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Postcolonial Perspectives on the International Response and the
Concealment of Atrocities
in Tigray Massacre
MA Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines how global attention influences the behavior of African states by analyzing the level of international responses from international organizations and the actions of the Ethiopian government in the Tigray massacre case, with particular focus on the effectiveness of mass atrocity information concealing strategies during the period between 4th November 2020 and 2nd November 2022. The study draws on data from reports, meeting records, and press statements issued by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the European Union (EU) on the topic of Tigray massacre. It further investigates the extent to which the Ethiopian government employed concealment strategies to restrict the flow of information regarding mass atrocities through many situation reports from conflict monitoring organizations. To analyze the data, direct content analysis and congruence analysis methods were applied.

The findings indicate that the Ethiopian government's use of information concealment strategies is consistent with realist theory, which posits that state behavior in an anarchic international system is primarily driven by survival rather than cooperation, particularly when coordination among states is not prioritized. However, a postcolonial theoretical analysis reveals additional causal mechanisms underlying the government's behavior. First, limited international attention to African conflicts shaped by hierarchical structures in global politics. It creates conditions in which states perceive reduced external scrutiny as strategically advantageous. In this context, the Ethiopian government may adopt adaptive strategies that combine the suppression of marginalized voices through the concealment of mass atrocity information with the selective adoption of international norms through mimicry, in order to manage and mitigate external pressure. Second, these conditions contribute to the prolongation of conflict, as partial compliance and managed visibility reduce external incentives for resolution. Finally, this dynamic may lead to the normalization of conflict, both within domestic governance practices and international perception. Overall, this research highlights the critical role of international organizations in African conflicts. From a postcolonial perspective, it suggests that conflict-resolution frameworks developed for Western contexts may not be fully effective in African cases and require adaptation, since that African conflicts are shaped by hierarchical dynamics in international politics.

1. Introduction

Since the Rwandan genocide, through the war in Darfur and the Tigray massacre, Africa has rarely been free from conflict. Nevertheless, international reactions and responses particularly from Western nations to the large-scale human rights violations in African countries have often been delayed. Several factors contribute to this, including limited access to conflict zones, a lack of verified evidence of atrocities, and the perception that certain African countries lack sufficient strategic importance to compel major powers to take immediate action to stop mass killings (Adelman et al., 1996). This problem reflects the structural inequality of power through the lens of postcolonial theory, as Africa continues to be viewed through a Western gaze as a region inherently prone to conflict and chaos. Consequently, new outbreaks of violence are often seen as “normal” or inevitable due to Orientalism that portrays the third world countries as strange, bizarre and backward based on their politics of location (Burney, 2012).

Nevertheless, the international community has a moral and legal duty to monitor and protect human rights, which are universal values. Based on the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or UDHR, a document that is considered as the foundation of modern human rights, all member states have pledged to co-operate with the United Nations or UN for promotion and protection human rights (United Nations, 1948). Hence, from a human rights perspective, there should be no hierarchy of suffering; voices from all nations deserve to be heard equally. Supporting this notion, voices from Africa highlight the persistent problem of double standards. In 2025, Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner, the Foreign Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, criticized the European Union or EU for double standard, when they failed to impose strong sanctions on Rwanda for its military support of a rebel group in the DRC, while simultaneously maintaining mineral trade agreements with Rwanda for economic purposes (Rankin, 2025). Considering strong sanctions that the EU adopted towards Russia after its full-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022 while being reluctant to apply the same measures to African countries can be an exemplary case of the present-day situation which stands in a sharp contrast to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Amnesty International report in 2023 highlighted the failure of international organizations, including the United Nations Security Council or UNSC and even the African Union or AU. Both failed to respond to the crimes and human rights violations in several conflict zones such as Sudan and Ethiopia. Overall, the global actions were inadequate to resolve threats to humanity, especially

famine in African countries, with most of events being the consequences of conflict (Amnesty International, 2023). Even though the intensity of conflicts and casualties in Africa are comparable to or even exceed those in other regions, the global response remains slower and less extensive than in the cases such as Israel-Hamas war that broke out in 2023 or the Russia–Ukraine war that started in 2022 (Yarnell, 2025). Africa seems to be located far away from global attention and rare to be ranked on the top of global priorities. One of the African leaders, Egypt’s President Abdel-Fattah El-Sissi mentioned a solution during the conference on the Russia-Africa partnership in Cairo in December 2025. He suggested the global community should follow African demands by granting at least two permanent seats with veto powers and five non-permanent seats in the UNSC to African countries. New members are expected to amplify African voices and bring African issues to the global agenda. However, the question of which African countries will represent the continent remains unresolved. (Wagdy, 2025). This suggestion has been a long-standing demand since the Africa Union was established in 2005.

Among many African conflicts, the Tigray massacre in Ethiopia is widely recognized as one of the most severe human rights violations in recent history. It started on 4th November 2020 when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered a military operation against the Tigray government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front or TPLF. Tigray is one of Ethiopia’s regional states with 7.1 million inhabitants, where 97% of people are Tigrayans, while the rest belong to Amharas, Irob, Afar, Agaw, Oromo, and Kunama ethnic groups (Omna Tigray, n.d.). Before the military operation, Ethiopia had a history of ethnic tensions and power struggles between the Tigrayan elite and the federal government that spanned many decades. The recent conflict was triggered by government statements that accused the Tigrayan ruling party of attacking a governmental defense post and attempting to steal military equipment (Asylum Research Centre, 2021). However, the operation that was supposed to be over in a few days escalated into a domestic war. The Ethiopian government cut off all communication, both offline and online, in Tigray region. As a result, Tigray became an isolated place from the rest of the world.

During the war, especially in the early stage, Ethiopian forces and allies committed numerous human rights violations, such as extrajudicial executions, sexual violence, looting of properties, and abuse that can be considered as war crime (Human Rights Watch & Amnesty International, 2022). Notwithstanding, international responses were low because the region was heavily blocked. At the same time, the digital black hole made all human rights violations ongoing and invisible.

Marginalization of Africa on the international stage, combined with information control strategies often employed by African governments during conflicts, result in the fact that violence intensifies and more lives are lost, while global awareness remains limited (Weldemichel, 2025). This raises the following question: if the international community paid more attention and responded more actively to crises in Africa, would African governments still be able to conceal information of mass killings so effectively? Based on transnational advocacy networks theory, human rights organizations, the media, and civil society play a key role in raising public awareness and pressuring states or international organizations to take action on human rights violations. This action is a result of the politics of information which means the ability to move political information quickly to the places where it has the most impact (Keck & Sikkink, 1999, p. 95). Hence, the dynamic of information and perception about the massacre is essential.

The objective of this thesis is to examine the relationship between the international responses and the behavior of the Ethiopian government during the Tigray conflict especially controlling the flow of information. The research question is: *How do international responses to the Tigray massacre influence the effectiveness of concealment mass atrocity information by the Ethiopian government and the resulting severity of human rights violations?* The thesis aims to explore how postcolonial hierarchies in global politics shape the outcomes of military conflicts by analyzing how international responses, especially by the normative power actors like UNSC and EU, can play an active role rather than passive one.

This thesis applies two methods. First, direct content analysis that uses indicators to indicate independent variable (IV) and dependent variables (DV). Second, congruence analysis will be employed to test the dataset observations and multiple competing theories, to find which theory is the best one for explaining the Tigray massacre case. Firstly, one independent variable (International Responses) and two dependent variables (Concealment of Mass Atrocity Information and Severity of Human Rights Violations) will be identified to set a framework for this research. Secondly, each variable will be operationalized by specifying measurable indicators that will guide data collection and allow for systematic comparison. In addition to identifying the presence of each indicator, the analysis will also assess the degree of intensity with which each indicator appears. At this stage, the goal is to make abstract concepts such as concealment of mass atrocity information to be tangible and applicable for collecting data. This involves evaluating the duration, scale, or severity reflected in the data. After that, the intensity level of both independent

and dependent variables will be measured and presented in graphs, to show the development of events during the Tigray conflict from 2020-2022. Lastly, congruence analysis will be used to examine data with hypotheses. With this methodology, I expect to see how international responses influence the effectiveness of concealment mass atrocity information strategies by the Ethiopian government and the resulting severity of human rights violations.

The relevance of this study lies in the contribution to the understanding of African governments' behaviors regarding the strategy of concealment of mass atrocity information from international states. In the time of Tigray war, Ethiopian government used many tactics to conceal information. The tactics included cutting communication channels, blocking all technology in the conflict region, and preventing the area from investigative journalists. This proved that information is one of the key control strategies. They tried to limit information from flowing outside the conflict zone because it would have brought international responses back to Ethiopia. Nowadays, the research on international responses to African conflicts is limited; hence, this research aims to fill the gap. It does so by implementing the postcolonial framework, which calls for hearing the voices of the third-world countries, as well as by explaining the relationship between international responses and the effectiveness of concealment mass atrocity information by the Ethiopian government during the conflict in Tigray. Moreover, I believe that understanding of the strategies that governments utilize during conflicts to limit information flow is crucial to raise awareness of the capabilities of a state to hide future human rights violations. In terms of international relations studies, this research also demonstrates that international responses to conflict not only serve to condemn or mitigate the severity of such events, but that international monitoring and scrutiny might make it more difficult for the government of the state concerned to conceal information. In other words, international responses help protect human rights or prevent the occurrence of humanitarian violence.

The thesis is structured in six chapters. First, the introduction, which has explained the research problem, research puzzle, and the importance of this research. The second chapter establishes the theoretical framework, which applies postcolonialism as an analytical approach, and realism and liberalism as the foundations for the hypotheses used to examine the empirical results of this research. Within liberalism, transnational advocacy networks explain the crucial role of international organizations and the flow of information to the public, which can exert pressure on the state. In contrast, realism considers international organizations to have a limited capacity to

influence state behavior. The aim is to develop two contrasting hypotheses, which are tested through congruence analysis. Moreover, I applied the concept of “necropolitics” that exposes the hierarchy in international politics. Within the framework, state authorities decide who may live and who must die. This framework will explain why Tigray conflict turned out to be one of the massive modern human rights violations and why international responses were limited. Additionally, the concepts of international response and information concealment strategy will be explored. The third chapter gives the context of Tigray massacre, explaining background events and actors who were involved in this conflict. The chapter ends with hypotheses. The fourth chapter explains the methodology and operationalization of all variables while also describing the methods that this thesis uses for collecting and analyzing data, and examining which hypotheses best align with empirical observations from the Tigray case. The fifth chapter presents empirical results. Then the thesis ends with a conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter focuses on the conceptual framework for this thesis. It starts with the postcolonial theory that is the core theoretical framework of this research. The second section presents the idea of realism and liberalism to human rights. Then the concept of necropolitics, which defines the authority of state power who will live and who will die. Following by the concept of international responses to human rights crisis and transnational advocacy networks to explain the role of international organizations. The last section presents the concept of concealment of massacre by the state. Overall, these concepts set a solid foundation before exploring the relationship between international responses and information concealment strategies that conducted by Ethiopia's government during Tigray massacre.

2.1 Postcolonial theory and Human Rights

Postcolonial thought emerged from the historical experience of colonialism. For more than 400 years, Western powerful nations such as Spain, Portugal, Britain, and France occupied territories across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As a result, these regions became exceptional spaces in which colonial powers were able to exercise authority arbitrarily. Colonizers exploited both natural resources and local populations, while also establishing new rules and systems through profoundly unequal power relations (Patel, 2023). Consequently, while colonial powers benefited fully from the conditions they created, indigenous peoples were forced to endure severe suffering, including forced labor, divide-and-rule policies, violent conflicts, and epidemics. Although the formal era of colonialism has ended, its legacy persists. The wounds left by colonial rule continue to shape the difficulties faced by many countries today, including challenges related to nation-building, the management of ethnic conflicts, and economic recovery. These enduring effects form the core focus of postcolonial studies. Moreover, postcolonial thought seeks to create space for marginalized populations and to restore the significance of their voices, as these groups have historically been silenced (Go, 2016, p. 23). One prominent work is *Can the Subaltern Speak?* By Gayatri Spivak (1988), It is an academic work that questions the ability of the oppressed group of people or the subaltern to express their own thoughts, because during the colonial era, colonialists rewrote history to erase the knowledge and identity of the local people. As a result, their identities were erased, and the knowledge produced by the colonialists became a representation of the subaltern.

