africa* (pp. 302–316). Routledge.
- Coombs, W. T. (2010). Parameters for crisis communication. In *The handbook of crisis communication* (pp. 17–53). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Corkalo Biruski, D. (2017). Determinants of post-conflict trust: The role of ethnic identity, personal and collective victimization and intergroup emotions. In *The role of trust in conflict resolution: The Israeli-Palestinian case and beyond* (pp. 59–80). Springer.
- Lehtonen, M. (2015). Indicators: Tools for informing, monitoring or controlling? In *The tools of policy formulation* (pp. 76–99). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Messner, S. F., & Rosenfeld, R. (2017). The present and future of institutional-anomie theory. In *Taking stock* (pp. 127–148). Routledge.
- Tuso, H. (2000). Indigenous processes of conflict resolution in Oromo society. In *Traditional cures for modern conflicts: African conflict "medicine"* (pp. 79–94). Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Väyrynen, T. (2018). Burton's human needs theory and the denial of culture in conflict resolution. In *Culture and international conflict resolution* (pp. 32–58). Manchester University Press.

3. Dissertations and Thesis

3.1. Doctoral Dissertations

- Chielu, S. M. O. (2021). *Ethnic conflict in Nigeria: A narrative inquiry of individuals who emigrated from Nigeria to the United States and their lived experiences* [Doctoral dissertation, Point Park University].
- Erba, S. H. (2024). *Amhara, Oromo, and Tigray political cultures and challenges of political stability in Ethiopia: 1991–2017* [Doctoral dissertation, Addis Ababa University].
- Teshale, A. D. (2023). *Mission and peace in Ethiopia* [Doctoral dissertation, Addis Ababa University].

3.2. Master's Thesis

- Bamlak, Y. (2013). *Assessment of indigenous conflict resolution systems and practices: Implication for socio-economic development: A survey of Simada Woreda, Amhara Region, Ethiopia* [Master's thesis, Addis Ababa University].
- Bersunega, F. (2019). *Critical examination of communication strategy of Ministry of Peace* [Master's thesis, Addis Ababa University].
- Gebeyehu, Y. G. (2023). *Public relations in crisis communication: Investigating the practice in the case of Ministry of Peace during Northern Ethiopia crisis* [Master's thesis, Addis Ababa University].
- Jemal, S. (2020). *Inter-ethnic relations and conflict management between Amhara and Oromo communities in Ataye Town, North Shoa Zone of Amhara Region* [Master's thesis, Bahir Dar University].
- Mengistu, D. C. (2021). *An assessment of the practices and challenges of using social media as a communication tool for peace building: The case of Ministry of Peace* [Master's thesis, Addis Ababa University].

4. Journal Articles

- Aalen, L., Kotsadam, A., & Villanger, E. (2019). Family law reform, employment, and women's political participation in Ethiopia. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 26(2), 299–323.
- Abas, T., & Beyene, Z. (2025). The role of customary crisis communication mechanisms in Ethiopia. *The Handbook of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research*, 293–305.
- Abbink, J. (2011). Ethnic-based federalism and ethnicity in Ethiopia: Reassessing the experiment after 20 years. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 5(4), 596–618.
- Abbink, J. (2021). The politics of conflict in Northern Ethiopia, 2020–2021: A study of war-making, media bias and policy struggle (ASCL Working Paper No. 152). *African Studies Centre Leiden*.
- Abebe, Y. (2018). Inter-ethnic conflict resolution in Ethiopia. *Journal of Peace Research*, 55(4), 507–520.
- Adam, A. M. (2020). Sample size determination in survey research. *Journal of Scientific Research and Reports*, 26(5), 90–97.
- Adamu, M. A. (2020). Role of social media in Ethiopia's recent political transition. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 12(2), 13–22.
- Adebayo, A. (2015). Community-based conflict monitoring: Lessons from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 5(1), 45–68.
- Adera, N. G., Ketema, B., & Girma, E. (2022). Effectiveness and quality of risk communication process in Ethiopia: The case of risk communication during cholera outbreak in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. *PLoS ONE*, 17(8), e0265203.
- Adugna, A., Kloos, H., & Degefa, T. (2014). Evaluation of the 2007 Ethiopian census data with an emphasis on coverage in Amhara region. *Ethiopian Journal of Development Research*, 36(1), 1–33.
- Afesha, N. (2022). Functional domains of IGR Forums, House of Federation and Ministry of Peace in Ethiopia: The need for clarity. *Mizan Law Review*, 16(2), 305–338.

