

Monthly Report: Disinformation Trends and Social Media Monitoring in Ethiopia

March 1–31, 2026

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1. Executive Summary

March 2026 marked a critical escalation in Ethiopia’s digital information environment, driven by the convergence of pre-election dynamics, regional geopolitical tensions, and increasing technological sophistication in disinformation tactics. As the country approaches the 7th General Election scheduled for June 2026, social media platforms have become central arenas for narrative shaping, political contestation, and coordinated influence operations.

A total of 584 instances of disinformation were identified during the reporting period, a notable increase from previous months. This surge was primarily driven by the rapid proliferation of AI-generated visual content, which has significantly lowered the barrier to producing convincing false narratives. Fabricated imagery - particularly related to military activity and political actors - emerged as the dominant disinformation format, accounting for more than half of all recorded cases.

The reporting period was marked by heightened public sensitivity to geopolitical developments, especially tensions involving Eritrea and Sudan. These were frequently exploited to amplify unverified claims of military confrontations, fostering a persistent atmosphere of uncertainty. At the domestic level, electoral ambiguity - particularly around National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) regulations and candidate eligibility - created information gaps that were actively leveraged to undermine institutional credibility.

Humanitarian crises, including the devastating landslides in the Gamo Zone, were weaponized through “false context” narratives, in which unrelated or outdated footage was repurposed to exaggerate the scale of events and provoke emotional reactions. Internal political developments - such as leadership changes within opposition parties - fueled speculative and often polarizing discourse online.

Platform analysis indicates that Facebook remains the primary vector for disinformation dissemination, accounting for 42.8% of identified cases, followed by X (Twitter) and TikTok, each at 25.7%. The continued dominance of individual users as primary sources underscores the decentralized nature of the threat, even as more sophisticated tactics - such as AI-assisted manipulation - become increasingly accessible.

Overall, March 2026 reflects a transition from opportunistic misinformation to a more structured and technologically enabled disinformation ecosystem. As Ethiopia moves closer to the election, the risks of coordinated narrative manipulation, identity-based polarization, and institutional delegitimization are expected to intensify. Strengthening public digital literacy, improving platform accountability in Ethiopian languages, and reinforcing independent fact-checking capacity remain critical to safeguarding information integrity in the months ahead.

2. Key Findings

- *Rise of Generative AI:* There was a marked increase in the deployment of AI-generated images to manufacture “military successes” or “regional provocations,” specifically involving drone warfare and border tensions.
- *Electoral Information Gaps:* Significant confusion surrounded the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) regulations, which was exploited to cast doubt on the legitimacy of both ruling and opposition party candidates.
- *Cross-Border Narratives:* Heightened tensions with Eritrea and Sudan served as a primary catalyst for viral rumors, often involving unverified claims of military hardware losses and diplomatic hostility.
- *Humanitarian Misinformation:* Real-world tragedies, such as the Gamo landslides, were frequently co-opted by bad actors using old footage from unrelated global disasters to exaggerate the scale of the crisis and incite panic.
- *Political Fragmentation:* The leadership changes within major opposition parties like EZEMA triggered a wave of speculative and often derogatory digital discourse regarding the parties’ future viability.

3. Scope

This report examines public discourse within Ethiopia’s digital environment from March 1 to March 31, 2026. The analysis focuses on high-engagement platforms, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, YouTube, and Telegram. By tracking viral narratives, political rhetoric, and coordinated disinformation campaigns, we provide a structured overview of the digital landscape. Furthermore, the report cross-references social media trends with content from established news agencies and verified fact-checking bodies to ensure a nuanced understanding of the prevailing information climate.

4. Approach

MFC analyzed publicly available posts using a hybrid methodology involving advanced digital monitoring tools and rigorous manual verification. We tracked emerging narratives through Feedly, TweetDeck, Telegram monitoring, and Google News. This approach allowed us to identify emerging rumors quickly and observe how they evolved into misinformation or disinformation.

We compared the narratives collected against verified information from credible media outlets, official government statements, and fact-checking partners. This cross-verification ensured accuracy and limited the influence of unverified claims in our analysis. When a narrative lacked evidence, we labeled it as a claim. This practice reinforces transparency and helps readers distinguish fact-based reporting from unverified or speculative commentary.