Foundational works in postcolonial theory include “*The Wretched of the Earth*” (1961) by Frantz Fanon, which calls on African nations under French colonial rule to rise and reclaim their local cultures. Fanon argues that prolonged Western domination led to the degradation and devaluation of indigenous cultures, which were portrayed as primitive and backward. Another seminal work is “*Orientalism*” (1978) by Edward Said, which explains how Western nations produced knowledge about the East that is saturated with myths and stereotypes rather than grounded in reality. As a result, postcolonial theory was developed with the aim of liberating and giving voice to countries that were formerly colonized. They are often called the Third World countries, because they have been oppressed and marginalized (Brown, 2014, pp. 13-14). The term postcolonial does not solely mean the period when many countries in the world became free from colonialism (which mainly occurred after the Second World War) but postcolonial also means the approach which aims to uncover sociopolitical issues in the present countries and societies that were affected by the imperial domination from the era of colonialism for example power dynamic and hierarchy (Carey, 2002, pp. 59-75). Postcolonialism has the task of deconstructing and critiquing many ideals produced from a Eurocentric perspective or any ideology that takes the West as the center. Human rights are one such ideal.

From a postcolonial point of view, human rights are a tool created by Western nations within their own societies and then granted to non-Western nations on the assumption that those nations are inherently “savage,” stemming from cultures radically different from the West (for example, practicing female genital cutting or non-monogamous forms of marriage). Makau Mutua argues that these practices fall outside the framework of Western cultures and are thus perceived as barbaric, with entire cultures stereotyped as representing the state itself. These states are consequently cast as primitive, deficient, and in need of correction (Mutua, 2001, pp. 243-245). As a result, the status and relationship between Western nations and Third World countries in the issue of human rights takes the form of “savage nations” versus “savior nations”. Hence, human rights through the lens of postcolonial theory became a stage for conflict between “good states” and “bad states” in cases where a state could not follow the norms of Western countries. Beyond this, the role of saviors is performed not only by states but also by non-state actors such as the UN or various NGOs. To illustrate the lens of postcolonialism regarding human rights crisis, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine is considered. It demonstrates a lack of a clear legal framework and consistent implementation. Its effectiveness remains uncertain, as the mechanism

has repeatedly faced political deadlock within the UNSC. For instance, in the Syrian crisis of 2011, both Russia and China exercised their veto power, effectively blocking collective action and leaving the UN limited to issuing condemnations and appeals. Moreover, R2P has been widely criticized by scholars and the Global South countries as a tool through which hegemonic powers legitimize their own political and military interventions under the name of humanitarianism. Overall, even though formal colonial rule has ended, from a postcolonial perspective, the group of Third World countries remains dominated by Eurocentric thinking (Brown, 2025, pp. 22-23). Human rights remain a crucial tool for protecting people's rights and fostering social peace. However, postcolonialism views the Western notion of human rights as not directly applicable; it needs to be deconstructed, adapted, and supplemented with conditions that fit each state's own context and society. Rethinking Western notions is part of the process of decolonization, which is also central to postcolonial studies and aims at the reconfiguration of power relations. Moreover, this process not only critiques the consequences of the colonial era, but also supports indigenous ideas, languages, and cultures. (Ashcroft et al., 2007). As a result, examining human rights through a postcolonial lens reveals that they are not universally applicable in the way they are commonly perceived while the frame of postcolonial theory also shapes the way of thinking, as many people believe that third world countries, by their nature, always have the problem of human rights violations. The next section focuses on the perspectives on human rights from mainstream international relations theories such as realism and liberalism, which provide different lens for looking at the Tigray massacre case.

2.2 Realism and Liberalism on Human Rights

In the eyes of realism, human rights are not the priority issue because the most critical matters of the state are national interest and security (Burchill et al., 2005, p. 30). As a result, states prefer to focus on power to gain benefits for their national interests and ensure their security, rather than follow cooperation functions like a human rights approach. Hans Morgenthau mentioned the six principles of realism in *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1948). In the fourth principle, he argued that universal moral principles cannot be applied as formulation because state action relies on the national interest (Keaney, 2006, p. 42). It means universal moral principles, such as human rights, are essential; he did not deny it. But when the state wants to claim or defend human rights, it should rely on the nation's interest. In structural realism by Kenneth

Waltz as in *Theory of International Politics* (1979), state behaviors are based on structure rather than human nature, which is often perceived as selfish. Anarchy is a key factor that drives state's behavior. Because in this world, when no state or government plays the role of a central authority to enforce or monitor state's behavior, all states must take care of themselves by gaining power as much as they can. Anarchical system created a security dilemma and constrained states from taking specific actions while encouraging them to do something toward others (Burchill et al., 2005, p. 35). As a result, human rights are often overshadowed by concerns about security and power.

In contrast, in liberalism, human rights are important because cooperation between states is the norm. Unlike realism, which focuses on power, liberalism looks for a peaceful relationship between nations. During the Enlightenment era between the 17th and 18th centuries, Immanuel Kant was one of the philosophers who laid the groundwork for liberalism. He believed in the formula of humanity, which means every human being has inherent worth, so we should not use other human as a tool to achieve our own goals. In Kant's perspective, humans should not be treated as a tool or slaves to achieve someone's goal because everyone should respect the dignity of humans (Halam & Deb, 2025). Kant is considered one of the founders of liberalism, and his legacy became the foundation of liberal notions in Western countries. As a result, liberalism prioritizes the human rights concept. No one in any country should be tortured because of their beliefs, and human rights should be the first value that every nation must respect (Akbarzadeh, 2017, p. 49). The relationship between liberalism and human rights can be seen through the morality of the state. It means the moral status of any state depends on how well it protects its citizens, and if a state seriously violates the rights of citizens, it can be considered as morally failing (Vincent, 1986, p. 115). Hence, respect for human rights has become a norm in the world of liberalism. The lists of freedoms and rights that each government must protect have become the standard to define appropriate behavior of a state while also setting the boundary between liberal states and non-liberal states. The latter are seen to fail to follow these norms which means that the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' states is drawn on the basis of human rights (Sikkink, 1998, p. 520). The next section discusses the concept of necropolitics, in which hierarchies among nations and races become a determining factor in approaches to human rights protection. Within these hierarchies in international politics, states may choose to protect some populations from atrocities while ignoring others.

2.3 Necropolitics

Necropolitics is often understood as a concept that stands as an extension of biopolitics by Michel Foucault. Biopolitics sees the human body as a form of economic capital, a kind of machine that can be trained, optimized, and developed. Citizen life, therefore, becomes a space that must be organized to ensure it remains strong, productive, and ready for use. Consequently, the human body must be kept under control. Achille Mbembe, however, goes beyond this notion. While Foucault views the control of life by state power as affecting the quality of life, Mbembe sees the right to kill or the right to live as the supreme power of the state, which can be exercised and manifested through various means, such as war (Mbembe, 2003). However, some scholars argue that Foucault had already defined racist violence, therefore, necropolitics is not new and can be incorporated into the concept of biopower (D’Cruz, 2025, p. 2).

In Mbembe’s understanding (2003), death is not always immediate or spectacular, as in war or genocide, but rather slow, systematic, and bureaucratically produced. State power does not always manifest itself through overt violence; instead, it operates through policies. Examples include restrictions on refugee access to legal rights, which in turn limit their access to healthcare, or Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in widespread food insecurity among civilians (Mukim et al., 2025, p. 7). This systematic abandonment of certain populations is closely tied to racial, religious, and ethnic hierarchies. Mbembe conceptualizes this modern form of exclusion as “nanoracism”, which refers to subtle, pervasive, and normalized forms of racism that are deeply embedded in everyday life and rarely questioned. This form of racism operates through entrenched “us versus them” logics and renders discriminatory attitudes socially acceptable, for example through stereotypes and biased representations in the media (Fernandez, 2023, p. 152). Furthermore, Mbembe’s conceptualization of the politics of death also includes the deliberate indifference toward the fate of particular populations. A key example is the system of black slavery, which Mbembe describes as a space where sovereign power was exercised through absolute control over life and death. Enslaved people were subjected to a condition of “living death,” in which their political and social identities were stripped away, reducing them to mere bodies that could be exploited, discarded, and ultimately allowed to die (Pele, 2020).

Linking necropolitics to postcolonial theory, Mbembe saw international politics as a system that produced states which hold their authority to determine who may live and who may die, effectively allowing certain groups to be exposed to death, for example refugees, stateless persons and some

ethnic groups (Santo, 2025). In many modern states shaped by postcolonial histories, sovereignty has taken the form of what Mbembe calls “commandement” (a French term meaning “command”). This mode of power does not function through democratic legitimacy or rational governance. Instead, it operates through coercion, violence, and domination. Under commandement, the relationship between the state and its population is reduced to obedience, punishment, and the conditional distribution of benefits (Mbembe, 2001, p. 32). After many African states have formally gained independence, this system of sovereignty continues to persist, especially in the conditions of ethnic conflict. In the African context, where ethnic diversity is extensive, ethnicity becomes a justification for mass killing, as certain groups are constructed as less human or less worthy of life. Mbembe explained that the conflict in Africa is driven by the dramatic change of political economy of statehood over the last quarter of the twentieth century. As a result, Africa has become a war machine. While on a global scale, populations are also divided into valuable lives and unvaluable lives, often along semi periphery and periphery countries. Africa is frequently represented in international politics as lacking the capacity to be a political actor of global significance, therefore, lacking strategic, economic, or political value (Mbembe, 2003, pp. 32-33). Consequently, African lives become unvaluable lives or lives whose loss is tolerated, ignored, or seen as inevitable from the global perspective. Furthermore, the forms of killing involved frequently include atrocity and dehumanizing violence, such as limb amputation, burning, and prolonged slow violence before death including rape. These methods reflect the perpetrators’ perception of victims as less than fully human like the report from Tigray victims (Amnesty International, 2023). Mbembe’s notions provide a deeper understanding of violence, racism, and conflict in modern societies while portraying the international politics as fraught with hierarchies, with some nations being more important than others.

Based on this logic of hierarchical human valuation, this thesis employs necropolitics to explain why the international community has barely responded to mass killings in Africa. This framework helps illuminate how international actors normalize or ignore the large-scale loss of African lives while persisting the post colonialist perspectives continue to drive people to deny the equal humanity of others and tolerate massacre events. However, international responses during the mass conflict never have only one guideline. Nowadays concepts are built from the study of previous atrocities around the world. I would like to present the main general concept then choose the right meaning that is suitable to this research.

2.4 International Responses

During the 1990s, within the context of changing ideas about human rights and intervention, several scholars debated on the balance between state sovereignty and human rights. They argued that when a state is unable or unwilling to protect human rights, it should be considered to have lost its sovereign legitimacy, thereby opening the door to humanitarian intervention. This type of a state can be considered as morally failing. Hence, human rights have become a norm in the world of liberalism. The lists of liberties and rights that each government must protect have become the standard to define the appropriate behavior of the state while also setting the boundary between liberal states and non-liberal states (Sikkink, 1998). International responses became a duty not policy options after the World Summit in 2005. The summit adopted the principle that the international community has a responsibility to protect its people from mass atrocities. The UN has developed many tools to prevent or mitigate conflict such as R2P. It is based on the liberal idea that all nations have the role to monitor and respond to mass atrocities.

Nevertheless, R2P is difficult to approve and is preferred to be the last option to solve a conflict, so nations and international organizations have many other tools and approaches to respond. For instance, the path before reaching R2P contains two approaches. First, prevention: actions that decrease the likelihood of atrocities before they occur. Second, response: actions that aim to stop or limit the scope of atrocities once they are ongoing (Straus, 2016, p. 33). In general, preventive approaches are a long-term action to prevent future atrocity, for example, ending discrimination in certain society. Responsive approaches are short-term actions that aim to limit violence, for example, provide economic sanctions on the government who perpetrated a human rights violation. This normative responsibility led to the framework of international responses. It means the ways that international communities react to four cases of mass atrocities such as war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing, the notion is based on the norm that international communities must do something when mass atrocity occurs (Mills, 2015, pp. 1-2). However, nowadays there is no clear approach of international responses to mass atrocity because the process is constantly evolving, each new mass killing requires a reassessment of lessons learned. Hence, choosing an approach also depends on political, geostrategic and normative perspectives of each state. However, overall, international responses can take three forms. First,

the types of responses by Kurt Mills. Second, the common prevention agenda by Alex Bellamy, and third, the response measures by Scott Straus.

Regarding the types of responses by Kurt Mills (2015), he defines the concept of response as state responsibility, including the responsibility to protect, the responsibility to prosecute, and the responsibility to palliate. The first one contains a variety of actions that aim to stop mass atrocity, protecting life and stopping the conflict. Second, the responsibility to prosecute involves the process of seeking justice after atrocity occurred, for instance, arresting people who conducted human rights violations (Mills, 2015, pp. 14-15). Lastly, the responsibility to palliate seeks to provide humanitarian aid. Because when atrocity happens, many people become displaced and urgently need basic resources for living such as water, food, medicine and shelters (Mills, 2015, pp. 16-17). Overall, these approaches cover the elements that international community should do, relying on the International Conference on Information Security framework which contains the responsibility to prevent genocide and other humanitarian catastrophes, the responsibility to react when such situations occur, and the responsibility to rebuild after a complex humanitarian emergency has ended (Mills, 2013). Furthermore, the common prevention agenda by Alex Bellamy (2011) contains two approaches. First, structural prevention aims to resolve the structural conditions that can lead to mass atrocities such as the presence of unequal economic and political conditions. Second, direct prevention aims to prevent the escalation of violence. These two types of approaches contain sub elements which are involved in many tactics such as governance measures, diplomatic measures, economic measures, security measures, human rights measures, and military measures (Bellamy, 2011, p. 5). This is the table that explains Bellamy’s notion to show how international actors can respond to any mass atrocity events by separated into two types of prevention:

Table 1: Structural prevention and direct prevention by Alex Bellamy (2011).

