

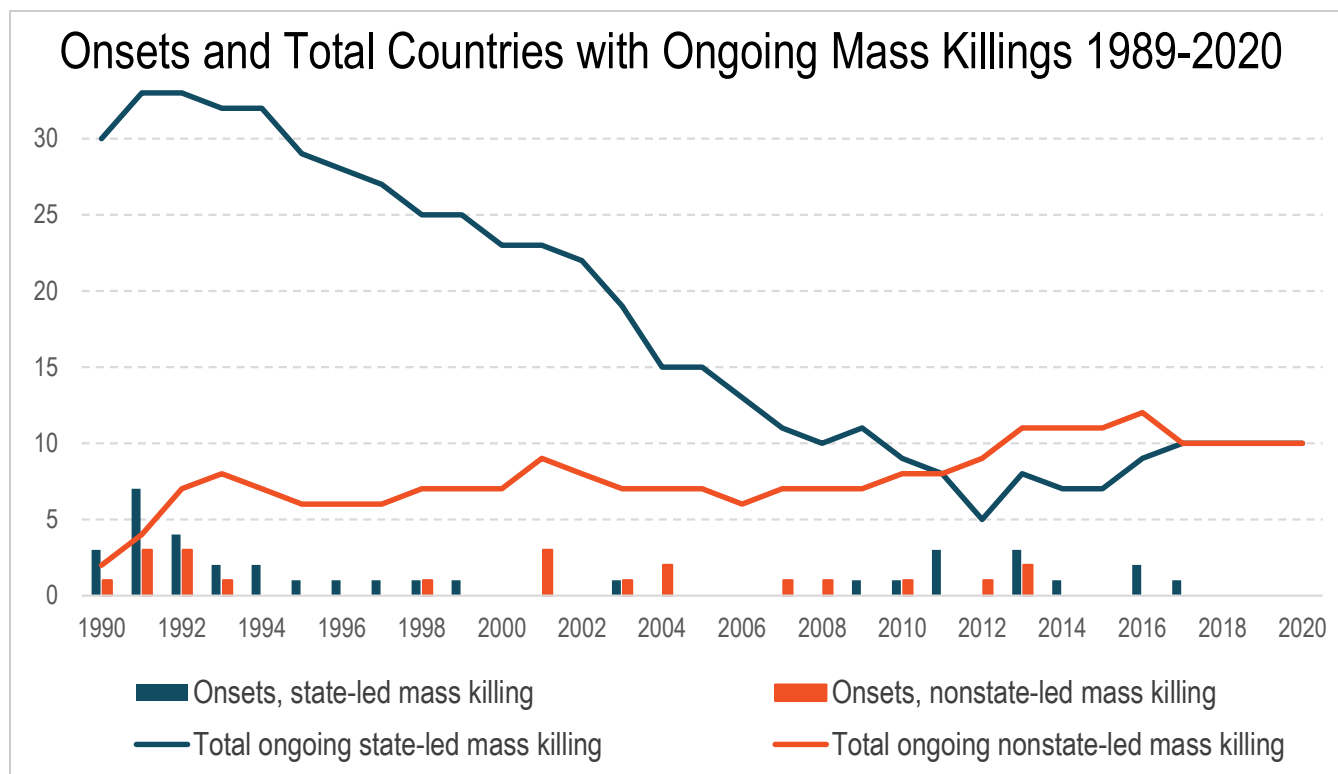


# EARLY WARNING PROJECT

## STATE OF THE WORLD MASS KILLING IN 2020

UNITED STATES  
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FOR THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE



The Early Warning Project uses patterns from past instances of mass killing to forecast when and where new mass killing episodes are most likely to happen in the future. Each year we update [our list](#) of countries experiencing state- and nonstate-led mass killing. The following report compiles our determinations for ongoing mass killings in 2020.

Based on the data currently available, there were no new mass killing episodes in 2020, according to the latest review by the Early Warning Project.

However, there are still a historically high number of ongoing mass killings: 20 separate episodes as of the end of 2020, perpetrated by 10 states and 10 nonstate groups, in 15 countries. Additionally, we highlight Ethiopia and the Central African Republic (CAR) as countries to watch based on events of 2020 and their ranking in the 2020-21 [Statistical Risk Assessment](#).