- Alamineh, A. S., Geremew, B. B., & Temesgen, K. A. (2021). Inquiring the political strategy of Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) in post-2018 Ethiopia. *The African Review*, 48(2), 333–358.
- Aldino, R., Oktari, R. S., & Yoshimi, N. (2025). Knowledge and awareness of police towards social disaster: A case study of potential conflict identification. *Journal of Disaster Research*, 20(2), 207–218.
- Alemu, B. T. (2022). Ethnic parties and state continuity in Ethiopia: A case on Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and National Movement of Amhara (NAMA). *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 55(1), 45–72.
- Ali, H., Rahman, S. U., Nosheen, F., & Ashraf, I. (2021). An analytical study of conflicts and violence on socio-economic status in Pakistan. *Journal of Accounting and Finance in Emerging Economies*, 7(2), 357–364.
- Amamkpa, A. W., & Mbakwe, P. U. (2015). Conflict early warning signs and Nigerian government response dilemma: The case of increasing agitations for statehood by Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASOB). *African Journal of History and Archaeology*, 1(8), 10–20.
- Amare, S., & Alamineh, M. A. M. (2023). Political narratives and their impact on Amhara people. *Abyssinia Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 8(2), 84–92.
- Asgedom, A. A., Redae, G. H., Gebretnsae, H., Tequare, M. H., Hidru, H. D., Gebrekidan, G. B., Berhe, A. K., Ebrahim, M. M., Cherinet, M., & Gebretsadik, G. G. (2025). Post-war status of water supply, sanitation, hygiene and related reported diseases in Tigray, Ethiopia: A community-based cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health*, 263, 114460.
- Asmare Aragaw, B. (2024). Conflict resolution from below: The case of local peace committees in North Wollo Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. *African Security Review*, 33(1), 98–114.
- Attoh, F. (2017). Wealth-flow theory and the gender hazards of female trafficking: Insights from Benin City, Nigeria. *Journal of International Politics and Development*, 15(1), 45–62.
- Awal, M. (2015). Vulnerability to disaster: Pressure and release model for climate change hazards in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Environmental Monitoring and Protection*, 2(2), 15–21.
- Ayalew, N. A. (2025). Policing law for disaster risk response in Ethiopia: The case of COVID-19. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Management*, 7(2), 405–416.
- Bayeh, E. (2022). Post-2018 Ethiopia: State fragility, failure, or collapse? *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9(1), 1–8.
- Bekele, Z. K. (2020). The quest for election and state of emergency in Ethiopia: An appraisal on related constitutional issues in focus. *Beijing Law Review*, 11, 947–968.
- Belay, Y. D. (2024). The Ethiopian state, foreign policy and participation in international peacekeeping: Continuities and changes. *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 27(2), 151–177.

- Belete, S. S. (2018). Unchecked powers of the Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service in the prevention and countering of terrorist crimes: Some disquiets at a glimpse. *European Scientific Journal*, 14(29), 211–230.
- Bendavid, E., Boerma, T., Akseer, N., Langer, A., Malembaka, E. B., Okiro, E. A., Wise, P. H., Heft-Neal, S., Black, R. E., & Bhutta, Z. A. (2021). The effects of armed conflict on the health of women and children. *The Lancet*, 397(10273), 522–532.
- Berhe, M. G. (2017). The Ethiopian post-transition security sector reform experience: Building a national army from a revolutionary democratic army. *African Security Review*, 26(2), 161–179.
- Beshir, A., Endris, A., Tessema, S., & Tefera, M. (2023). Exploring routes and consequences of small arms and light weapons trafficking in selected areas of Ethiopia. *Journal of African Development Studies*, 10(1), 64–79.
- Beshir, A., & Kassa, F. (2024). Practices of conflict Early Warning System and police timely response in selected areas of Ethiopia. *Journal of African Development Studies*, 11(2), 20–33.
- Biber, E. (2013). The challenge of collecting and using environmental monitoring data. *Ecology and Society*, 18(4).
- Bihonegn, T. (2015). The House of Federation: The practice and limits of federalism in Ethiopia's second federal chamber. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 9(3), 394–411.
- Birhanu, H., & Kebu, Z. (2019). Inter-federal-regional conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopian federacy: A comparative appraisal on the legal and institutional frameworks. *Beijing Law Review*, 10, 1374–1395.
- Bitew Geremew, B. (2024). The tragedy of colonialism in a non-colonised society: Italy's historical narratives and the Amhara genocide in Ethiopia. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 59(6), 1892–1907.
- Bonett, D. G., & Wright, T. A. (2015). Cronbach's alpha reliability: Interval estimation, hypothesis testing, and sample size planning. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(1), 3–15.
- Bradshaw, G. J., & Lötter, C. (2019). Re-evaluating Burton's human needs approach from critical theory perspectives. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 24(1), 6–28.
- Burka, B. M., Roro, A. G., & Regasa, D. T. (2023). Dynamics of pastoral conflicts in eastern Rift Valley of Ethiopia: Contested boundaries, state projects and small arms. *Pastoralism*, 13(1), 5.
- Cammaert, P. (2018). The role of a UN field mission in conflict prevention and resolution. *International Peacekeeping*, 25(5), 683–704.
- Chadefaux, T. (2023). An automated pattern recognition system for conflict. *Journal of Computational Science*, 72, 102074.
- Chekol, M. A., Moges, M. A., & Nigatu, B. A. (2023). Social media hate speech in the walk of Ethiopian political reform: Analysis of hate speech prevalence, severity, and natures. *Information, Communication & Society*, 26(1), 218–237.
- Dana, A. A. (2016). The status of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in criminal justice system under the legal frameworks of Ethiopia and its challenges. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 17, 793–810.