Structural prevention	Direct prevention
Economic Measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reducing deprivation and poverty. - Reducing inequalities, especially horizontal. - Promoting economic growth. 	Diplomatic Measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fact-finding. - Deploying eminent persons/envoys. - Acting as a neutral mediator.

- Supporting structural reform.	- Pursuing arbitration (including International Court of Justice).
Governance Measures - Strengthening and supporting democracy. - Supporting the diffusion or sharing of power. - Strengthening the independence of judiciaries.	Sanctions - Banning travel. - Embargoing trade and arms. - Freezing assets. - Imposing diplomatic sanctions
Security Measures - Strengthening rule of law. - Ending/preventing impunity. - Reforming the security sector. - Encouraging disarmament and effective arms control/management with particular reference to small arms	Inducements - Promoting economic or trade incentives. - Offering political inducements.
Human Rights Measures - Protecting fundamental human rights with specific protection of minorities, women, and children's rights. - Supporting the work of the International Criminal Court.	Military Measures - Mobilizing preventive deployments. - Developing and/or threatening rapid deployment capability. - Jamming and other means of preventing incitement.

Lastly, the response measures by Scott Straus are based on the fundamental stopping of genocide and mass atrocity. The logic behind responsive approaches contains noncoercive tools and coercive tools which are separated into five types and specified in this table (Straus, 2016, p. 144):

Table 2: Response measures to atrocity by Scott Straus (2016).

Types	Noncoercive	Coercive
Diplomatic	- Mediation and negotiation.	- Withdraw of diplomatic relations.

Informational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Naming and shaming. - Media Monitoring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disruption of communication networks of perpetrators. - Countering of speech that incites violence.
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support of evidence gathering. - Preliminary investigation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Referral to the international court. - Investigation by international court.
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Withdrawal of foreign assistance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sanctions on governments or individuals. - Financial assets freezes.
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Withdraw military assistance. - End of planning and training exercises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Military interventions.

These are the key concepts and examples of approaches to international responses to mass atrocities. This thesis adopts Scott Straus’s framework of response measures by focusing on noncoercive approaches as an initiative response. Although Mills provides a useful typology of international responses and Bellamy offers a comprehensive normative framework for atrocity prevention, both approaches are limited in explaining how international responses unfold during ongoing conflicts and how variations in response intensity affect state behavior. In contrast, Straus’s framework treats international responses as a set of observable and sequential measures, allowing for systematic analysis of their timing, intensity, and escalation. This approach is particularly suitable for methodology and enables the examination of how variations in international responses shape state behavior. Next, I present the concept of transnational advocacy

network which is important because it plays a role as bridge connecting between atrocity information and the international actors.

2.5 Transnational Advocacy Network

Transnational advocacy network is a form of organization for the volunteers who share the same character and values, and work together to promote their principles, and norms. Most of its networks focus on specific issues such as human rights, women's rights, environment, indigenous people, and ETC (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). To achieve their aims, network members follow four strategies. First, informative politics, meaning that transnational advocacy network uses information by network members to reveal the problem. Second, symbolic politics, meaning that network members use symbol and narrative to create a story that portrays the problem of violation while raising moral values they uphold. Third, leverage politics, or pressuring and exposing the failure of the government while also sending ripples to the big influences such as donor countries, financial organizations, or political allies. Fourth, accountability politics, or the action to compel governments to honor their commitments by exposing the gap between rhetoric and reality and by making them ratify or sign a new treaty (Kiel, 2011).

The major actors in this network include international and domestic NGOs, local social movements, foundations, media, international organizations, and parts of the executive branches of the government. All these are working together, it is called the Boomerang pattern, starting when domestic organization or group demands change from the state. However, when the government neglects or blocks their demand, as a result, groups will seek help from international allies through transnational networks. Then the international organization will pressure certain states to follow their demands like the effect that is coming back to that certain ignoring government as a boomerang. Moreover, the repercussions from international contact can help the groups concerned amplify their voice to raise awareness of the problematic issues. (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, pp. 20-23). The UNSC and EU's roles in human rights issues are consistent with the principles of transnational advocacy networks because they function as venues and mechanisms that connect states, NGOs, and civil societies in disseminating information, exerting moral pressure, and holding states accountable regarding their human rights obligations. However, regarding human rights, even though various organizations exert pressure on states that commit violations, there is no guarantee that these violations will cease. This is because international relations lack clear

enforcement mechanisms, and the world faces far more human rights crises daily than the global community can address entirely. Many scholars have debated the role of international organizations and institutions in contributing to world peace however, these actors often lack the authority and influence necessary to significantly change state behavior. In *The False Promise of International Institution* (1994) by John J. Mearsheimer, he pointed to the critical aspect that, after the Cold War, state behaviors are still motivated by self-interested and seeking to be the great power in this anarchical international political system. As a result, from the realism perception, international organizations cannot truly change the behavior of states. While sometimes states may simply formally agree with the majority of states in order to protect their interests rather than appealing to the norms or disciplines that are defined by international organizations (Mearsheimer, 1994, p. 7).

Nevertheless, a world with human rights protection through international organizations or NGOs is still better than the one without it. Rather than relying on direct coercion, these networks operate through information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics. Information is the key to achieving their goal to protect human rights. This is the reason why some states want to conceal the information on mass atrocities that they commit. However, when information is key, there are many strategies that a state can do for hiding, distorting or misrepresenting it. The next section will explain the ability of a state to conceal mass atrocities from global attention.

2.6 Concealment of mass atrocities information

Based on historic crisis patterns such as First World War, the Red Scare, Second World War, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War, US governments tend to control information during the crises in three ways (Wells, 2004, p. 451). First, control confidential information to ensure the survival of the nation because that information can be harmful if the adversaries reach it, for example, military information. Second, control public information. It is direct censorship or indirect censorship to control public information and gain support from public while trying to solve the conflict. And third, attempting to gather information. It is a special power that a government could use to collect more information. For example, after the 9/11 attack, the US government announced a new operation named "Terrorism Information and Prevention System". It is a monitoring program that allows local workers such as utility, postal, and delivery workers to report

suspicious activity from home and business venues. It has extended the power of intelligence-gathering which can abuse civilian rights (Wells, 2004, p. 452-561). Concealment of mass atrocity information as in the case of Tigray massacre can be considered to belong to controlling public information.

The way to conceal mass atrocities information occurs by the effort of perpetrators including government and the military. The process of concealment can happen before mass atrocities occur. For instance, in the Rwanda genocide case, concealment was divided among many agencies and levels, making it impossible for anyone to see the whole picture. For example, money from the public health budget was used to buy cars, fuel, and machetes, while these items were later used to kill a large number of people. This was because the Rwandan government was then subjected to strict spending controls by the World Bank, particularly regarding military budgets (Mullins, 2022, p. 426). Concealment of information on mass atrocities can also be considered as a part of official denial by the state. When atrocities happen, the state can deny the truth by hiding information, preventing the general public, the perpetrators themselves, and the international community from seeing the truth or intervening to stop the violence. Their actions include manipulating the truth, altering news or information to create a certain understanding, leaking information to counter media information, and even rewriting history (Cohen, 2001). Controlling information is the key to success, because for any operation to take place, one important thing is media control. When the government can control media, they can control the flow of information which directly affects the effectiveness of the disclosure or concealment of a particular event (Mullins, 2022, p. 433). As Barbara Harff, a professor of political science argues, *“State-controlled, and state-influenced, media is an obvious source of power and a highly useful tool in the dissemination and maintenance of the ideological elements necessary to undergird a genocide or other form of mass violence directed at a minority population”* (Mullins, 2022, pp. 432-433).

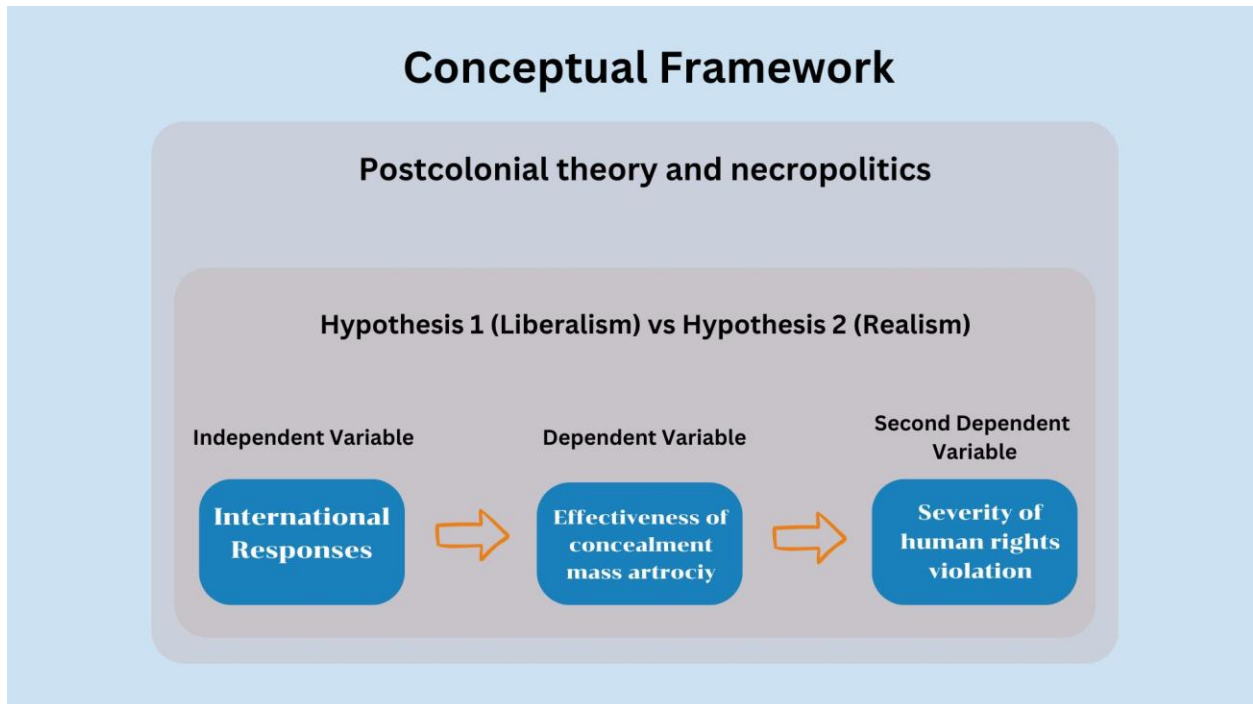
The lack of access to conflict areas and the lack of evidence, especially digital evidence in today digital era, are also reasons why massacres can remain concealed for many months. Back in history, the My Lai massacre in Vietnam in 1968 by the US military took almost a year till the story was published. In 2005, the Haditha massacre in Iraq by the US Marines took four months to reach journalists' ears (Engelhardt, 2007). Apart from the narrative, both massacre cases had a series of photos to confirm the atrocity. However, in the Tigray case, there was virtually less photographic evidence from the massacre sites themselves. Only the images of the survivors' wounds could

serve as partial proof. This reflected the effectiveness of the Ethiopian government's complete digital black hole (Weldemichel, 2025).

In international relations, control of the media can be used to conceal and obscure the true scale of violence occurring in a situation. The government can claim legitimacy for its actions, making international scrutiny more difficult, which may result in delayed international responses to the situation (Mullins, 2022, p. 434). Hence, the power of controlling the flow of information by the state is an essential element in enabling or sustaining atrocity crimes. Governments use it to limit the flow of information posted by opposition groups in certain areas. Moreover, censorship is also used to control narratives and public perceptions (Gohdes, 2020; Michaelsen & Thumfart, 2022 cited by Ntini, 2024). Overall, nowadays the tactics that many governments rely on are surveillance, content censorship, internet shutdowns, and disinformation campaigns (Feldstein, 2021; Gravett, 2022 cited by Ntini, 2024).

Having presented all concepts that are essential for this research, I will present the conceptual framework of the study. The concepts of international responses and the concealment of mass atrocity information are used to define the independent and dependent variable, respectively. The relationship between these variables is then examined through the lens of competing theoretical perspectives, namely the first hypothesis based on liberalism and transnational advocacy networks, and the second hypothesis based on realism. Each hypothesis generates distinct expectations regarding the observed data. The analysis not only assesses which hypothesis demonstrates the highest degree of correspondence with empirical evidence but also situates the findings within the broader theoretical frameworks of postcolonial theory and necropolitics. The conceptual framework of this research is presented in the figure below.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework.