5. Disclaimer

This report analyzes publicly available digital content. It does not promote, endorse, or support any political actor, institution, or ideological position. Screenshots, links, and examples reflect patterns in misinformation and are included strictly for research purposes. Their inclusion does not imply agreement or amplification. Verified claims always take precedence. Unverified stories remain clearly marked to avoid confusion and preserve editorial integrity.

6. Introduction and Context

Ethiopia's digital information landscape in March 2026 was shaped by a single underlying dynamic: the convergence of electoral competition, regional instability, and advancing technology into a disinformation ecosystem of growing sophistication. Each of these forces did not operate in isolation - they fed one another, creating conditions in which falsehoods spread faster, landed harder, and proved more difficult to counter than at any previous point in the country's digital history.

The primary catalyst was the approaching 7th General Election, scheduled for June. As the campaign period intensified, social media shifted from a space of general political discourse into a battleground for narrative control. Online content moved away from broad public grievances toward highly targeted campaigns aimed at undermining the institutional credibility of the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and questioning the legitimacy of specific candidates - both from the ruling party and the opposition. The actors behind these campaigns remained largely obscured, operating through anonymous accounts and coordinated posting networks, though their timing and targeting suggested a level of organization beyond ordinary political commentary.

The electoral tension did not develop in a vacuum. Ethiopia's fraught geopolitical position - particularly its pursuit of maritime access through the Red Sea and its strained relations with Eritrea - supplied a steady stream of raw material for viral misinformation. Alleged military incidents along the borders with Sudan and Eritrea were amplified by unverified accounts, generating a cycle of perpetual "breaking news" that bypassed traditional editorial gatekeeping. These macro-

level anxieties, in turn, were repurposed for domestic consumption: regional security skirmishes were exaggerated and reframed along ethnic lines, transforming geopolitical tensions into tools for local political mobilization.

This climate of heightened anxiety made Ethiopian digital audiences especially vulnerable when real-world crises struck closer to home. A series of high-impact domestic events - including humanitarian tragedies in the Gamo Zone and disruptions triggered by fuel shortages and international diplomatic visits - provided fertile ground for what researchers call "false context" media: the practice of circulating authentic but outdated footage alongside misleading captions to drive contemporary panic or assign political blame. Because these tactics exploit real suffering, they are particularly difficult for ordinary users to identify and dismiss.

Compounding this vulnerability, the economic strain of surging global oil prices deepened public frustration across the country. Fuel shortages disrupted daily life and eroded confidence in government responsiveness, creating an audience primed for emotionally charged narratives. Economic grievance, already a potent political force, became an accelerant - making users more likely to engage with, believe, and share content that confirmed their sense of institutional failure.

Technologically, March 2026 marks a critical turning point. The accessibility of generative AI tools has significantly lowered the barrier to producing convincing fabricated evidence. Where earlier waves of disinformation relied on "cheapfakes" - crudely edited images, misleading screenshots, or out-of-context video clips - this month saw a notable rise in AI-generated imagery depicting fabricated

military hardware deployments and staged high-level political meetings. The distinction matters: cheapfakes can often be debunked through basic reverse-image searches and contextual verification, while AI-generated content requires more advanced forensic tools that most users and even many newsrooms do not yet possess.

This technological shift carries an implication that extends well beyond Ethiopia. In a media environment where visual evidence is routinely equated with truth, the normalization of synthetic media threatens to erode the very foundation of public trust. Countering this will require more than platform-level content moderation. It demands investment in digital literacy at scale, the integration of AI-detection tools into newsroom workflows across the Horn of Africa, and a willingness by electoral institutions - NEBE chief among them - to engage proactively with the information environment rather than responding to crises after they have already shaped public perception. Without these measures, the gap between what Ethiopian citizens see online and what is actually occurring will only continue to widen.

7. Viral Topics and Discussion Issues

In March, Ethiopia's social media environment was dominated by discussions of regional security tensions, media freedom, and emerging electoral disputes.

This section highlights the conversations that captured national attention and generated the highest engagement across major platforms.

7.1 *High-Traction Non-Election Conversations*

7.2 *EHRC Urgent Call on Arsi Zone Killings*

The [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission](#) (EHRC) urged federal and Oromia regional authorities to take immediate action to halt killings, displacement, and property destruction in the Arsi Zone. This followed renewed attacks that left up to 30 civilians dead since late February, deepening a cycle of violence linked to armed group activity.