- Enyew, E. L. (2013). A move towards restorative justice in Ethiopia: Accommodating customary dispute resolution mechanisms with the criminal justice system. *Mizan Law Review*, 7(2), 322–348.
- Eranfeno, G. N., Gemed, A. J., & Bamano, A. Z. (2024). News discourses threatening multiculturalism in Ethiopian mainstream TV channels: Discourse historical approach. *Heliyon*, 10(4).
- Erega, B. B., Ferede, W. Y., Mitku, A. K., Belachew, T. W., Addisu, D., Mekuriaw, B. Y., Goshu, Y. A., Alemayehu, H. D., Lake, E. S., & Arage, R. B. (2025). Exploring the youth perceptions of factors contributing to victims' silence during the armed conflict in Ethiopia. *Conflict and Health*, 19(1), 1–7.
- Faizi, I., & Nayebe, H. (2023). Anomie theories of Durkheim and Merton: A comparative review. *Comparative Sociology*, 22(2), 280–297.
- Fikeryohannes, G. A., Adamtey, R., & Owusu-Ansah, J. (2023). The practices, effectiveness and challenges of communal resource conflict management along North Wollo Amhara and neighboring Afar in Ethiopia. *African Journal of Land Policy and Geospatial Sciences*, 6(3), 418–431.
- Fiseha, A. (2019). Federalism, development and the changing political dynamics in Ethiopia. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 17(1), 151–176.
- Gebrehiwot, T., Woldemichael, K., & Tesfaye, M. (2020). Local engagement in disaster management: A case study. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 48, 101615.
- Gebrewahd, M. T. (2019). Ethiopia and Eritrea: National security, militarization and normalization predicaments. *National Political Science Review*, 20(3), 113–135.
- Gemechu, M. (2023). Ethiopia: Federalism, party merger and conflicts. *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, (42), 3–22.
- Gessesse, K. B., & Moges, M. A. (2025). Social media discourses amidst ethnopolitical extremism and conflict: The case of Ethiopia. *Discourse Studies*, 1–22.
- Gibbs, J. J., & Goldbach, J. (2015). Religious conflict, sexual identity, and suicidal behaviors among LGBT young adults. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 19(4), 472–488.
- Guta, A. B., Kelifa, A. E., Abebe, S. T., & Tsoge, M. T. (2024). Illicit small arms and light weapons trafficking: Its contributory factors and key actors in selected areas of Ethiopia. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 1–22.
- Haile, J. M. (2024). Social media for diffusion of conflict and violence in Ethiopia: Beyond gratifications. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 108, 103063.
- Haileyes, B., & Leta, B. (2023). Challenges and prospects for the Amhara and Oromo political elite cooperation towards democratization process in Ethiopia. *East African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 8(2), 51–68.
- Halefom, A. (2022). Integrating traditional and state institutions for conflict prevention: Institutional, legal and policy frameworks in Ethiopia. *Mizan Law Review*, 16(2), 339–368.
- Hase, H., & Tafara, Y. (2022). An investigation of public relations practices and challenges: A case of West Wollega Zone government communication affairs office. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(12), 2456–2472.

- HORN, T. (2025). The civil war in Ethiopia (2020–2022) and the African Union's role in the peace process. *Janus*, 16(1, TD2).
- Ishola, A. V., Anya, A. A., Anya, K. A., & Anya, E. K. (2025). Beyond forecasting: Reimagining Early Warning Systems amid the Sahel crisis for sustainable Africa-EU peacebuilding. *African Journal of Humanities and Contemporary Education Research*, 20(1), 134–146.
- Jellason, N. P., Salite, D., Conway, J. S., & Ogbaga, C. C. (2022). A systematic review of smallholder farmers' climate change adaptation and enabling conditions for knowledge integration in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) drylands. *Environmental Development*, 43, 100733.
- Jibat, K. (2024). Causes of inter-ethnic conflicts in East Africa: The case of Ethiopia. *Journal of Global Peace and Conflict*, 11, 1–23.
- Kassa, M. A., Fenta, S., Anbesaw, T., Tesfa, N. A., Zemariam, A. B., Kassaw, G. M., Abate, B. B., & Semagn, E. G. (2024). Post-traumatic stress disorder and associated factors among high school students who experienced war in Woldia town. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15, 1359370.
- Kibris, A. (2015). The conflict trap revisited: Civil conflict and educational achievement. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59(4), 645–670.
- Kim, Y.-Y., & Park, H.-J. (2023). Factors influencing suicidal ideation according to the deprivation indices of different regions in Korea. *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Public Health*, 56(1), 88–98.
- Kreft, A.-K. (2019). Responding to sexual violence: Women's mobilization in war. *Journal of Peace Research*, 56(2), 220–233.
- Maarouf, H. (2019). Pragmatism as a supportive paradigm for the mixed research approach: Conceptualizing the ontological, epistemological, and axiological stances of pragmatism. *International Business Research*, 12(9), 1–12.
- Mengie, L. T. (2022). The House of Federation of Ethiopia: Unfit for federalism. *Review of Constitutional Studies*, 27, 129–162.
- Mengistu, A. A., & Adamu, T. (2023). Political dynamics and intelligence in Ethiopia: A 27-year overview (1991–2018). *Journal of Somali Studies*, 10(3), 45–78.
- Moges, M. A. (2017). Why silence? Reporting internal conflict in Ethiopian newspapers. *Journalism Studies*, 18(12), 1525–1542.
- Odinga, S. (2017). 'We recommend compliance': Bargaining and leverage in Ethiopian–US intelligence cooperation. *Review of African Political Economy*, 44(153), 432–448.
- Opiyo, K. (2023). Preventing conflict escalation through early warning: The Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 7(4), 132–143.
- Østebø, T. (2023). Religious dynamics and conflicts in contemporary Ethiopia: Expansion, protection, and reclaiming space. *African Studies Review*, 66(3), 721–744.
- Power, S. A., Madsen, T., & Morton, T. A. (2020). Relative deprivation and revolt: Current and future directions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 35, 119–124.
- Regassa, T. (2010). Learning to live with conflicts: Federalism as a tool of conflict management in Ethiopia. An overview. *Mizan Law Review*, 4(1), 52–101.