3. Case study of Tigray massacre

This chapter justifies the selection of the case of Tigray massacre for the analysis and provides background information. Ethiopia is known as one of the oldest civilizations, having 3,000 years of recorded history. Moreover, this country is also famous as the only African country that had never been colonized by European nations. The name “*Ethiopia*” originates from the Greek language. It came from “*Aithiops*” which means “burnt face” which can reflect the view that ancient people had of the population in this land (Chrysopoulos, 2026). However, before modern Ethiopian nation was established, this land was known as “*Abyssinia*”. It was in 1931 when the constitution officially changed the country’s name to Ethiopia. Abyssinia was an ancient Christian kingdom located on the horn of Africa. Founded in the 13th century, it was located in what is now northern Ethiopia. The heart of the kingdom was Axum city, in today’s Tigray region. It later transformed into the Ethiopian Empire and eventually into modern Ethiopia (Cartwright, 2019). However, the narrative of Abyssinia which can be considered as the mainstream history of this country represents just one part of Ethiopia. This narrative does not include the history of the people who live in the southern regions, they are ethnic minorities and believe in Islam or traditional indigenous religions. As a result, the entire peoples from south Ethiopia are excluded from the mainstream history narrative (Ali & Hameso, 2008). Apart from that, in practical ways, Ethiopian history becomes the legacy of only Amhara ethnic group, the ethnic group who are majority of this country. Even this ethnic group is diverse and built through the expansion and oppression of ethnic groups in the south (Weldeananiya & Omeje, 2025). Hence, ethnic conflict and silencing of the subaltern group voices are a long-term problem that has existed in Ethiopia since the dawn of modern nation establishment. The next subchapter discusses the relationship between Tigray region and the federal government of Ethiopia which were allied before becoming enemies after Covid-19 pandemic due to enduring ethnic conflict and power struggle.

3.1 Tigray region and federal government relations

Ethiopia is the 10th largest country in Africa, and this country is also the 2nd most populated one in Africa, with 132 million people, preceded only by Nigeria according to World Bank in 2024. With the area of 1.1 million square kilometers, Ethiopia’s land is home to at least 80 ethnic groups. The biggest ethnic groups are Oromo, 34.5%, Amhara, 26.9%, and Tigray, 6.1% (Ezugwu, 2023). Ethiopia has organized its governing authority under a federal system since 1994. It provided a

certain power to the 10 regional governments based on ethnic lines. This system was designed not only to share power, but also to guarantee respect for the diverse histories and cultures of its various communities. (Hurley, 2023). Technically, Ethiopia has never been ruled by the central power of Addis Ababa government until recent political reform by Abiy Ahmed, the present Prime Minister since 2018. Many communities who live outside major cities are organized by their own law and customs (Pellet, 2021).

Even though Tigrayans are not the majority population of Ethiopia, they held a significant ruling power for decades. The Tigray People's Liberation Front or TPLF was part of the federalist system that governs Ethiopia. They joined the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front or EPRDF in 1991 with the aim to overthrow Mengistu Haile Mariam, the former Prime Minister who had controlled the state since 1977 and was considered as a military dictator as the leader of Derg regime. During three decades of EPRDF rule, when the TPLF held the dominant position within the coalition government from 1991 to 2018, Ethiopia faced persistent problems of discrimination against minority groups, which led to violent conflicts in many regions. Moreover, many Ethiopians protested to express their dissatisfaction with the TPLF's ruling style, citing corruption scandals, the exclusion of other minority groups from their rights, and concerns that economic growth was not benefiting all communities equitably. (Hurley, 2023).

During 2018, Hailemariam Desalegn, the former Prime Minister who came to power in 2012, faced mass protest by majority ethnic groups of Oromo and Amhara after hundreds of people were killed during clashes with security forces. Desalegn resigned, then the parliament elected Abiy Ahmed, an Oromo Christian, as a new Prime Minister. Ahmed came with the goal to unify all Ethiopians under one centralized government, terminate ethnic conflicts and ethnically divisive politics. This attempt created tensions between the federal government and TPLF. Then in December 2019, the EPRDF was reestablished. Later, it changed the name to The Prosperity Party or PP which was the largest political party in Ethiopia at the time. However, TPLF decided to leave the coalition after disagreeing with the direction the PP sought to take, particularly its focus on state-led economic development. (Pellet, 2021, p. 11). One major concern of the TPLF was that the new reforms were intentionally designed to shift Ethiopia from a system of multinational federalism toward a more centralized state. Moreover, amid growing public demands to arrest former officials and elites under anti-corruption policies, the TPLF feared that Tigrayans would be unfairly targeted and made scapegoats. (Ploch Blanchard, 2021).

The conflict escalated with the national elections in 2020. First, Ethiopia planned to hold elections in August, but because of Covid-19 the government postponed the plan until the end of the pandemic. TPLF against it, considering it as Ahmed's intention to stay in power for an unlimited term. Hence, local elections occurred in Tigray region in September and TPLF won by landslide. However, the federal government did not recognize the result of the elections. This event led to the breaking point between TPLF and the federal government (Pichon, 2022). Amidst the tensions between political groups, Tigray's government claimed the federal government planned a military operation to intervene in the Tigray region. Then they decided to launch a first strike against federal military bases in Tigray on 3rd November. In response to the attack, Ahmed ordered a military operation in the day after and declared the state of emergency in Tigray region for 6 months. On 12th November, the federal government claimed control of the western part of Tigray region, but according to TPLF, they still controlled the large area of western Tigray (Pellet, 2021, p. 13). The situation turned complex when Eritrea joined with the Ahmed troops, making Tigray become the battleground between Tigray Defense Forces or TDF and Ethiopian National Defense Force or ENDF who allied with Eritrean Defense Forces or EDF. The armed conflict that followed by both sides' action was brutal. Based on human rights organization reports, all parties involved in committing war crimes and crimes against humanity including murder, enforced disappearances, torture, deportation, rape, sexual slavery, persecution, unlawful imprisonment, possible extermination and other unlawful acts, especially in western Tigray, with many victims being civilian Tigrayans (Amnesty International, 2023).

One factor that contributed effectively to the commission of mass atrocities was internet shutdown. After the conflict between TPLF and Ethiopian government occurred on 4th November, the federal government ordered internet shutdown in Tigray region. Geographic location and digital black hole made Tigray become an isolated place, completely cut off from the global community. Apart from that, lines of communication like telephone were also blocked. This strategy made the conditions difficult for Tigrayans because they lacked information for many months, before the government restored internet and phone call system in some areas (Asylum Research Center, 2021). UNHCR reported that nearly 2.1 million people were displaced in Tigray region. Even in the areas that the Ahmed government could control and where fighting seemed over, people were afraid to come back home due to fear of looting and torture, especially from Eritrean soldiers (Plaut & Vaughan, 2023). The blockade of Tigray region continued. In late 2021, the federal government

declared many restrictions that made UN aid convoys difficult to pass through Tigray border to help starving people. By December 2021, Tigray forces said they would withdraw their troops from neighboring regions in northern part of Ethiopia, taking a step toward ceasefire. The federal government responded by announcing they would release high-profile Tigrayan politicians who were in custody.

In January 2022, reports from news media and human rights organizations stated that more than a third of Tigrayans were extremely lacking food. By late March, the Ethiopian government declared an indefinite humanitarian truce in the hope of facilitating the delivery of aid. Tigrayan forces subsequently agreed to a plan of cessation of hostilities, allowing many trucks carrying humanitarian assistance to enter the Tigray region. Around August, the Ethiopia federal government proposed a ceasefire agreement, however, fighting erupted again near the town of Kubo. Ethiopian and Eritrean forces then resumed their offensive against Tigray. By September, the African Union or AU proposed to mediate peace talks, which TPLF and Ethiopian government accepted AU suggestion. Peace talks occurred in Pretoria, South Africa in late October. Finally, on 2nd November, both sides agreed to do “permanent cessation of hostilities”, followed by an agreement and the process of disarmament and the restoration of law and order (Aljazeera, 2022).

3.2 Ethiopia’s internet shutdown

Internet access is necessary for living, this tool gives an opportunity for citizens to gain public information, while also providing them an opportunity to participate effectively in the society (Akinyetun, 2025). With 8.3 billion world population now, at least 4.95 billion people around the world have access to and are active on the internet. This number reflects the face of modern society when the whole world shrinks into the global village and connection between humanity is easily achieved by pushing a button. As Hendrik Bussiek, media expert, said: *Questions are answered within seconds on Google. And the internet was about to democratise the entire world. The Arab Spring 2010, starting in Tunisia, was termed a ‘Facebook revolution’, the Sudan uprising 2019 would not have been possible without social media. People come together and organise for a common cause by digital means. Online media have sprung up and multiplied, bloggers started blogging, everyone is able to have her or his say* (Bussiek, 2022, p. 1).

Even though internet is essential for modern living, in Africa, there are still reports of internet shutdowns, internet blocking and filtering, especially during elections or after domestic repressions by governments. Internet shutdown can be considered a human rights violation because it limits the freedom of opinion and expression to people (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022). Apart from that, based on the adoption of a resolution on “the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet” by United Nations Human Rights Council in 2021, human rights that exist in the online world must be protected in the same way as they are in the offline world. This resolution also condemns intentional and arbitrary internet shutdowns (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2021). However, even though digital rights are fundamental human rights, development of digital rights in Africa is a slow progress due to poor democratic governance and weak infrastructure. As a result, most of African’s countries face substantial barriers to internet access (Maseko, 2024). According to Global Voices’ data from 2024, compared to other continents, Africa remains the least connected continent where only 38% of the population can access the internet. Many rural areas are excluded and isolated from the digital world (Rutherford, 2025).

Ethiopia has had more internet shutdowns than any other Africa’s countries, used as a tactics to stop protests or control uprisings. Before the Tigray conflict, internet shutdowns also used to be an obstacle to political and social movements (Ayalaw & Redae, 2025). A series of such government tactics started in 1991, after EPRDF overthrew the Dreg military regime and started the reform. One part of the reform was extending fundamental human rights and citizens’ democratic participation in governance. It led to the freedom of press and establishment of many private newspapers, followed by many magazines. However, elections in 2005 changed this progress. There was a high competition between parties, and online world was filled with heated debates among supporters of various political factions as a consequence of allowing for a freer and fairer electoral process by the state. However, when EPRDF realized that they lost many votes, the era of digital authoritarianism began. The election results from some areas were released late, while certain mobile communication channels, such as SMS services that people relied on to follow the news, were shut down. (Brhane & Eneyew, 2023). The report from OpenNet Initiative, the joint project whose goal was to monitor and report on internet filtering, found that between 2006 and 2007, many political and news websites in Ethiopia were blocked, moreover the blocked contents

included political criticism, reporting on human rights issues, and the platforms of ethnic minorities (Poetranto, 2012).

In 2008, the EPRDF government continued to control internet via the enactment of numerous strict and oppressive laws such as the enactment of the 2008 Media and Access to Information Proclamation, the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, the 2009 Civil Societies Proclamation and the 2012 Telecom Fraud Offences Proclamation. Amidst the extremely harsh repressions against press freedom, many news agencies and political groups faced difficult choices, while many private newspapers decided to close down (Brhane & Eneyew, 2023). Moving to the 2010 election, the EPRDF won again but this time it was a landslide victory; however, the crackdown and control of the online world continue until today. Records from the Shutdown Tracker Optimization Project (STOP), which collected data on internet shutdowns in 60 countries between 2016 and 2021, show that Ethiopia ranked highest, with 22 shutdowns in just five years. It was followed by Algeria with 11 shutdowns and Sudan with 10. (Anthonio & Roberts, 2023). The longest internet shutdown and telecommunications blackout occurred in Tigray from November 2020 to November 2022, approximately two years. Some parts of Tigray were blocked to connection till 2023, hence, overall, internet shutdown can be considered spanning over 1,153 days since the conflict between federal government and TPLF occurred (Akinyetun, 2025). Tigray region was in complete blackout and cut off from the rest of the world. The blocking of communication and restrictions on journalists' access led much of the Ethiopian media to continue framing the Tigray war as an internal conflict, without fully recognizing the scale of the tragedy unfolding in the region. Moreover, Ethiopian government's press and social media also contributed to fake news about the situation (Tesfa et al., 2024).

3.3 The effect of digital black hole

The result of civil war between TPLF and federal government troops was brutal and committed by both sides. The U.S. State Department has described the two years' war in Tigray as "ethnic cleansing", especially due to mass rape with intentional dehumanization of Tigrayan women (Okeowo, 2024). According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights or OHCHR, investigation from 16th May to 30th August 2021 found violations of international human rights law, humanitarian, and refugee law. Both sides committed crimes such as attack on civilians and civilian objects, unlawful killing, torture, arbitrary detentions, abduction,

enforced disappearances, and gang rape (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021). Moreover, following the two years of war, two million people in Tigray became internally displaced. This number is approximately 40% of total Tigray population. Makeshift shelters, school classrooms, emergency tents from humanitarian organizations, and unfinished buildings are new homes for war-affected people (Bekele et al., 2025). Humanitarian impact of the Tigray war is immeasurable and continues to be studied until now. However, this section focuses on the effect of communication blackout that suspended Tigrayans' communication with the outside regions for many months.