### How we determine when mass killings begin and end

We consider a mass killing to have occurred when the deliberate actions of armed groups—including but not limited to state security forces, rebel armies, and other militias—result in the deaths of at least

1,000 non combatant civilians who are targeted as part of a specific group, over a period of one year or less. We determine a mass killing to have ended when fewer than 100 civilians of the targeted group are killed for three consecutive years.

To determine onsets and terminations, we draw on any publicly available datasets, reports of international organizations, governments, and NGOs (e.g., United Nations, U.S. government, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group), and media reports. We also sometimes call on experts to assist in our determinations when the data are inconclusive. When in doubt, we presume that the status quo persists—i.e., no new mass killing has begun, or, in ongoing episodes, the mass killing continues.

Mass killings include, but are not limited to, policies which intentionally kill civilians en masse (e.g., military strategies that intentionally target civilians, mass execution of a specific group) and policies that knowingly result in widespread death (e.g., mass starvation, confiscation of health care supplies, forced relocation). In general, unrelated executions of individuals or the accidental killing of civilians in war (“collateral damage”) will not be considered a

mass killing. If an armed group is engaged in multiple campaigns that systematically kill civilians (e.g., in different geographic areas, or targeted against separate civilian groups), those fatalities will be counted toward separate potential onsets.

## Country to Watch: Ethiopia

Ethiopia ranks 9th highest risk (out of 162 countries) for experiencing a new mass killing in 2020 or 2021, according to the latest [Statistical Risk Assessment](#). There is already one ongoing [state-led mass killing](#) in Ethiopia, beginning in 2015 against perceived state opposition in the Oromia Region. Reports of increasing violence against civilians across multiple regions of Ethiopia in 2020 raise acute concerns. The Government of Ethiopia has severely limited international access to the Tigray region, making a determination of the total fatalities, perpetrators, and targeted groups difficult. The Early Warning Project continues to closely monitor the situation and will update this assessment as more information becomes available.

Armed conflict in Tigray began in November 2020. The conflict has included [reports](#) of massacres, [sexual and gender-based violence](#), [extrajudicial killings](#), and [widespread destruction and looting of public and private property](#). The origins of the current conflict can be traced back to September 2020, when the Tigray region [held](#) local elections in defiance of Prime Minister Abiy's nationwide postponement of elections due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the federal government [suspended](#) funding to the region. The local government, led by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), called this a "declaration of war" and on November 4th, the federal government sent its army into Tigray.

The ensuing armed conflict has resulted in violence against civilians perpetrated by Ethiopian state security forces, non-state militias, and [Eritrean security forces](#). Estimates of civilian fatalities range from [seven](#) (according to the Ethiopian government) to [52,000](#) (according to Tigrayan opposition groups). Millions of people are [displaced](#), and the [looming famine](#) and ongoing [humanitarian crisis](#) raise the risk for future mass atrocities. [Rape is being used as a weapon of war](#) across the region, and sexual assault

has become "an integral part of the violence" [according to](#) Prime Minister Abiy.

The federal government [declared victory](#) over the TPLF in late November. However, reports of atrocities in the region [continued through 2020 and into 2021](#). In March, the UN human rights chief [called for](#) a probe into the crisis and for the Ethiopian government to allow "independent monitors access to the region, to establish the facts and contribute to accountability." U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [called for](#) an end to "acts of ethnic cleansing" in western Tigray, and cited the need for a full investigation into human rights abuses, and President [Biden sent Senator Chris Coons](#) to Addis Ababa for talks with Prime Minister Abiy in early March 2021. Soon after this visit, the Ethiopian government invited the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to join the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission to conduct a [joint investigation](#) in Tigray.

In addition to the conflict in Tigray, western regions of Ethiopia are also experiencing an increase in ethnic violence in the lead-up to elections planned for June 2021. In late December, unknown gunmen killed [207 people](#) in the western Benishangul-Gumuz region the day after a [visit](#) from Prime Minister Abiy. Abiy visited to discuss the need for justice following a November [bus attack](#) in the region in which gunmen killed at least 34 civilians. In June, popular Ethiopian musician and Oromo activist, [Hachalu Hundessa](#), was killed outside his home in Addis Ababa. Protests erupted in the capital and were met with [deadly force](#) from government forces, [killing](#) at least 239 people in the week after the murder.