- Robinson, M., & Rogers, J. (2018). Applying contextual anomie and strain theory to recent acts of corporate deviance. *Journal of Theoretical & Philosophical Criminology*, 10(2).
- Rød, E. G., Gåsste, T., & Hegre, H. (2024). A review and comparison of conflict Early Warning Systems. *International Journal of Forecasting*, 40(1), 96–112.
- Salemot, M. A. (2021). Non-derogable rights during state of emergency: Evaluation of the Ethiopian legal framework in light of international standards. *Hawassa University Journal of Law*, 5, 175–202.
- Sharma, L. R., Bidari, S., Bidari, D., Neupane, S., & Sapkota, R. (2023). Exploring the mixed methods research design: Types, purposes, strengths, challenges, and criticisms. *Global Academic Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 5(1), 3–12.
- Shaw, M. N. (2007). Control, and closure? The experience of the Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission. *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*, 56(4), 755–796.
- Shiferaw Chanie, B., & Ishiyama, J. (2021). Political transition and the rise of Amhara nationalism in Ethiopia. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 56(5), 1036–1050.
- Sisay, G., Sefene, A., Kassaw, A., Getachew, D., & Ali, G. (2025). Sendai framework for disaster risk management: Practices and challenges against the targets in Ethiopia. *Natural Hazards*, 1–21.
- Sufri, S., Dwirahmadi, F., Phung, D., & Rutherford, S. (2020). A systematic review of community engagement (CE) in disaster Early Warning Systems (EWSs). *Progress in Disaster Science*, 5, 100058.
- Tadesse, Y., & Yimer, M. (2021). Integrated legal framework for inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia. *Mizan Law Review*, 15(1), 45–67.
- Taye, B. A. (2017). Ethnic federalism and conflict in Ethiopia. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 17(2), 41–66.
- Tesfaye, A., & Kefale, A. (2025). Co-opt and repress: Dynamics of youth-government relations in post-2018 Ethiopia. *Critical African Studies*, 1–19.
- Tesfaye, M., Hadis, S., Hailu, S., & Getahun, A. (2020). Promoting people's coexistence and interdependencies in North Shoa and Oromo Nationality Zones: An urge for crisis communication and reconciliation. *Abyssinia Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 42–51.
- Teshome, M. Z. (2021). Management of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia: The case of Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups. *Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution*, 12(2), 25–33.
- Tilahun, M., Zelalem, W., & Birhanu, T. (2019). Religious institutions and their implication for sustainable peace in Amhara National Regional State: A study on some selected East Gojjam Woredas. *Journal of Religion and Peace Studies*, 4(1), 55–78.
- Tora, T. T., Andarge, L. T., Abebe, A. T., Utallo, A. U., Meshesha, D. T., & Wubie, A. F. (2025). An expert-based assessment of Early Warning Systems effectiveness in South Ethiopia Regional State. *Discover Sustainability*, 6(1), 188.
- Tronvoll, K. (2022). The anatomy of Ethiopia's civil war. *Current History*, 121(835), 163–169.
- Vuorelma, J., & Lehtonen, P. (2025). Performing authority in times of crisis: Six frames of contested authority during the pandemic era in Finland. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 48(2), e70004.