Since 4th November 2020, Tigray region suffered from communication blockage. Ethiopian government cut all connection in Tigray, internet, landline, and mobile phone networks did not work anymore. It means all atrocities that happened during the fighting were hidden. Moreover, without internet and other connections, it was also difficult for Tigrayans to verify information and seek shelters, while international actors did not have any clue regarding what happened in Tigray because of the lack of information (Gebreslassie et al., 2024, p. 133-134). The blockade of Tigray also included physical restrictions, such as transportation blockades which were imposed to prevent people from leaving the area. All of Tigray's national services were freezing. People could not withdraw their money from bank accounts. Salaries to civil servants, health care workers, and all government officers were suspended (Gebreslassie et al., 2024, p. 122). During the invasion, the situation in Tigray remained largely hidden from the international community. Based on one interview done by the team who produced the study *"Life in Darkness: The Communication Blockade during the Tigray Siege"*, one interviewee said that the news about his father's death needed three months to be delivered to Tigray region: *"I was not able to visit my family members who have been in Nebelet [Central Zone] for almost two years due to security, transport and financial reasons caused by the siege. The death of my beloved father, after a long illness, came from Nebelet in a piece of paper. Mind you! Living 200 km apart and not hearing about the death of your beloved father for three months. I haven't got the chance to even participate in his funeral and share the pain with my siblings and the whole family. It is hard to bear it!"* (Interviewees 101, focus group interview by Liya Mamo, face-to face, July 2022) (Gebreslassie et al., 2024, p. 122). Moreover, Ethiopian government also restricted all journalist access to Tigray region. The road to Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, was closed for many months along with other roads. Tigray was already located in a remote area where rural roads were not widely available, and people typically

traveled on foot or used donkeys to carry loads (Annys, 2021). Therefore, blocking these routes had a greater impact on outsiders attempting to enter the region, as the government's tactics restricted not only foreign journalists but also the delivery of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian workers tried to help Tigrayans, but their convoys were facing denials or restrictions on crossing border to Tigray. This aimed at removing all witnesses from recording atrocity incidents (Weldemichel, 2026). It can also explain why even though the Tigray war occurred in modern times, it rarely has photos or videos to prove human rights violation actions. In Tigray case, this is not only one of the longest digital black hole but also one of the most brutal. The intentional shutdown was comprehensive; it did not cover only communications and internet but included any national service and information and communication technology infrastructure. Ethiopian government has never admitted it and blamed Tigray forces for shutting down their own systems (Gebreslassie et al., 2024, pp. 104-105). Living in this helpless situation for two years could have created massive impact on people's mental states and region's economy. However, more importantly, the Ethiopian government effectively understood the geographic conditions and vulnerabilities of Tigray. As a result, the massacres in Tigray became a profound tragedy, compounded by a lack of information, particularly digital evidence, to support the victims' accounts. In the next section, I present two hypotheses with different potential outcomes, both grounded in the same underlying logic: if the international community had paid greater attention to Tigray, would the massacres have been as severe, or might they have been less devastating.

3.4 Hypotheses

Having presented the theoretical framework and the background of the case, this section formulates the two theories that this research will use to evaluate which theory the data from the Tigray massacre case study aligns with. Starting with the notion of liberalism theory, which emphasizes the important role of international organizations, the concept of transnational advocacy networks (1998) suggests that international organizations can exert significant influence on state behavior. In contrast, realism theory does not emphasize the importance of international organizations. Based on the argument presented in *The False Promise of International Institutions* (1994), international organizations have limited power and influence to change state behavior. Accordingly, this study develops two hypotheses, derived from literature, to be tested in the analysis section. These hypotheses present two different expected outcomes. On the one hand, high

levels of international response may reduce human rights violations in the Tigray region by creating conditions that make it more difficult for the state to conceal information. On the other hand, high levels of international response may increase human rights violations, as they may prompt the state to intensify its efforts to conceal information.

Hence, the two hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Based on liberalism, international response constrains concealment and improves human rights protection outcomes: *The stronger of the international response to the Tigray conflict, the less effectively Ethiopian government can employ massacre concealment strategies, leading to greater transparency and an overall increase in human rights protection in the region.*

H2: Based on realism, international response intensifies concealment and worsens human rights violations outcomes: *The stronger of the international response to the Tigray conflict, the more effectively Ethiopian government can employ massacre concealment strategies, leading to higher of human rights violation in the region.*

4. Methodology, operationalization of variables, and data

This study adopts a qualitative research design employing two main methodological approaches. First, direct content analysis and second, congruence analysis. The research begins with document analysis, as this approach is suitable for collecting data from official reports and media sources. Through direct content analysis, qualitative data are systematically coded using predefined keywords from conceptual framework to identify the independent variable or international responses and the first dependent variable or the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information and the second dependent variable or the severity of human rights violations. This procedure enables the conversion of qualitative textual data into structured and measurable indicators, allowing the intensity levels of each variable to be examined.

Subsequently, congruence analysis to exam, does the data pattern align with the theory's predictions or hypothesis or not. After that the result from congruence analysis will be analyzed in the framework of postcolonial and necropolitics, which provides the analytical lens for understanding how international power relations shape both international responses to and outcomes in this case.

4.1 Research Methods

4.1.1 Document analysis

Document analysis is a method to evaluate, interpret, and derive meaning from documents within the scope of this research. Instead of conducting interviews or observations, researchers use existing documents for their studies. Focusing on examine and interpreting data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007 cited by Bowen, 2009). Based on the conceptual framework, I begin with the independent variable and explore data sources from organizations such as the UNSC and the EU, as both are the main international organizations that protect human rights and always take stance on global conflicts. Highlighted the keywords in the data sources can be interpreted as matching with the concept of international responses based on the indicators provided in the table below. In the case of the first dependent variable, I apply the same approach, drawing on multiple sources that examine the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information. As a result, I expect to obtain qualitative data in the form of codes that indicate the variables under study. The indicators for each variable are presented in the table below.

Table 3: Thematic coding for each variable.

Independent variable	Indicators
International responses	1 Diplomatic - Mediation and negotiation
	2 Informational - Naming and shaming
	3 Informational - Media monitoring
	4 Legal - Support of evidence gathering
	5 Legal - Preliminary investigation
	6 Economic - Withdrawal of foreign assistance
Dependent variables	Indicators
1 The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information	1 Digital black hole
	2 Restrictions on journalist access
	3 Arresting and harassment of journalists
	4 Official denials
2 The severity of human rights violations	Number of civilian casualties

4.1.2 Direct content analysis

Directed content analysis begins with an existing theory or conceptual framework that guides the analysis. Based on this theoretical foundation, researchers define initial codes or categories that focus the examination of the phenomenon under study. This approach follows a deductive process in which data are analyzed in relation to the existing theory (Mayring, 2000 cited by Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Each variable is operationalized by specifying measurable indicators that guide data collection and allow for systematic comparison. In addition to identifying the presence of each indicator, direct content analysis aims to convert qualitative data into measurable frequencies for analysis by assessing the degree or intensity with which each indicator appears. This involves evaluating the frequency, scale, or severity reflected in the data. The measurement scale is presented in the table below for each variable.

Table 4: Measurement scale for each variable.

Independent variable	Indicators	Measurement scale
International responses	1 Diplomatic - mediation and negotiation	Frequency of coded actions, actions identified in the documents are coded into six indicators, and the score is calculated based on the number of actions that correspond to the relevant indicator.
	2 Informational - naming and shaming	
	3 Informational - media monitoring	
	4 Legal - support of evidence gathering	
	5 Legal - preliminary investigation	
	6 Economic - withdrawal of foreign assistance	
Dependent variables	Indicators	Measurement scale
1 The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information	1 Digital black hole	Ordinal scale of intensity from 0-4
	2 Restrictions on journalist access	
	3 Arresting and harassment of journalists	
	4 Official denials	
2 The severity of human rights violations	Number of civilian casualties	Events are counting such as number of civilian casualties per month.

4.1.3 Congruence analysis

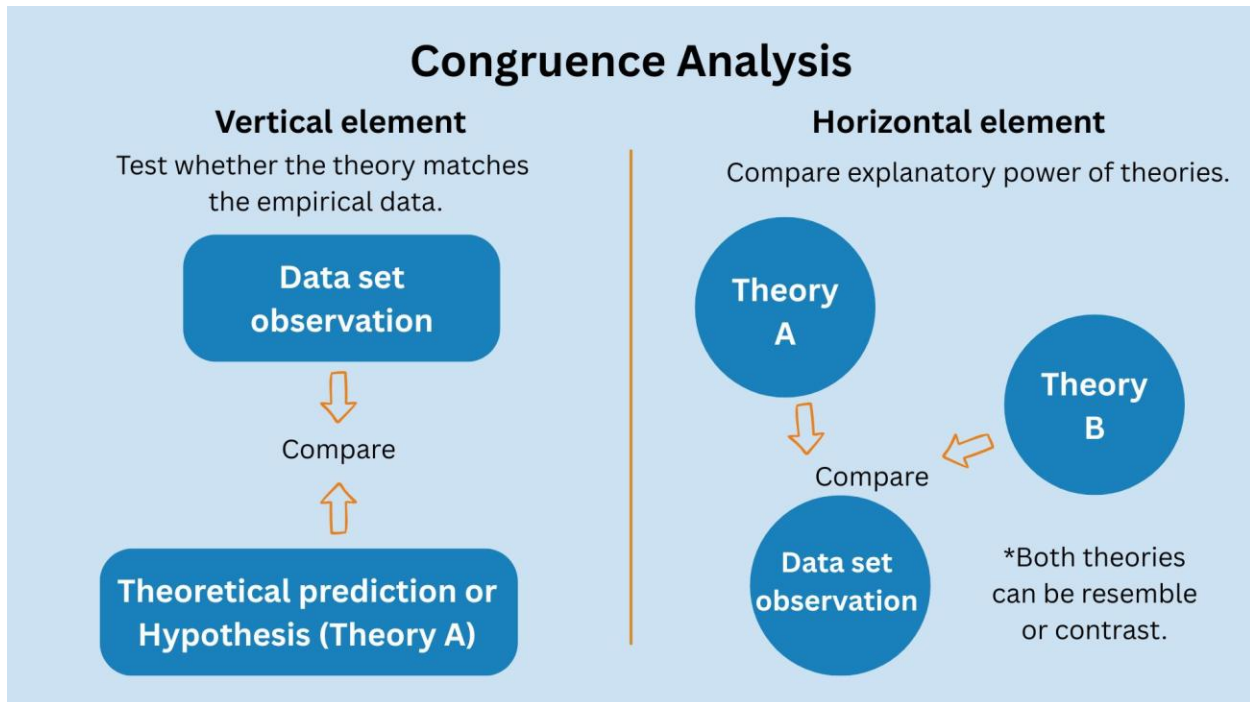
Congruence analysis is an approach used to assess the alignment between theoretical expectations and empirical patterns in the data. Rather than tracing a continuous causal chain between variables X and Y, this method is particularly useful in cases where the causal mechanism linking X and Y is unclear or where a direct causal relationship cannot be readily observed. Instead, researchers focus on the outcome variable (Y) to evaluate the strength of

competing explanations by comparing how well different theories correspond with the observed data. In other words, the analysis seeks to determine which theory, such as Theory A (e.g., liberalism) or Theory B (realism), demonstrates the highest level of congruence with the empirical observations (Wauters & Beach, 2018).

The process begins by translating abstract theoretical concepts into concrete expectations or hypotheses. These hypotheses are then compared with empirical data through interpretative analysis to assess whether the predicted patterns correspond to the observed outcomes (Blatter & Blume, 2008). Congruence analysis consists of two main components: vertical and horizontal. First, the vertical element involves comparing theoretical predictions with the empirical data patterns obtained from the case under study. This step allows researchers to systematically evaluate the degree of congruence between theory and evidence, thereby strengthening the validity of theoretical claims and reducing potential bias. Second, the horizontal element entails comparing the degree of congruence across multiple competing theories. For example, researchers assess whether Theory A or Theory B better aligns with the dataset observations. The objective is to determine which theory provides the most convincing explanation of the observed outcomes (Blatter, 2012).

Applying this approach, this study examines which hypothesis best aligns with empirical observations from the Tigray case. The first hypothesis, which is based on a liberalist perspective and transnational advocacy networks, posits that a high level of international response reduces the effectiveness of concealing information about mass atrocities, thereby leading to lower levels of human rights violations. In contrast, the second hypothesis, which is based on realism, suggests that high levels of international response may paradoxically increase the effectiveness of concealment, resulting in higher levels of human rights violations. Through both vertical and horizontal congruence analysis, this study evaluates which of these competing hypotheses is more consistent with the observed data. A summary of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of congruence analysis is presented in the figure below.