The Early Warning Project will continue to review information and reports from conflicts across Ethiopia.

## Country to Watch: Central African Republic

The Early Warning Project's [Statistical Risk Assessment](#) ranked CAR as the 18th most likely country to experience a new mass killing in 2020 or 2021, marking a significant rise from its position at

38th in the 2019-2020 risk assessment. There is already one [ongoing non-state-led mass killing](#) in CAR, perpetrated against Muslim non-combatant civilians perceived to support Séléka/ex-Séléka rebels. Since 2013, Séléka/ex-Séléka rebels and opposing anti-Balaka armed groups have carried out systematic attacks on Christian and Muslim civilian populations, respectively.

On December 3rd, CAR's Constitutional Court [ruled](#) former President François Bozizé could not run in the late December presidential election on “moral grounds” due to UN sanctions and an international arrest warrant issued for alleged “crimes against humanity and incitement to genocide.” Bozizé [joined](#) a coalition of six anti-balaka and ex-Séléka armed groups, called the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), which launched a series of attacks aimed to disrupt the [elections](#). The CPC killed [hundreds](#) of civilians in December, with the goal of forcing an election postponement or new round of peace talks. As a result of the violence, an estimated 30,000 refugees fled from CAR into neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and 185,000 people were internally displaced. On December 27th, CAR [held](#) general elections despite ongoing attacks by the CPC. Violence [has continued into 2021](#), indicating significant cause for concern regarding risk for civilian populations.

## Ongoing State-Led Mass Killings

The following countries were experiencing ongoing episodes of state-led mass killing as of the end of 2020. More details on all ongoing mass killings can be found on [our website](#). As noted in the definition, mass killings are ongoing as long as there are at least 100 civilians killed per year as part of the episode. The names of the targeted communities and year of onset are in parentheses:

- Burma/Myanmar (Rohingya, 2016; ethnic minority groups: Kachin, Lisu, Shan, 1948)
- Ethiopia (Oromo, 2015)
- Iraq (Sunni, 2014)
- Nigeria (suspected supporters of Boko Haram, 2009)

- North Korea (suspected political opponents, 1948)
- Philippines (civilians accused of using or selling drugs, 2016)
- South Sudan (suspected rebel supporters/co-ethnics, 2013)
- Sudan (ethnic groups in Darfur, 2003)
- Syria (suspected Assad opposition supporters, 2011)

## Ongoing Nonstate-Led Mass Killings

The Early Warning Project identified 10 ongoing episodes of nonstate-led mass killing as of the end of 2020. The affected countries, with the perpetrator group and date of onset in parentheses, are the following:

- Afghanistan (Taliban, Haqqani network, and associated armed groups, 2001)
- Central African Republic (various armed groups, including anti-Balaka, 2013)
- Democratic Republic of the Congo (various militias in the northeast, 1998)
- India (Maoist rebels, 2004)
- Iraq (Islamic State, 2003)
- Nigeria (Boko Haram, 2010)
- Pakistan (Taliban Movement of Pakistan and associated militias, 2001)
- Somalia (Al Shabaab and associated militias, 2007)
- South Sudan (Machar supporters, SPLM in Opposition, Nuer ethnic militias, and others, 2013)
- Syria (Islamic State and associated militias, 2012)

## Authors

**Alex Vandermaas-Peeler** is a PhD candidate at The George Washington University and an intern for the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide.

**Mollie Zapata** is the Research Manager at the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide.

**The Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide**

of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum works to prevent genocide and related crimes against humanity. The Simon-Skjodt Center is dedicated to stimulating timely global action to prevent genocide and to catalyze an international response when it occurs. Our goal is to make the prevention of genocide a core foreign policy priority for leaders around the world through a multi-pronged program of research, education, and public outreach. We work to equip decision makers, starting with officials in the United States but also extending to other governments, with the knowledge, tools, and institutional support required to prevent—or, if necessary, halt—genocide and related crimes against humanity.



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100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW Washington, DC 20024-2126 [ushmm.org](https://ushmm.org)