7.3 *Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's Tigrinya Interview*

The Prime Minister's interview in Tigrinya with the [Ethiopian News Agency \(ENA\)](#) sparked intense debate. While supporters praised his linguistic skills, opposition figures claimed he used an off-camera teleprompter. Substantively, the PM warned that Ethiopia would not tolerate Eritrean attempts to destabilize the country and reiterated demands for Red Sea maritime access, while denying any intent to invade neighboring states.

7.4 *SAF Claims of Downed Ethiopian Drone*

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) claimed to have shot down an Ethiopian drone (allegedly a Turkish-made Bayraktar) in Kordofan, Sudan. Despite [viral video footage](#) purportedly showing the wreckage, the incident has not been independently verified.



Image: Screenshot taken from the video circulated on social media

7.5 Fuel Shortages and Economic Strain

Major cities, including Addis Ababa, Mekelle, and Bahir Dar, faced severe fuel shortages and long queues. The federal government introduced emergency [subsidies](#) and a national crackdown on illegal trade to mitigate the [impact of Middle East tensions](#) and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

7.6 Amnesty International Briefing on OLA

[Amnesty International](#) released a briefing alleging that members of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) have subjected women and girls to sexual violence, including gang rape and slavery, since 2019. The report claims these acts were often used to punish families associated with government forces.

7.7 Gamo Floods and Landslides

Tragedy struck the [Gamo Zone](#), where heavy rains triggered landslides killing at least 102 people. Parliament declared three days of national mourning as search and rescue operations continued for the dozens still missing.



Image: © South Ethiopia Regional State Office Of The President, official Facebook Page

7.8 Lega Dembi Gold Mine Pollution

Human Rights Watch reported that pollution from the Lega Dembi mine in Oromia continues to cause severe health issues. [The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) has urged the government to address the high concentrations of toxic heavy metals, such as mercury and arsenic, found in the area.



Image: A 16-year-old boy collects water from a spring near Lega Dembi gold mine in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. © 2020 Tom Gardner

7.9 PM Abiy Ahmed's UAE Visit

The PM's travel to [Dubai to meet UAE](#) Vice President Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum was viewed through two lenses: supporters saw it as a sign of strong diplomacy during regional conflict, while critics suggested it signaled a specific alignment in the ongoing Middle East tensions.



7.10 Fano Offensive in South Gonder

[Media outlets](#) reported that Fano forces killed several high-ranking woreda administrators during an offensive in the South Gonder Zone. The zonal administration confirmed fighting in Nefas Mewcha and Hamusit, describing the militants as “mischievous forces.”



Image: Wogeda Town, one of the places where the attack took place according to reports

7.11 Detention of Journalist Bewket Abebe

The detention of journalist Bewket Abebe was one of the major topics within the Ethiopian media landscape during the month of March. Bewket Abebe, the Chief Editor of [The Reporter magazine](#), was detained for three days for “entering the Wolqait area without a special permit” and for taking photos on the streets of Humera, according to the publication. Officials warned that journalists are required to obtain specialized permits not only to conduct professional work but also to enter the zone.



Image: Journalist Bewket Abebe

7.12 National Dialogue Commission Relocation

Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission relocated its Tigray agenda-gathering forum to Addis Ababa, citing the absence of “favorable and enabling conditions” in the region. The commission issued a [call on its website](#) for Tigrayans living in Addis Ababa to attend the discussion event at the Skylight Hotel.

7.13 Appointment of General Asrat Denero

The appointment of General Asrat Denero as Addis Ababa Police Commissioner by [PM Abiy Ahmed](#) was another major media topic. General Asrat is the military officer who led the defense force operations in the Benishangul-

Gumuz region to secure the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project.

The Prime Minister’s Office provided no explanation as to why General Asrat was selected to lead police work in the capital. In the army, he previously served as Commander of Land Forces and as Director of Military Intelligence. He replaces Commissioner Getu Argaw, whose next role remains unspecified; it is also unclear why Argaw was removed from the position.



Image: Screenshot taken from the Facebook post of the office of the PM on the appointment of the new Addis Ababa Police Commissioner and Vice-Commissioners



Image: General Asrat Denero. Asrat was promoted to the rank of Lieut. General in January 2020. © [MFC Data Bank](#)

7.14 OLA Military Claims

The [OLA claimed](#) significant gains in East and West Shoa, asserting they killed 256

government soldiers and captured 122 others. These locations are within 100km of Addis Ababa. These claims remain unverified, and the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) has not commented.