- Wako, P., & Shen, N. (2021). Analysis of Ethiopian national disaster risk management policy by process model. *International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research*, 5(2), 57–67.
- Walther, O. J., Radil, S. M., Russell, D. G., & Trémolières, M. (2023). Introducing the spatial conflict dynamics indicator of political violence. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 35(3), 533–552.
- Weldemariam, A. F. (2009). A critique of the national security policy: Towards 'human security' in Ethiopia. *Horn of Africa Bulletin*, 21(11), 1–12.
- Woldetsadik, M., & Wandere, D. (2024). Socio-political conflict and implications on gender dynamics: Cases from Central, East and Horn of Africa. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 8, 12–41.
- Wondimu, T., & Gebresenbet, F. (2018). Resourcing land, dynamics of exclusion and conflict in the Maji area, Ethiopia. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 18(6), 547–570.
- Workneh, T. W. (2019). Counter-terrorism in Ethiopia: Manufacturing insecurity, monopolizing speech. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(1), 1–22.
- Worku, M. (2023). The role of customary conflict resolution mechanisms and elders in preserving peace and security (The case of Sheko Community, South West Ethiopia). *International Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, 8(4), 178–182.
- Yan, F., & Peng, Z. (2025). Ethical analysis of anomie: From Durkheim to the digital age. *Sociology Compass*, 19(8), e70107.
- Yoel, S. R., Akiri, E., & Dori, Y. J. (2023). Fostering graduate students' interpersonal communication skills via online group interactions. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 32(6), 931–950.
- Yohannes, R., & Mengistu, B. (2021). Traditional conflict resolution in Ethiopia: The case of the Oromo Gadaa system. *Horn of Africa Bulletin*, 33(2), 23–35.
- Yusuf, S. (2019). Drivers of ethnic conflict in contemporary Ethiopia. *Institute for Security Studies Monographs*, 2019(202), v–46.
- Zelege, M. (2010). Ye Shakoch Chilot (the court of the sheikhs): A traditional institution of conflict resolution in Oromiya zone of Amhara regional state, Ethiopia. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 10(1), 123–150.
- Zeyede, G., Jemaneh, A., & Adaye, Y. (2024). Media reporting of ethnic identity-based violence and personal security challenges in North Shoa, Ethiopia. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 2386709.
- Zikargae, M. M. H. (2022). Risk communication, ethics and academic integrity in the process of minimizing the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in Ethiopian higher education. *Cogent Education*, 9(1), 2062892.

10. Legal Proclamations and Official Documents (Ethiopia)

- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (1995). *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* (Negarit Gazeta, Proclamation No. 1/1995). Addis Ababa: FDRE.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2001). *Ethiopian National Security Council Establishment Proclamation No. 257/2001*. Negarit Gazeta.

- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2005). *Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* (Proclamation No. 414/2004). Negarit Gazeta.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2013). *Ethiopia National Disaster Risk Management Policy and Strategy*. Addis Ababa: FDRE.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2019). *National Conflict Prevention and Management Policy*. Negarit Gazeta.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2021). *House of Federation Conflict Handling Directive No. 2/2021*. Addis Ababa: House of Federation.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2022). *Ethiopia Disaster Risk Management Commission: A roadmap for multi-hazard impact-based early warning and early action system (2023–2030)*. Addis Ababa: EDRMC.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2024). *FDRE National Dialogue Commission: Preliminary report on constitutional reform consultations*. Addis Ababa: National Dialogue Commission Publications.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2025). *Amhara Region Indigenous Conflict Resolution Recognition Proclamation No. 679/2025*. Negarit Gazeta.
- Ministry of Peace. (2019). *Ministry of Peace 10-year strategic plan*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Peace.
- Ministry of Peace. (2021). *Conflict early warning and response directives*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Peace.

11. Reports and Institutional Publications

- ACLED. (2021). *Ethiopia: 2021 conflict trends and analysis*. Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.
- ACLED. (2023). *EPO September 2023 monthly: Multiple coinciding conflicts and Ethiopia's rank in the ACLED Conflict Index*. Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.
- Amhara Association of America. (2021). *Report on attacks against Amhara civilians in Oromia Special Zone*. AAA Publications.
- Amnesty International. (2022). *Ethiopia: 'I don't know if they are alive': The humanitarian crisis in Oromia and Amhara regions*. Amnesty International Publications.
- Bonareri, M. A. (2022). *A critical analysis of the role of Early Warning Systems in preventing conflict in Africa: Case study of the Ilemi Triangle* [Policy brief]. African Peacebuilding Network.
- Brenner, A. (2024). *The prolonging Abyssinian Crisis* [Policy paper]. European Institute of Peace.
- CRS Ethiopia. (2021). *Conflict analysis and peacebuilding assessment: North Shewa Zone*. Catholic Relief Services.
- Dessie, Y., Habteyesus, D., Wado, Y. D., Nur, A., Muthuri, S., Kisaakye, P., Wandera, B., Seruwagi, G., Obare, F., & Villaveces, A. (2025). *Ethiopia humanitarian violence against children and youth survey, 2024: Data-to-action workshop report*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Women and Social Affairs.
- Ethiopian Disaster Risk Management Commission. (2021). *Humanitarian impact assessment: North Shewa conflict*. EDRMC Publications.

- Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Investigation report on human rights violations in Ataye and the Oromia Special Zone*. EHRC Publications.
- Ethiopian Peace Observatory. (2022). *Guidelines for conflict data collection and early warning*. Ministry of Peace Publications.
- Frimpong, O. (2020). *Contributions of early warning to the African Peace and Security Architecture: The experience of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)*. Springer.
- GardaWorld. (2021, April 26). *Ethiopia: At least six rounds of ethnic killings since 2018 in Ataye town, North Shewa Zone*. GardaWorld Security Intelligence.
- Graham, J., Rashid, S., & Malek, M. (2012). *Disaster response and emergency risk management in Ethiopia*. United Nations Development Programme.
- Grasso, V. F., & Singh, A. (2011). *Early Warning Systems: State-of-art analysis and future directions* (Draft Report). United Nations Environment Programme.
- Human Rights Watch. (2021). *"We are in debt to the dead": Accountability gaps in Ethiopia's conflict response*. Human Rights Watch Publications.
- Human Rights Watch. (2022). *Ethiopia: Events of 2021* (World Report 2022). Human Rights Watch Publications.
- International Alert. (2020). *Community-based Early Warning Systems: Best practices and lessons learned*. International Alert Publications.
- International Crisis Group. (2021). *Ethiopia's Tigray war: Deadly escalation and regional implications* (Crisis Group Africa Report No. 309). International Crisis Group.
- International Crisis Group. (2023). *Ethiopia: Security sector reform and national dialogue* (Crisis Group Africa Briefing No. 187). International Crisis Group.
- International Organization for Migration. (2021). *Displacement tracking matrix: North Shewa and Oromia Special Zone*. IOM Ethiopia.
- International Rescue Committee. (2021). *Emergency response to conflict-affected populations in North Shewa*. IRC Ethiopia.
- Jallow, R. I. (2021). *The effectiveness of the Continental Early Warning System in the African Peace and Security Architecture* [Master's thesis, University of Pretoria].
- Jameel Observatory. (2022). *Early Warning Systems in Ethiopia's drylands: Community perspectives and trust*. Jameel Observatory Publications.
- Jensen, L. U. (2022). *Exploring potential pathways for strengthening disaster risk management in conflict* [Working paper]. Overseas Development Institute.
- Mercy Corps. (2022). *Conflict analysis and early warning in Ethiopia's borderlands*. Mercy Corps Ethiopia.
- OCHA. (2021). *Ethiopia: Humanitarian situation report – North Shewa conflict*. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- OCHA. (2022). *Humanitarian response plan: Ethiopia*. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- Østebø, T., Haustein, J., Gedif, F., Kedir, K. J., Jemal, M., & Tesfaye, Y. A. (2021). *Religion, ethnicity, and charges of extremism: The dynamics of inter-communal violence in Ethiopia*. European Institute of Peace.
- UNDP Ethiopia. (2022). *Conflict prevention and recovery in Ethiopia's border regions*. United Nations Development Programme.

- UNISDR. (2015). *Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction 2015–2030*. United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.
- Villalba, C. S., & Puttick, M. (2017). *Eyes on the ground: Realizing the potential of civilian-led monitoring in armed conflict*. Minority Rights Group.
- Zelalem, T. (2024). *Religion and ethnicity in Ethiopia's contemporary conflicts*. Ethiopian Peace Research Institute.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Data Collection (Questionnaires & KII) tools



Informed Consent Form for Questionnaires' Participants

Dear Participant,

I am a PhD candidate in Disaster Risk Science at Disaster Risk management department of Bahir Dar University. As part of my degree requirements, I am conducting research for my dissertation on *the Effectiveness of Conflict Early Warning Systems in Ethiopia: The Case of Ataye Town, North Shewa Administrative Zone in Amhara National Regional State* from 2018 to 2023.

You have been identified as a valuable participant who can provide critical information to ensure the success of this study. Please be assured that all responses will be acknowledged and credited, and they will be used strictly for academic purposes. The information obtained will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated, and your contribution will significantly enhance the quality of this research.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Negesse Asnake

+251912356800 bichenalaw@gmail.com

Bahir Dar University

17. The 2021 conflict was more between religious groups than ethnic groups	
18. The year 2022 was a time of "no war and no peace" (tense but quiet)	
19. In 2023, fighting between OLA and special police turned into ethnic conflict	
Statement of Conflict Monitoring	Response
B1. Who was monitoring?	
1) The Peace Committee (government-appointed group) did a good job watching for conflict signs	
2) The Inter-Religious Council did a good job watching for conflict signs	
3) Peace clubs and forums (youth groups, school clubs) did a good job watching for conflict signs	
4) Field monitors (people sent to collect information) did a good job watching for conflict signs	
B2. How monitoring was done	
1) All the different groups involved in monitoring agreed on what signs to look for	
2) Monitors collected information from many sources (community, government, media)	
3) Monitors used different methods to collect information (observation, interviews, surveys)	
4) The information collected was analyzed properly (scientifically)	
5) Warnings were issued when monitors found potential risks	
Statement Conflict Communication	Response
1) The Ministry of Peace followed a clear plan for communicating warnings	
2) The government gave a lot of media coverage to conflicts	
3) The government presented conflict information in a helpful (positive) way	
4) Warning information reached vulnerable people (women, elderly, poor, disabled)	
5) Conflict warnings were shared through many different channels (radio, word of mouth, phone, meetings)	
6) The conflict information people received was accurate and reliable	
Conflict Early Response Statements	
1) The Security Council responds effectively to conflict.	
2) The security task force responds well to the situation.	
3) The de jure command post responds effectively.	
4) The de facto command post responds effectively.	