Figure 2: The method of congruence analysis.



4.1.4 Conclusion

Finally, the findings derived from the direct content analysis and congruence analysis will be synthesized to provide a clear answer to the research question. The results will then be evaluated within the framework of postcolonial theory to examine how international power relations shape responses to African conflicts and influence the dynamics of information concealment and human rights violations. This section will also discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, as well as suggestions for further research.

4.2 Data Sources

As this research uses many data sources from different organizations, data sources for each variable are outlined below.

4.2.1 International Responses

Based on the concept of Straus (2016), the indicators of independent variable contain four types of indicators. First, Diplomatic indicators; mediation and negotiation. Second, Informational indicators; naming and shaming, and media monitoring. Third, legal indicators; Support of

evidence gathering and preliminary investigation. Fourth, Economic; Withdrawal of foreign assistance. The fifth type or military indicators were not included because along the timeframe, there have never been military responses from both subjects, the UNSC and the EU to solve Tigray massacre.

To ensure analytical consistency and avoid data inflation, the study focuses exclusively on formal institutional documents that represent collective decisions of the UNSC and the EU, such as Security Council resolutions and European Parliament resolutions. The data sources are outlined in the table below.

Table 5: Data sources for the independent variable, international responses.

Institutions	Data Sources	Type of Indicators	Justification
UNSC	1 Security Council resolutions	Diplomatic, Informational, Legal, Economic	A formal expression of the UN to make decisions, express a stance, or determine a course of action to resolve international issues. It can reflect the stances of the UNSC.
	2 meeting records	Diplomatic, Informational, Legal, Economic	The official records from formal meetings of the UN Security Council. This reflects the discussion on the issues of international security.
	3 presidential statements	Diplomatic, Informational	An official document summarizing the UNSC's views, but it is not legally binding.

	4 press statement	Diplomatic, Informational	Statement to formally express a unified stance on a crisis.
EU	1 European Parliament resolutions	Diplomatic, Informational, Legal, Economic	The stance and recommendations of the European Parliament, as reflected in its resolutions, which typically include demands, condemnations, financial support claims, or policy proposals.
	2 EEAS press release	Diplomatic, Informational,	Official statement by European External Action Service, the EU's diplomatic body, to respond to international issues.
	3 European Commission statement and press release	Diplomatic, Informational, Legal, Economic	A public document to announce new policies, legislative, decisions, or political stances.

4.2.2 Effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information

Based on the frameworks of Cohen (2001) and Mullins (2022) and informed by the context of the Tigray massacre, indicators were developed to measure the Ethiopian government’s concealment of mass atrocity information. First, a digital black hole refers to communication

blockages, such as internet shutdowns, disruptions to phone lines, and the disabling of telecommunications infrastructure. Second, restriction on journalist access which prevented outsiders from entering Tigray region. Third, arresting and harassment of journalists to limit the freedom of press. And fourth, official denials to minimize the incident or counterattack any accusation of human rights violations in Tigray region. The data sources are outlined in the table below.

Table 6: Data sources for the first dependent variable, effectiveness of concealment mass atrocity information.

Indicators	Data sources	Justification
1 Digital black hole	Primary sources - EEPA reports (Europe External Programme with Africa)	A regular update focusing on human rights and refugee protection in the Horn of Africa. It provided a situation update in every few weeks.
	Secondary Sources - Armed conflict location and event data or ACLED - Media reports	Situation reports by ACLED who are doing conflict monitor and providing real-time data.
2 Restriction of journalist access	Primary sources - EEPA reports	-
	Secondary sources - Armed Conflict Location and Event Data - NGO reports	NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.
3 Arresting and harassment of journalists	Primary sources - Committee to protect journalists	An independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide. This organization collected data on cases of arrest and

		harassment of Ethiopians and Tigrayans during the war.
	Secondary sources - EEPA reports - Armed Conflict Location and Event Data	-
4 Official denials	Primary sources - Government press releases from pmo.gov.et	Official statements from the Ethiopian government.
	Secondary sources - EEPA reports - Armed Conflict Location and Event Data	-

4.2.3 Severity of human rights violations

Lastly, the second dependent variable will be derived from collecting data from Ethiopiatigraywar.com. This website worked with Ghent university and Every Casualty Counts organization in the UK, providing casualty counts since the beginning of the Tigray war. The team consolidated the database in line with best practices and the standards for casualty recording to make sure that every victim is counted. Combing with massacre events report from OCHCR, to ensure that the key massacre events during would not be missing.

4.3 Analysis Process

The data are organized by month for the entire timeframe of the study. For international responses, each action is first classified into one of six categories.

1. Diplomatic – mediation and negotiation
2. Informational – naming and shaming
3. Informational – media monitoring

4. Legal – support of evidence gathering
5. Legal – preliminary investigation
6. Economic – withdrawal of foreign assistance

The monthly score for each document is calculated based on the number of actions falling within each category, with a minimum score of 0 and a maximum of 6 for one document. To classify the level of responses, a quartile-based approach is applied: the bottom 25% of months are classified as low, the middle 50% as medium, and the top 25% as high. This approach ensures that the classification is based on the data and is consistent across the timeframe.

For the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information, a composite score is created. Each indicator is measured on an intensity scale from level 0 to level 4. For each month, the highest intensity level observed on any given day is recorded as the monthly score. This approach captures not only the daily severity of events but also reflects the temporal scale of the atrocities and their impact on civilian life. Then using quartile to convert the intensity level into three level low, medium, high. The details of intensity scale are presented in the table below.

Table 7: Intensity scale for analyzing the first dependent variable data.

Indicator	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
1 Digital black hole	No digital disruption.	Limited and temporary disruption affecting a small area, institution, or a few households, lasting less than 24 hours.	Localized shutdown affecting a neighborhood, village, camp, or small locality, lasting 1–7 days.	Large-scale shutdown affecting a city or multiple localities or lasting more than 7 days.	Region-wide or total shutdown affecting most or all of the population, lasting more than 7 days.
2 Restriction on	No restriction.	Minor or temporary restrictions,	Clear restriction on access for	Severe restrictions preventing	Total denial of access for most or all journalists

journalists' access		such as delays, extra checks, checkpoints, or short-term denial of entry, lasting less than 24 hours.	several journalists, lasting 1-7 days.	most journalists from entering or reporting from the area, lasting 7-15 days.	for more than 15 days.
3 Arresting and harassment of journalists	No harassment, arrest, and violence against journalists.	Verbal intimidation, threats, surveillance, confiscation of equipment, expulsion, or other non-physical harassment.	Detention or arrest of journalists without serious physical harm.	Physical assault, torture, serious injury against journalists.	Killing of one or more journalists.
4 Official Denials	No official denials.	Informal denials or minimization by public figures, spokespersons, or unofficial channels, with no further action.	Formal denials or minimization in official statements, press briefings, or government documents,	Formal denials combined with narrative framing that discredits or takes	Formal denials combined with active countermeasures or labeling opposition as criminals or terrorists.

			with no further action.	any action further.	
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For the severity of human rights violations, the total number of civilian deaths per month is calculated. Monthly fatalities are then classified into low, medium, or high using the same quartile method. At the end of this process, three monthly-intensity levels of each variable are derived.

4.4 Timeframe

The timeframe of analysis spans from 4th November 2020, the start of the military offensive, to 2nd November 2022, the date on which the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was signed. And the result of last month, November 2022, will combine with October 2022 because the number of dates in November are only two days.

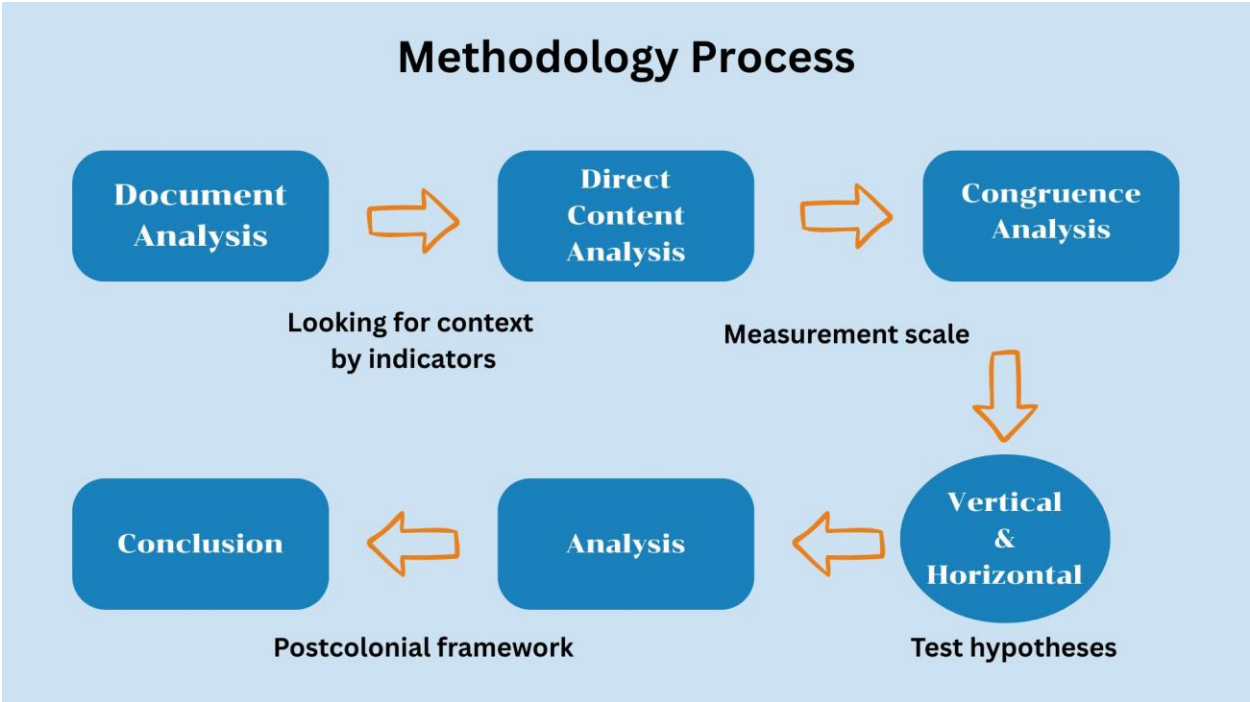
4.5 Limitations of research

In this study, I am not able to understand the Amharic or Tigrinya language. As a result, the data collection would rely on the English language database. Moreover, during the Tigray war, with the blockade of the region by the Ethiopian government, there were many civilians who died of starvation. The exact number cannot be counted. Reports from World Food Program indicated that 83% of Tigray population needed emergency support during the conflict (World Food Programme, 2022). However, this research focused only on the number of casualties who died in direct combat or from violence targeting civilians. As a result, the number of people who died by indirect conflict is not included in the data.

4.6 Methodology Framework

The methodology process is presented in the figure below.

Figure 3: Methodology process.



5. Empirical results

After analysing the data, I present the empirical findings of this study. I begin with the results related to the independent variable, namely international responses. This is followed by an examination of the two dependent variables: the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information and the severity of human rights violations. I then analyse the relationships between the three variables using graphical representations, distinguishing between responses by the UNSC and the EU. Drawing on a congruence analysis approach in order to examine the hypothesis. The purpose is to examine which hypothesis supports or refutes the key information received from the results. After that, I would like to analyze the empirical results that I found in the framework of postcolonial and necropolitics.

5.1 International Responses by UNSC

As the principal international body responsible for addressing threats to international peace and security, the UNSC began responding to the Tigray massacres more regularly after verified reports of mass atrocities in March 2021. The documents examined in this study include Security Council resolutions (106), meeting records (299), presidential statements (32), and press statements (119). However, among these documents, none of the Security Council resolutions issued between 4th November 2020 and 2nd November 2022 explicitly mentioned the Tigray massacre. This absence is notable given that several resolutions during the same period addressed other crises in Africa, such as condemning attacks by Al-Shabaab in Somalia (Resolution 2551 (2020)), expressing concern about the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Resolution 2556 (2020)), and reaffirming the responsibility of the government of Sudan to protect civilians (Resolution 2620 (2022)).

Despite the absence of references in formal resolutions, the UNSC addressed the Tigray situation through other forms of documentation. Out of 299 meeting records, 40 documents referred to the Tigray crisis. Most responses were of diplomatic type. The Council encouraged the Ethiopian government to pursue negotiations with the TPLF and emphasized the role of regional organizations, particularly the African Union, in facilitating conflict resolution (8816th meeting). Diplomatic responses also included reminders that military action could not resolve the conflict (8843rd meeting), calls for ceasefire agreements among the parties (8850th meeting), and appeals

to protect human rights, especially those of women and girls, who were particularly vulnerable during the crisis (8949th meeting).