7.15 US Visa Bond Requirement

The [U.S. State Department announced](#) that starting April 2, citizens of 12 countries, including Ethiopia, may be required to post a \$15,000 bond for B1/B2 visas. The bond is intended to ensure visitors return to their home countries.

7.16 Deportation of Solomon Bogale and Its Controversies

On March 12, 2026, the U.S. [Immigration and Customs Enforcement \(ICE\)](#) agency referred to the Ethiopian Amhara Fano militia as a “Tier III terrorist group” in the context of deporting an Ethiopian individual named Solomon Bogale.

This sparked significant conversation on social media, with many users assuming the U.S. government had officially labeled the militia as a “terrorist group.” Government supporters shared the news with various captions, while [Fano issued a three-page statement](#) requesting clarification from ICE regarding the designation.



Image: Solomon Bogale is an Ethiopian national who was deported from the United States to Ethiopia on March 5, 2026.



March 16th, 2026

Todd M. Lyons
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20536
Via: Office of Public Affairs
ICE.PublicAffairs@ice.dhs.gov

Subject: Request for Clarification Regarding Public Reference to "Fano" as a "Tier III Terrorist Group"

Dear Acting Director Lyons,

I write respectfully in my capacity as Chairman of the Amhara Fano National Movement (AFNM) regarding a recent public communication issued through the official social media account of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The post referenced an individual deported to Ethiopia and described that person as being affiliated with "Fano, a Tier III terrorist group." Because this phrasing appeared in a public communication outside the context of a formal immigration proceeding, it has generated understandable questions among Ethiopians in Ethiopia, members of the Ethiopian American community, and observers familiar with United States immigration law.

We wish to respectfully note that the "Tier III" terminology referenced in Section 212(a)(3)(B)(v)(III) of the Immigration and Nationality Act is generally understood as a legal concept applied in individual immigration determinations to assess whether an organization qualifies as an undersigned group under the statute. It is not a formal designation applied by the United States government to organizations in the manner of established lists such as:

• Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) designated by the U.S. Department of State under the Immigration and Nationality Act;

• Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) designated pursuant to Executive Order 13224; or

Image: Page one of Fano's statement on the issue

7.17 Election-Related Viral Topics

7.18 Ruling Party Opts Not to Compete in Districts Held by NAMA and EZEMA Leaders

Ethiopia's ruling Prosperity Party (PP) has declined to field candidates in the [Tigray region](#) and in dozens of constituencies nationwide, including areas where prominent opposition leaders are contesting seats in Amhara and Addis Ababa.

According to news agencies, the PP has not registered a single candidate for either parliamentary or regional council seats in Tigray, where the feasibility of holding elections remains uncertain. In contrast, six opposition parties and two coalitions have fielded a combined 101 candidates in the region.

At the same time, the ruling party has opted not to compete in more than 80 constituencies for the House of Peoples' Representatives across the country, including districts where leaders of the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA) and [Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice \(EZEMA\)](#) are running.

7.19 Political Commentator and Lecturer Arrested by Mekelle Security Forces

On March 13, 2026, Shewit Gebregzabher, a political commentator and lecturer at Mekelle University, was arrested by Mekelle security forces without a court-issued warrant, according to media outlets. His [party issued a statement](#) regarding his arrest that same day.

On March 22, 2026, Shewit [was released](#) on 10,000 Birr bail following a court decision that found insufficient grounds to keep him in detention over allegations of transporting a large cache of weapons.

7.20 EZEMA Officially Replaces Top Leadership

The [Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice party \(EZEMA\)](#), one of the country's leading opposition parties, replaced two of its top leaders. During an emergency meeting on March 8, 2026, members removed Education Minister Berhanu Nega from party leadership, replacing him with Eyob Mesafint. [The assembly](#) also voted to replace Berhanu's

deputy, Yohannes Mekonnen, Chair of Building Construction at the Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction and City Development, with Nigatu Wolde.



Image: Birhanu Nega



Image: Eyob Mesafint

This sparked significant media discussion, as Berhanu's political stance regarding Prosperity Party policies had angered many, including former supporters. Little is known about the new leadership, and social media users noted that it remains to be seen if the new team can address the political crisis the party has faced over the past few years.

7.21 Controversies Over Prosperity Party's Candidate in Addis Ababa

The ruling Prosperity Party (PP) has officially begun introducing its candidates for the upcoming General Election, presenting a mix of seasoned government officials and prominent public figures that has sparked various controversies.

