

Trendless Fluctuation? How Twitter's Ethiopia Interventions May (Not) Have Worked | Tech Policy Press

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On November 5, 2021, Twitter announced it was halting Trending topics in Ethiopia due to the ongoing threat of violence in the country, which has been embroiled in a year-long civil war. The escalating conflict, originally between Ethiopia's northern Tigray region and the national government, has left thousands dead and displaced millions. Previous reports, and a trove of documents leaked by Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen, have illustrated how social media is fueling ethnic-based violence in Ethiopia.

Twitter Trends have, in fact, played a significant role in the communications strategies for both parties since fighting broke out in November 2020. Although the predominant language in Ethiopia is Amharic, English-language tweets about the war have frequently trended in-country. Groups from across the political spectrum created click-to-tweet campaigns to ensure hashtags such as #TigrayGenocide and #NoMore trended, primarily targeting diaspora members as telecommunication access was originally restricted in Tigray. These types of operations have also successfully manipulated Twitter Trends in Nigeria and Kenya.

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