Regarding the informational responses identified by Scott Straus (2016), naming and shaming, and media monitoring, meeting records provided statements highlighting the severity of the situation while condemning ongoing hostilities and their compounding effects alongside the pandemic (9014th meeting). A small number of documents also supported legal responses, including evidence gathering and preliminary investigations, as the Council emphasized the need for accountability for human rights abuses committed in the Tigray region (8812th meeting). However, none of the meeting records reflected the economic response category, such as the withdrawal of foreign assistance to Ethiopia.

The remaining document types examined were presidential statements and press statements. Although none of the presidential statements focused specifically on the Tigray massacres, two press statements out of 119 documents addressed the situation in the region. The first was issued by Council President Dinh Quy Dang of Vietnam, who noted the Council's concern regarding the humanitarian situation in Tigray, particularly food insecurity, and expressed alarm about sexual violence against women and girls while calling for investigations and accountability (UNSC, 2021). The second statement, issued by Council President Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez of Mexico, expressed deep concern over the expansion and intensification of military operations in northern Ethiopia. The statement urged all parties to respect international law and refrain from further hostilities while reiterating support for mediation efforts led by the African Union (UNSC, 2021).

Overall, although references to the Ethiopian crisis were less frequent compared to other international crises addressed by the Council, the UNSC nevertheless provided regular responses through diplomatic and informational channels. These responses illustrate the Council's role as an external observer that continues to monitor the situation while using its institutional authority to signal concern and exert pressure on actors responsible for international crimes.

5.2 International Responses by EU

EU is founded on the principles of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights. Consequently, the EU plays an important role in promoting and safeguarding human rights, as well as monitoring violations and imposing measures against actors who fail to

comply with these principles. This study examines three types of EU documents: European Parliament resolutions (254), EEAS press release (16), and statements and press releases from the European Commission (10). Among the 254 European Parliament resolutions adopted between 4th November 2020 and 2nd November 2022, only five documents addressed the situation in Ethiopia. These resolutions primarily reflected diplomatic and informational responses, particularly media monitoring. For example, one resolution informed the international community at the early stage of the crisis that the Ethiopian government had launched military operations in the Tigray region and provided details about the unfolding situation from the beginning of the conflict (P9_TA(2020)0330). In terms of naming and shaming and supporting evidence gathering, the EU also highlighted concerns about human rights violations and the lack of transparency resulting from the communications blackout imposed in Tigray. Consequently, the EU called on all parties involved in the conflict to guarantee unrestricted access for independent human rights monitors and journalists to the region (P9_TA(2020)0330). In addition, the EU supported the suspension of certain financial assistance to the Ethiopian government from December 2020 onward after multiple reports indicated serious human rights violations (P9_TA(2022)0351).

Regarding EEAS press Releases, 15 documents referring to the Tigray crisis were identified. Most of these documents reflected diplomatic responses, including informing the international community about developments in the conflict (European External Action Service, 2021), providing humanitarian assistance of 23.7 million Euro to affected areas (European External Action Service, 2020), and supporting diplomatic engagement. For instance, the EU and the United States dispatched special envoys to visit Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray region, in order to encourage political dialogue aimed at resolving the conflict (European External Action Service, 2022).

Finally, statements and press releases from the European Commission primarily emphasized diplomatic responses through appeals, recommendations, and calls for action. For example, Janez Lenarčič, the EU Commissioner for Crisis Management, urged all parties to allow full and unrestricted access for humanitarian workers to affected areas and stressed the need to protect civilians and uphold international humanitarian law (European Commission, 2020). These documents frequently included information about atrocities committed during the conflict, which reinforced the EU's position and strengthened its condemnations of human rights violations.

Although references to Ethiopia appeared less frequently compared to other international crises, the EU played an important role in informing the international community about the Tigray massacres while also acting as a protector through humanitarian assistance and sanction measures. Tigray issued regular responses, typically publishing new statements or documents on the situation approximately every two to three months. The diagram below shows the different level of responses by UNSC and EU, measured by the frequency of coded actions and organized on a monthly basis.

Figure 4: Level of international responses by UNSC and EU to Tigray massacre.



5.3 The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information by Ethiopian government during Tigray massacre

The government of Ethiopia began concealing information about mass atrocities from the first day of the conflict by cutting internet connection, landlines, and mobile phone networks. As a result, the Tigray Region was effectively disconnected from the rest of the world (Gesese et al., 2021, cited in Gebreslassie et al., 2024). Reports from the Europe External Programme with Africa (EEPA) indicate that this digital black hole tactic emerged at the outset of the conflict, with

situation reports describing the severe difficulties faced by civilians living without communication services or electricity.

Although reports initially focused on the digital black hole, attention later shifted toward emerging evidence of human rights abuses and widespread sexual violence against women and girls in Tigray. In May 2021, internet access was partially restored in certain areas, including Mekelle, while most parts of the region remained disconnected. However, in June 2021, when forces associated with the TPLF regained control of Mekelle from federal forces, the communications blackout was reimposed, once again disabling internet and telephone services across much of the region. References to the digital blackout appeared intermittently in subsequent reports before becoming a central issue again between July and August 2022. During this period, negotiations aimed at establishing a ceasefire between the TPLF and the federal government intensified. One of the key conditions for advancing peace talks was the restoration of essential public services, including banking, electricity, and telecommunications. In June 2022, Debretsion Gebremichael, president of the Tigray regional administration, emphasized the importance of these services, stating that negotiations would not be possible while the population remained under siege and basic services were suspended (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2022).

References to internet shutdowns were not consistently covered in the situation reports, since these reports often prioritized immediate developments such as massacres or negotiation attempts. Cross-checking with secondary sources provides a clearer picture of the extent of the communications blackout. Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, analyses in the book *“Tigray: War in a Digital Black Hole”*, major international media outlets, and internet shutdown monitoring platforms confirm that the digital black hole in Tigray lasted for approximately two years after the conflict began on 4th November 2020, following the declaration of a state of emergency by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The regional internet shutdown formally ended on 31st January 2023, lasting approximately 818 days and 19 hours.

This prolonged disruption significantly affected the daily lives of approximately six million residents of Tigray (Internet Society Pulse, n.d.). Moreover, some observers argue that the problem has not been entirely resolved, as internet access in several areas remains limited or unreliable. Internet shutdowns have also expanded to other regions, including the Amhara Region, during subsequent conflicts with the federal government (Access Now, n.d.).

Overall, the digital black hole represents one of the most effective mechanisms for concealing information about mass atrocities. By cutting communication services, the flow of information about human rights abuse from the affected region to the international community was severely restricted. Given the duration and geographic scope of the telecommunications shutdown in Tigray, this study codes the intensity of the digital blackout indicator at level 4, the highest level in the measurement scale, for each month in which the shutdown remained in effect according to both primary and secondary sources.

The second indicator is restrictions on journalists' access, which represents the least effective tactic used by the government of Ethiopia to conceal information about mass atrocities. At the beginning of the Tigray War, the federal government imposed strict lockdown measures that cut off communications and prevented news media from reporting on the situation in the Tigray region. However, increasing pressure from international actors, including the EU and governments such as the United Kingdom, called on the Ethiopian government to open the region to independent investigation.

On 25th February 2021, the Ethiopian government announced that it would authorize access for 135 international organizations and allow several international media outlets to enter the region. These included BBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters, Agence France-Presse, France 24, The New York Times, and Financial Times. According to EEPA reports, journalists from Sky News were among the first broadcast reporters to travel to areas south of Mekelle in early March 2021. Shortly thereafter, additional news reports followed, allowing accounts of the suffering of Tigrayan civilians to reach the global public after approximately four months during which information had largely been suppressed by the communications blackout.

Between 2021 and 2022, restrictions on journalists' access became intertwined with a broader humanitarian blockade affecting the region. This blockade began around mid-2021 when the first humanitarian aid convoys attempted to reach Tigray. Both the federal government and the TPLF accused each other of obstructing aid deliveries. In addition, reports from EEPA and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project indicated that soldiers from Eritrea established numerous checkpoints and imposed sieges in several areas, particularly in rural locations, further restricting access. Given these conditions, international actors frequently called for unrestricted access to Tigray for independent investigators and journalists, a demand that appeared repeatedly in international statements on the conflict. Based on the evidence of roadblocks, security risks, and

the prolonged inaccessibility of some areas, where journalists were unable to travel due to geographic and safety constraints. The intensity of this indicator is coded between Level 1 and Level 3 during different periods of the conflict.

Overall, restrictions on journalists' access were most effective at the beginning of the conflict. Although the Ethiopian government later formally allowed media access to the region, journalists continued to face significant challenges in verifying information. These challenges included the ongoing communications blackout, the remoteness and difficult terrain of the region, and persistent security risks in areas controlled by Eritrean forces, which have been widely reported to employ arbitrary and violent tactics. Both intentional and indirect restrictions therefore created significant obstacles to independent reporting, leaving many aspects of the Tigray massacres insufficiently documented.

The final indicator examined in this study is the arresting and harassment of journalists, combined with official denials by government authorities. These indicators are assessed as having moderate effectiveness in concealing information about mass atrocities. Evidence suggests that the intensity of arrests, harassment, and official denials began in the first month of the conflict in Ethiopia. Journalists were frequently detained without formal charges and often faced prolonged detention. In some cases, they were subjected to physical abuse. For example, journalist Dawit Kebede was assaulted on 2nd December 2020, while journalist Abebe Bayu was abducted and attacked by unidentified individuals on 1st July 2021. Although cases of physical violence occurred, they were relatively infrequent. According to reports from the Committee to Protect Journalists and EEPA reports, the Ethiopian authorities more commonly relied on indirect forms of pressure, such as threats, warnings, license suspensions, and arrests, to suppress journalists attempting to report on the situation in the Tigray Region. Tigrayan journalists appeared to be particularly vulnerable to these measures.

The highest level of intensity, killings of journalists, occurred only twice during the research period. The first incident took place on 28th January 2021, when Dawit Kebede, who had previously been assaulted in December 2020, was killed while driving near his home in Mekelle. The second occurred on 21st May 2021, when Sisay Fida, a journalist affiliated with Oromia Broadcasting Network, was shot near his residence in the Oromia region. Pressure on the media environment also extended beyond traditional journalists to social media commentators and influencers. During the conflict with Tigray forces, the Ethiopian government attempted to

promote narratives that framed its military actions as legitimate efforts to restore national peace. Consequently, reporting that contradicted official narratives was frequently targeted. This pressure was exercised through several state institutions, including the federal government, the Ethiopian Media Authority, and national police forces.

Although patterns of abuse varied, reports consistently documented arrests and harassment of journalists throughout the conflict. These pressures significantly affected the ability of journalists to operate freely. Some journalists reportedly practiced self-censorship for safety reasons, while others resigned from their positions. For example, 3rd June 2021 report noted that several journalists working for Voice of America resigned after expressing concerns that the network had not sufficiently highlighted atrocities committed by Ethiopian forces and their allies (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2021).

Official denials constituted another important tactic. Government officials frequently blamed the TPLF and Tigrayan actors for the humanitarian aid blockade, often using highly charged terms such as “criminal,” “terrorist,” and “rebel.” In addition, accusations were directed at international organizations perceived to be sympathetic to the TPLF. On 24th March 2021, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed accused organizations including Amnesty International and the United Nations of being “part of the TPLF family” (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2021). Lower-intensity forms of official denials also occurred, particularly in response to allegations of large-scale atrocities. These included denials of civilian killings and use of chemical weapons. Similar to the pattern observed in journalist harassment, the intensity of official denials fluctuated between Level 1 and Level 4 during the study period.

Notably, even during the period leading to the ceasefire negotiations in November 2022, the Ethiopian government did not significantly reduce its use of official denials. One contributing factor was the renewed escalation of hostilities in September 2022, which revived familiar government narratives accusing Tigray forces of undermining peace efforts and obstructing humanitarian assistance during the final stages of negotiations.

Overall, both indicators, journalist harassment and official denials, are assessed as moderately effective in concealing information about mass atrocities. In terms of effectiveness, they fall between the two other indicators identified in this study. The digital black hole was the most effective tactic because it severed communications for an extended period, while restrictions on journalists’ access proved less sustainable due to international pressure. Nevertheless, arrests and

intimidation of journalists, and official denials strategies still contributed significantly to limiting the flow of information about atrocities occurring in northern Ethiopia, particularly when combined with the geographic challenges and limited accessibility of the region. The diagram below shows the different intensity level of four indicators that contributed to conceal mass atrocity information.

Figure 5: Intensity level of four indicators of the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information from November 2020 to June 2021.