In Addis Ababa, the [Yeka Sub-City branch](#) generated significant headlines by nominating renowned music composer Kamuzu Kassa as a candidate for the city council. The controversy centers on his residency registration; social media users argued that he registered using a false house number belonging to Kibrework Shiwota.

This has created a legal debate regarding NEBE regulations, which require a candidate to have lived in their contesting area for at least six months.



Image: Kamuzu Kassa

7.22 Ethiopia's Opposition Coalition Unveils Manifesto

The Coalition for Ethiopian Unity (CEU), a group of four opposition political parties, [unveiled its manifesto](#) in Addis Ababa as the

country prepares for the 7th General Election scheduled for June. The coalition was originally formed in September 2025 by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP), Amhara Gyonawi Movement, Enat Party, All Ethiopian Unity Party, and the One Ethiopia Democratic Party; however, the One Ethiopia Democratic Party is no longer a member. The manifesto outlines the coalition’s stance on issues ranging from the federal system of government to land administration.



Image © *Ethiopia Insider*

8. Disinformation Trends

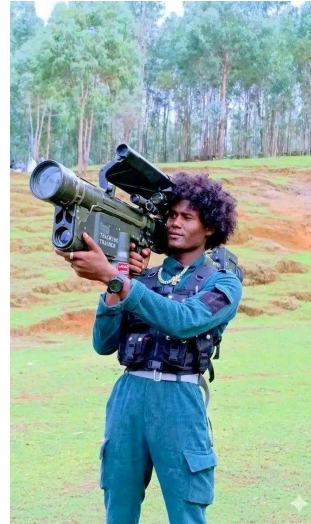
Several recurring disinformation tactics were observed during March 2026, reflecting a marked increase in both volume and sophistication.

8.1 Fabricated AI-Generated Images

The MFC monitoring team observed a spike in AI-generated imagery designed to deceive users regarding military capabilities.

8.1.1 Fano Anti-Drone Claims

Viral images on X and TikTok claimed Fano forces were now using advanced anti-drone weapons. [MFC verified](#) these images were AI-generated.



8.1.2 Eritrea Drone Shooting Claim

A viral Facebook post claiming Eritrea shot down an Ethiopian drone used an [AI-generated image](#) to “prove” the event.



8.2 Doctoring Genuine Images with AI

Users are increasingly using AI to alter real photographs to fit a specific narrative.

8.2.1 Tigray Officials Misinformation

A doctored image circulated claiming to show Tigray interim administration officials drinking heavily during a meeting. [MFC confirmed](#) the original photo was edited to include the alcohol.



Image: Doctored image that circulated on Social media

8.3 Resurfaced Old Videos

The use of “false context” remains a primary tool for spreading misinformation.

8.3.1 Gamo Flood Video

While the Gamo Zone suffered genuine flooding, a viral TikTok video claiming to show the disaster was actually [old footage from](#) an unrelated geographic location.

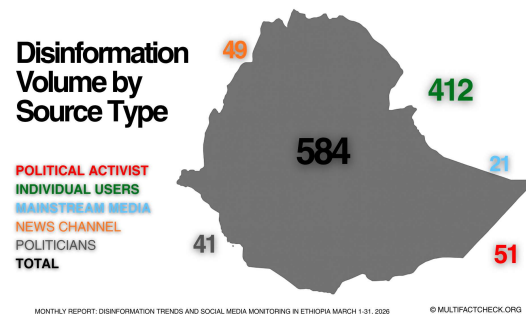


9. Data Collection Overview

During the March 1–31, 2026 monitoring period, the MFC team documented a significant surge in disinformation across Ethiopia’s digital ecosystem.

A total of 584 instances of disinformation were identified and systematically analyzed this month, marking a notable increase from the previous period. The dataset is examined through three critical analytical lenses: *Disinformation Volume by Source Type*, *Disinformation Volume by Source Category*, and *Disinformation Distribution Across Social Media Platforms*.

This mapping reveals the evolving tactics used by various actors to manipulate public narrative and the digital spaces where falsehoods gain the most traction.