5) The DRM council responds successfully to conflict.	
6) The House of Federation resolves boundary disputes.	
7) The Ministry of Peace resolves conflict incidents.	
8) Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms work effectively.	
The criminal justice system ensures rule of law.	

Part Three: Discussion

1) Illuminate vulnerability factors of Ataye town?

2) Explain threats of Ataye town security include ethnic extremists, religious extremists, social media, and firearm traffickers to inter-ethnic conflict?

3) Elucidate the pattern of the conflict from 2018 to 2023?

4) Describe Ataye town conflict monitoring practice?

5) Did the communication regarding the Ataye conflict help de-escalate the situation? Why?

6) Do you agree with the effective early response of Ataye conflict?

7) How did the Security Council contribute to the response efforts during the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023? Can you provide specific examples of their actions and their impacts?

8) In what ways did the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Council respond to the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023? What initiatives or strategies did they implement, and how effective were these measures?

- 9) What role did the Security Task Force play in addressing the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023? Can you describe specific operations or interventions they undertook?

- 10) How did the Defacto Command Post respond to the Ataye conflict during the period from 2018 to 2023? What were their main objectives, and how successful were they in achieving them?

- 11) What contributions did the Dejury Command Post make in the context of the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023? Can you discuss the nature of their involvement and any notable outcomes?

- 12) What was the role of the House of Federation in the resolution of the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023? How did their actions or policies influence the situation on the ground?

- 13) How did the Ministry of Peace approach the Ataye conflict between 2018 and 2023? What specific strategies or programs did they implement to foster peace and stability?

- 14) In what ways did traditional conflict resolution systems engage with the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023? Can you share examples of practices or initiatives that were employed?

- 15) What role did the criminal justice system play in addressing the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023? How did it contribute to conflict resolution, and what challenges did it face?

16) Why the Ethiopian conflict Early Warning System unable to prevent this conflict?

The end

Interview and Focus Group Discussion Questionnaire Guidelines

For the Interviewer: Before conducting the interview, carefully follow the guidelines below.

- 1) These questions (1-20) are designed for interviews and focus group discussions with relevant leaders and community representatives at all levels.
- 2) Before starting the interview/discussion, introduce yourself. Then, briefly introduce the purpose of the survey as described above. Explain to the interviewee/discussion participant how they were selected (purposive sampling).
- 3) Before starting the interview, make it clear that the ideas raised during the discussion will be included in the analysis and report of the study; however, the individual's name will not be mentioned in the document. If they agree, tell them that the discussion will be recorded and that it is a good idea to record all the points raised during the discussion, as it is difficult and would disrupt the flow of the discussion, and that the recorded ideas will not be shared with anyone other than for the purpose of the study; confirm their agreement.
- 4) When the interviewee is ready for the discussion, read the discussion topics and, if appropriate, the guiding questions; then asks the participant to express their thoughts/responses. The dissertation on *Effectiveness of Conflict Early Warning Systems in Ethiopia: The Case of Ataye Town, North Shewa Administrative Zone, Amhara National Regional State*'. The study contains no material or money benefit. The interview session will take between 35 minutes up to 50 minutes. You kindly requested to respond the following interview without fear and bias. Your honest response will be helpful to get a sound data.
- 5) After all the discussion points have been raised and discussed thoroughly, thank the person and conclude the discussion.

I. Interviewee Personal Information

- 1) Sex _____ 2) Age _____
- 3) Education Level _____ 4) Employment Status: _____
- 5) Length of service _____ 6) Address: _____
- 7) Number of years in the area _____ 8) Interview participant code _____
- 9) Date of interview _____ Place _____

KII and FGD Questions

- 1) Why is the Ataye city administration frequently affected by inter-ethnic conflict?

