



Writing Policy Briefs

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ATROCITY ALERT: TIGRAYAN CIVILIANS AND OROMO DETAINEES IN AREAS UNDER ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT CONTROL

Bridget Conley, Alex de Waal, Deborah Mayersen, and Hollie Nyseth Brehm

Ethiopia: Indicators of imminent escalation in mass atrocity including genocide demand immediate international response.

The war between the Ethiopian government, its allied militias, and the Eritrean military against Tigrayan armed forces is now entering a new, extremely dangerous phase that presents a high risk of mass atrocity. As Tigrayan forces approach Ethiopia's capital city of Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian government has begun taking action that raises alarms about potential mass atrocities in and around the city. Specifically, the Ethiopian government has escalated hate speech against Tigrayans, mobilized neighborhood militias to fight the war, and arbitrarily arrested at least 30,000 Tigrayan civilians in Addis Ababa. These civilians—in addition to Tigrayan soldiers held in detention centers since the war began in November 2020, imprisoned Oromo political leaders, and Oromo civilians who refuse to join militias—are all at heightened risk of atrocities. Additionally, there are reports of ongoing massacres of Tigrayans who live in Western Tigray, which is still under government control. We call for the United Nations, the African Union, and all states that are parties to the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide to fulfill their obligation to act now by 1) Demanding all armed actors in Ethiopia abide by their obligations to protect civilians under international law; 2) Demanding an immediate end to hate speech, incitement to violence, and inflammatory public statements, as well as the release of detainees; and 3) Imposing an arms embargo and calling out arms suppliers as potentially at risk of being accomplices to the crime of genocide.

Background and Context

The risk of a major escalation in ethnically targeted mass atrocities in Ethiopia is extremely high. This is due to developments in the current armed conflict that present the serious likelihood of defeat for the government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Research across numerous cases has found that threats to a government, including but not limited to battlefield losses, is a common trigger for mass atrocities. This possible trigger, as well as the presence of other risk factors of atrocity crimes, suggests that at least tens of thousands of civilians are at risk.

On November 4, 2020, at a time of escalating tension and reciprocal threats, Tigrayan forces attacked Ethiopian military bases. The government of Ethiopia responded by launching a military offensive in alliance with neighboring Eritrea and

Naming & Shaming

Plan for Our Time Together



What is a Policy Brief



Structure of a Brief



Tips and Public Writing



Workshopping Time

Choose your own adventure: your own briefs, collective editing, or op-eds



Take Two Minutes

And write everything you know
about policy briefs!



What is a Policy Brief?

- A tool to share research with non-specialized audiences
- Short, clear document that should stand on its own
 - Often 2 pages
- Summarizes findings or knowledge alongside concise policy recommendations
 - For law, guidelines, practices, actions, etc.
- Often peer-reviewed

Purpose



Focuses on one key topic

Typically raising awareness and/or sharing knowledge, as well as making recommendations

The topic should be immediately clear



As you begin, **write your purpose first** to ensure you can align the brief elements with the purpose

Example: Raise awareness of impending atrocity

Audience



- Who will read your brief?
- What do they know?
 - (Same with literature reviews for articles)
- What kinds of recommendations will be most useful to them?

Typical Structure

Executive summary

Introduction

Body

- Overview
- Analysis/examination of findings

Recommendations

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Executive Summary



Summarizes the entire brief



Often a paragraph, though can be bullet points



A strong topic sentence to begin the summary is incredibly important



Write (or at least edit) this last, just like your introduction of your research papers

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Background and Context

The risk of a major escalation in ethnically targeted mass atrocities in Ethiopia is extremely high. This is due to developments in the current armed conflict that present the serious likelihood of defeat for the government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

Research across numerous cases has found that threats to a government, including but not limited to battlefield losses, is a

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Recommendations

Introduction



- Use a hook
 - Underscore why the audience needs to care
 - Broader implications than disciplinary theory
- Present the argument/problem
 - Urgent and important
- Foreshadow what is coming

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Recommendations



Body

- Background (as needed)
- Approach/methods/how deriving information
- Key findings
 - E.g., 3 main pieces of evidence
- Be assertive yet honest about limitations
 - Consider anticipating the counter arguments and directly addressing them
- Hint toward implications and recommendations

Typical Structure

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Recommendations



Recommendations (and Conclusion)

- Link research to actual recommendations
- Often in bullet points (though can be paragraphs)
- Include actors and actions
- Feasible

obligation to prevent and punish the crime of genocide.

Recommendations

- The UN Security Council should issue a resolution recognizing the threat of genocide and other atrocity crimes, instructing all armed actors in Ethiopia to abide by their obligations to protect civilians under international law, and committing to the investigation of and accountability for international crimes.
- The UN, AU, EU, US, and other relevant stakeholders should immediately and without caveat demand that all parties to the conflict refrain from violence against civilians and cease inflammatory public statements, incitement to violence, and hate speech in all forms of media.
- The UN Security Council should impose an arms embargo on Ethiopia and Eritrea, and all stakeholders should call out other states that are either directly involved in the war or are providing arms to the Ethiopian government (e.g., China, Iran, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates) as at risk of being potential accomplices in international crimes.
- The UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide should issue a strong statement condemning the Ethiopian government's extrajudicial arrests of civilians, hate speech, and violent targeting of civilian groups.
- The African Union should issue a clear warning to the Ethiopian government that the perpetration of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity places it in violation of Article 4(h) of the African Union Constitutive Act

Tips



- Try to avoid political language
- Use concise headings
 - Verbs
 - Clear, active language as opposed to passive language
- Include a brief bio or a nod toward your qualifications

Public Writing

No jargon

- Could a family member understand it?

Short words, short sentences

- Academic writing is often *not* good writing

Read every topic sentence

- Across topic sentences; how do they flow?
- Within paragraphs, too. Does every sentence support the topic sentence?

How Can This Help You?



Beyond hopefully helping others, this can:

- Get your name out there!
- Draw attention to your work
 - Cite your articles in the brief
- Ideally fuel your energies, as your findings will reach broader audiences

Where to Publish

Varies by discipline, so check professional associations!

Also check research centers (e.g., International Development Research Center)

Different countries also have their own engagement endeavors

E.g., U.S.: Scholars Strategy Network

Often write them directly for government or nonprofit contract work

Questions So
Far?



Workshop

Take 5 minutes by yourself and brainstorm topics for a policy brief

- What do you know that many people don't?
- How might your research inform policy?
- Start thinking about a purpose for a brief



Choose Your Own Adventure

More in-depth on your policy briefs

OR

Collectively edit a policy brief submission

OR

Op-eds



With a Partner



Clearly write your purpose



Think of your recommendations



Be ready to share with the group!

One Key Thing You Learned

Look back at what you wrote at the start!