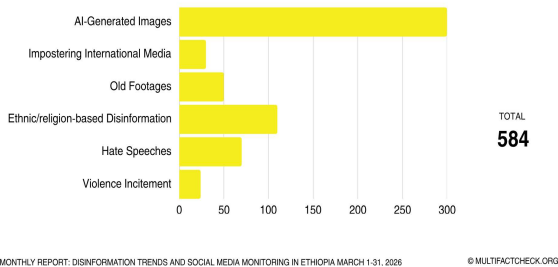


Analysis of *Source Types* reveals that *Individual Users* remain the primary drivers of disinformation, accounting for 412 recorded instances, underscoring the central role that decentralized, non-institutional actors play in spreading unverified content.

Political Activists followed as the second most active group with 51 instances, while *News Channels and Politicians* contributed 49 and 41 instances, respectively. *Mainstream Media* outlets were associated with the fewest

instances, totaling 21. Although institutional actors produced less content by volume, their reach lends disproportionate legitimacy to the narratives they amplify.

Disinformation Volume by Source Category

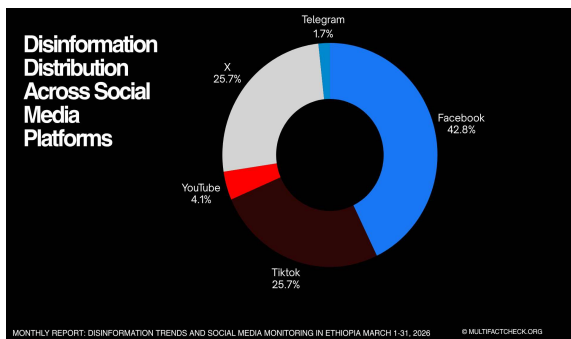


Regarding *Source Categories*, the monitoring team identified several distinct deceptive formats. *AI-Generated Images* emerged as the most prevalent tool for disinformation, with 300 instances recorded, highlighting a sophisticated shift toward synthetic media.

Ethnic or religion-based disinformation followed with 110 instances, reflecting the continued weaponization of identity-based narratives. Other documented categories included *Hate Speech* (70 instances), *Old Footage* (50 instances), *Impersonating International Media* (30 instances), and *Violence Incitement* (24 instances). The prevalence of AI-driven content underscores a growing challenge in visual verification for ordinary users.

In terms of *Platform Distribution*, Facebook served as the primary vector this month, hosting 42.8% of all documented cases. Both X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok saw identical levels of engagement, each accounting for 25.7% of the distribution. YouTube (4.1%) and Telegram (1.7%) hosted smaller proportions of the identified content.

This pattern signals a return to legacy platforms like Facebook for narrative broadcasting, while confirming the sustained influence of short-form video and real-time microblogging in Ethiopia’s polarized digital landscape.



10. Conclusion

March 2026 confirmed that Ethiopia's information ecosystem is at a critical juncture. The 584 disinformation instances documented this month - more than half of which involved AI-generated imagery - represent not merely a quantitative increase but a qualitative shift in the sophistication of the threat. The convergence of genuine humanitarian crises, regional military tensions, and the approaching general election has created conditions that both domestic and external actors are actively exploiting.

Facebook remains the dominant vector at 42.8% of cases, but the equal 25.7% shares held by X and TikTok indicate that disinformation is adapting to the affordances of multiple platforms simultaneously. The dominance of individual users as sources (412 of 584 instances) further confirms that the threat is decentralized, making traditional top-down content moderation insufficient on its own.

As the June election draws closer, MFC anticipates a continued rise in identity-based disinformation and intensified efforts to delegitimize the National Election Board. Three priorities demand urgent attention: first, social media platforms must invest in content moderation capacity for Amharic, Tigrinya, Afaan Oromoo, and other Ethiopian languages, where automated detection remains weak; second, newsrooms and civil society organizations require accessible AI-detection tools to keep pace with the shift from cheapfakes to synthetic media; and third, electoral institutions - NEBE chief among them - must engage proactively with the information environment rather than responding to crises after public perception has already been shaped. MFC will continue to monitor these trends and provide a factual anchor as the country navigates an increasingly volatile digital landscape.

MultiFact Check (MFC) is an independent fact-checking organization dedicated to investigating claims that spread misinformation and disinformation, and publishing fact-checked reports to inform the public. Our work is geographically focused, with primary emphasis on nations in the Horn of Africa and their diaspora communities. With a presence in various regions of Africa, Europe, and North America, MFC leverages a team of professionals with diverse expertise to deploy best practices in journalism and scholarships, identifying, investigating, and publishing accurate facts.