- 2) How uncompensated victims of conflict, the ethnic-based federal structure, grievances, boundary claims, and ethnicity for political purposes, informal armed groups, militarization, resource competition, and local government weakness exposed it?
- 3) Explicate conflict threats of Ataye town?
- 4) What was the impact of ethnic extremists, religious extremists, social media, and firearm traffickers for this conflict?
- 5) Clarify the pattern of the conflict from 2018 to 2023?
- 6) How effective are the peace council, inter-religious council, peace forum/club, and focal persons in monitoring the Ataye conflict?
- 7) What indicators signify inter-ethnic conflict in Ataye?
- 8) Describe the process of inter-ethnic conflict monitoring in Ethiopia.
- 9) Explicate the contribution conflict communication for conflict de-escalation?
- 10) What was the contribution of the Security Council in responding to the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023?
- 11) What was the contribution of the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Council in responding to the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023?
- 12) What was the contribution of the Security Task Force in responding to the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023?
- 13) What was the contribution of the Defacto Command Post in responding to the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023?
- 14) What was the contribution of the Dejury Command Post in responding to the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023?
- 15) Deliberate the role of the House of Federation in resolving the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023.
- 16) Discuss the role of the Ministry of Peace in resolving the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023.
- 17) Confer the role of traditional conflict resolution systems in resolving the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023.
- 18) Discuss the role of the criminal justice system in resolving the Ataye conflict from 2018 to 2023.
- 19) Why was the Ethiopian Early Warning System unable to prevent this conflict?
- 20) Please share any additional points or insights?

Annex 2: Profile of Interview and FGD Participants

Table 52 : Key Informant Interview Participants Demography

NB: P = Peace actor, S = Security actor, D = DRM actor, C = Community representative

KII Participant	Sex	Years of Experience				Educational Level			Age Group		
		≤10	11–15	16–19	≥20	≤Diploma	BA	≥MA	21–30	31–40	≥41
1) P06	M	✓					✓			✓	
2) P07	F	✓					✓		✓		
3) P09	M	✓							✓		✓
4) P10	F	✓					✓		✓		
5) P02	F	✓					✓		✓		
6) P03	F		✓					✓		✓	
7) P05	M		✓					✓		✓	
8) P08	M		✓					✓		✓	
9) P01	M			✓			✓				✓
10) P04	M				✓	✓					✓
11) S04	M	✓				✓					✓
12) S07	M	✓				✓				✓	
13) S05	F		✓			✓					✓
14) S06	M		✓			✓					✓
15) S01	M				✓	✓					✓
16) S02	M				✓	✓					✓
17) S03	M				✓	✓					✓
18) D07	M	✓				✓				✓	
19) D01	M		✓			✓					✓
20) D02	M		✓			✓					✓
21) D03	M		✓				✓				✓
22) D04	F		✓				✓				✓
23) D05	M				✓		✓				✓
24) D06	M				✓		✓				✓
25) C01	M	✓					✓			✓	
26) C02	F	✓					✓			✓	
27) C06	M	✓					✓			✓	
28) C14	F	✓					✓		✓		✓
29) C15	M	✓					✓			✓	
30) C03	M		✓			✓	✓			✓	
31) C04	F		✓			✓					✓
32) C07	F		✓			✓					✓
33) C08	M		✓								✓
34) C09	F		✓			✓					✓
35) C10	M		✓			✓					✓
36) C13	M		✓								✓
37) C05	M			✓		✓				✓	
38) C11	M			✓		✓				✓	
39) C12	F			✓							

Table 53 : FGD 1 Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Sex	Age	Ethnic Group	Job
FGD1-01	Male	32	Amhara	Carpenter
FGD1-02	Male	60	Amhara	Retired person
FGD1-03	Male	43	Amhara	Government employee
FGD1-04	Male	24	Amhara	Occasional laborer
FGD1-05	Male	40	Amhara	Farmer
FGD1-06	Male	53	Amhara	shop owner
FGD1-07	Male	37	Amhara	Government employee
FGD1-08	Male	50	Amhara	Religious leader

Table 54 : FGD 2 Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Sex	Age Group	Ethnic Group	Job
FGD3-01	Female	28	Amhara	Cafeteria owner
FGD3-02	Female	45	Amhara	Trader
FGD3-03	Female	32	Amhara	Health extension
FGD3-04	Female	42	Amhara	Farmer
FGD3-05	Female	36	Amhara	seeks casual work
FGD3-06	Female	44	Amhara	Market trader
FGD3-07	Female	38	Amhara	Employee of government
FGD3-08	Female	46	Amhara	Retied person

Table 55 : FGD 3 Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Sex	Age	Ethnic Group	Job
FGD2-01	Male	40	Oromo	Farmer
FGD2-02	Male	46	Oromo	Religious leader
FGD2-03	Male	37	Oromo	Small trader
FGD2-04	Male	52	Oromo	Taxi driver
FGD2-05	Male	36	Oromo	casual worker
FGD2-06	Male	55	Oromo	Shop keeper
FGD2-07	Male	44	Oromo	Shoeshine boy
FGD2-08	Male	33	Oromo	employed laborer

Table 56 : FGD 4 Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Sex	Age	Ethnic Group	Job
FGD4-01	Female	33	Oromo	petty trader
FGD4-02	Female	42	Oromo	House servant
FGD4-03	Female	33	Oromo	Market vendor
FGD4-04	Female	46	Oromo	Government employee
FGD4-05	Female	34	Oromo	spouse of laborer
FGD4-06	Female	41	Oromo	Shop keeper
FGD4-07	Female	31	Oromo	Trader
FGD4-08	Female	42	Oromo	Trader