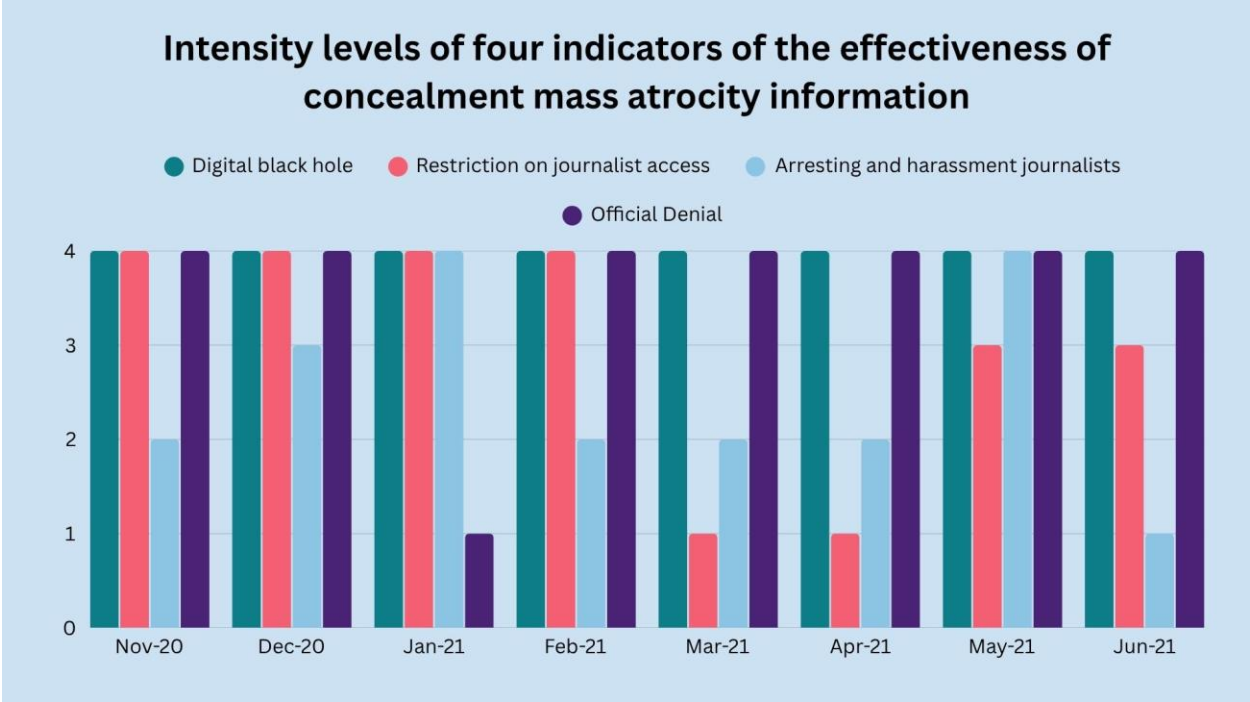


Figure 6: Intensity level of four indicators of the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information from July 2021 to February 2022.

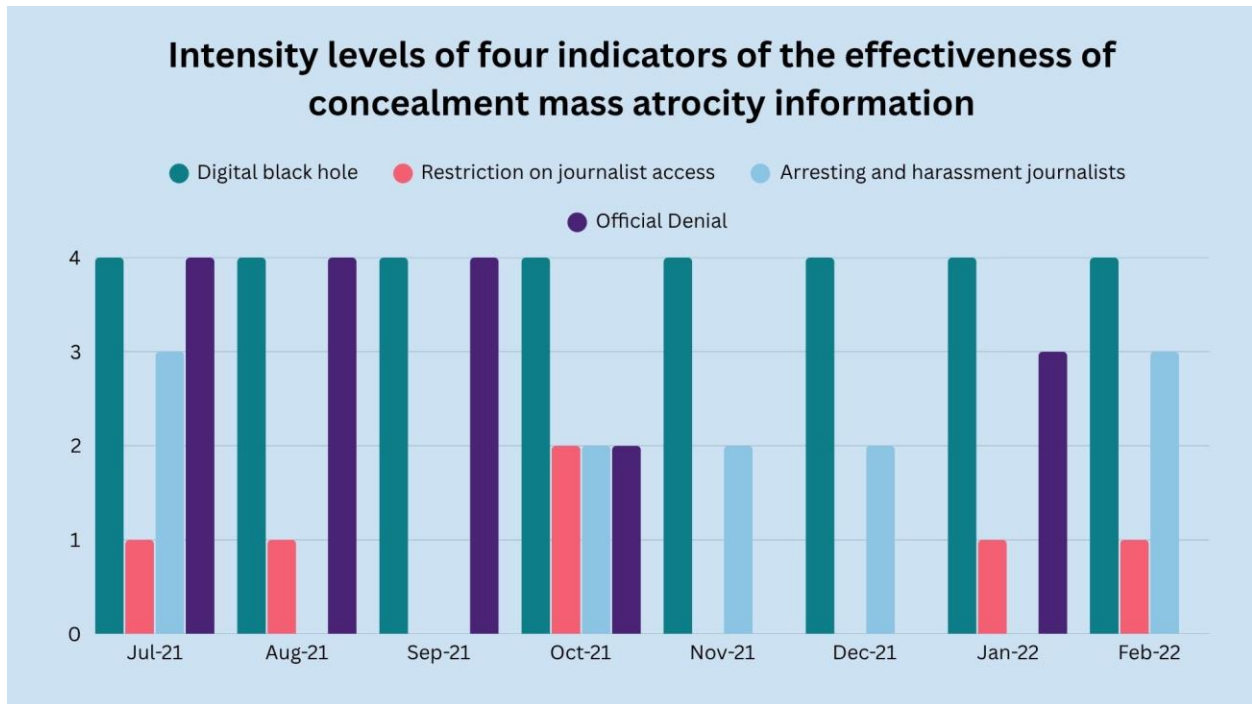
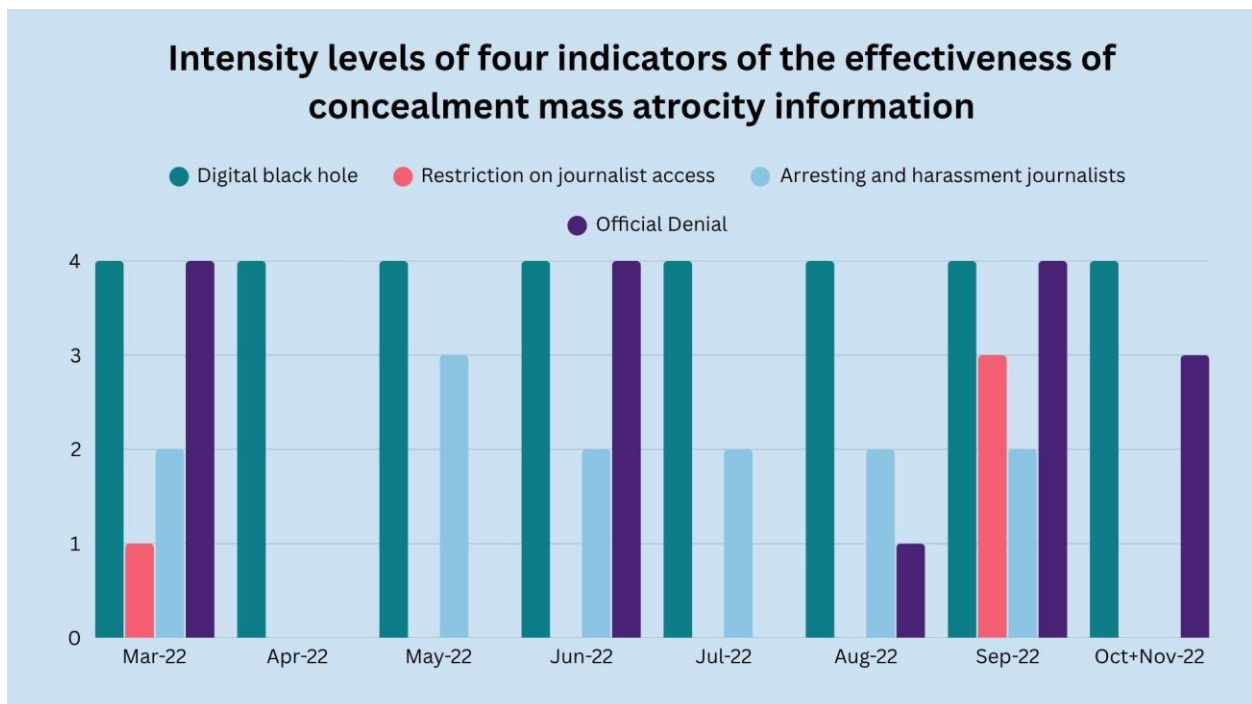


Figure 7: Intensity level of four indicators of the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information from March 2022 to November 2022.



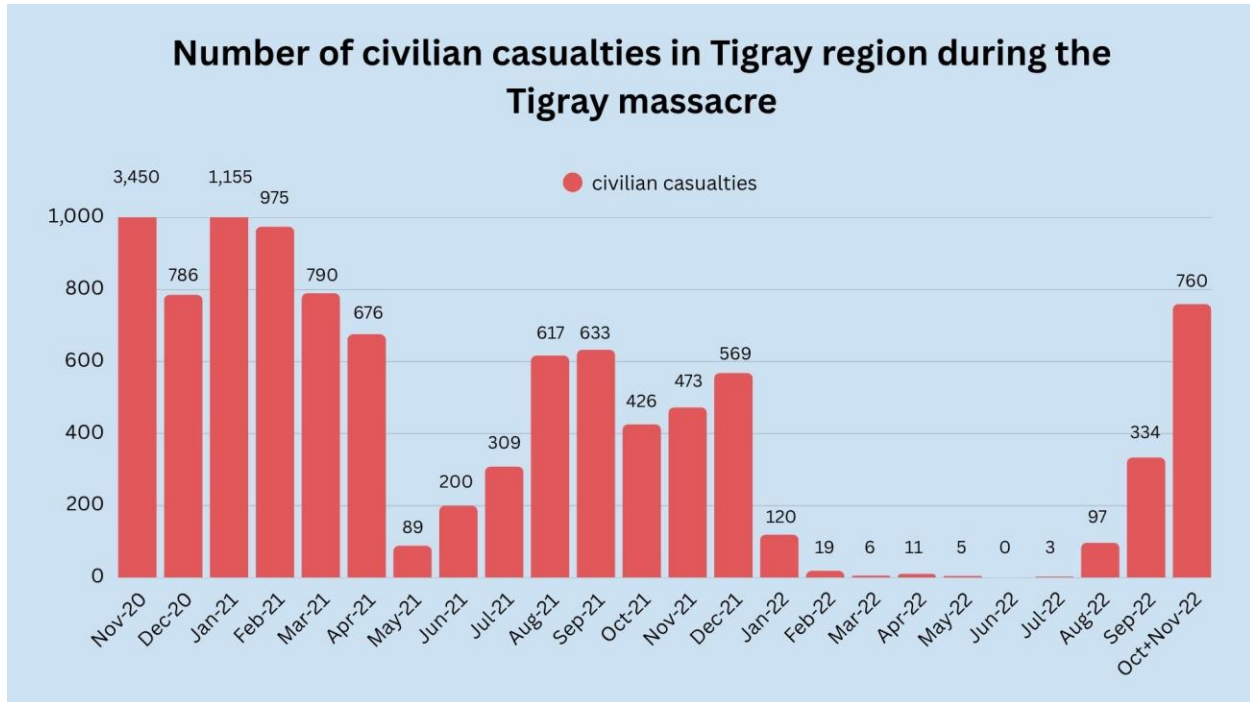
5.4 The severity of human rights violation

Due to limitations in available data, much of which is reported only in general overviews. It is challenging to measure the precise intensity of committed violence across time. However, the database from Ethiopiaticgraywar.com provides daily casualty figures, which offer a useful source for analyzing patterns of violence. Therefore, this study examines the second dependent variable using this dataset and supplements it with massacre event reports from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that major atrocity events during the study period are not overlooked.

Several armed actors were identified as perpetrators of violence against civilians in the Tigray Region during the research timeframe. These include the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), the Amhara Special Forces, Amhara militia groups such as Fano, and forces associated with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Evidence suggests a recurring pattern in which young and adult men were frequently targeted, as opposing forces often suspected them of being affiliated with or supporting Tigrayan armed groups. Victims ranged widely in age, from children as young as five years old to elderly individuals up to seventy years old. Reports indicate that in some cases male members of a household were disproportionately affected during violent incidents, while women were subjected to severe forms of abuse driven by ethnic hostility. Apart from attacks on civilian areas, many people also died from airstrikes.

During the first six months of the conflict, the number of casualties was particularly high before declining significantly in subsequent periods. Several factors contributed to this decrease. Large-scale displacement led many civilians to flee the Tigray region, while the geographical expansion of hostilities shifted some conflict activity toward neighboring areas, including the Afar region to the east. This general trend of lower casualty numbers continued into 2022, particularly during periods of ceasefire negotiations. However, the death toll increased again in the final stages before the peace agreement, following renewed clashes in September 2022. The diagram below presents the number of casualties monthly.

Figure 8: Number of civilian casualties in Tigray region.

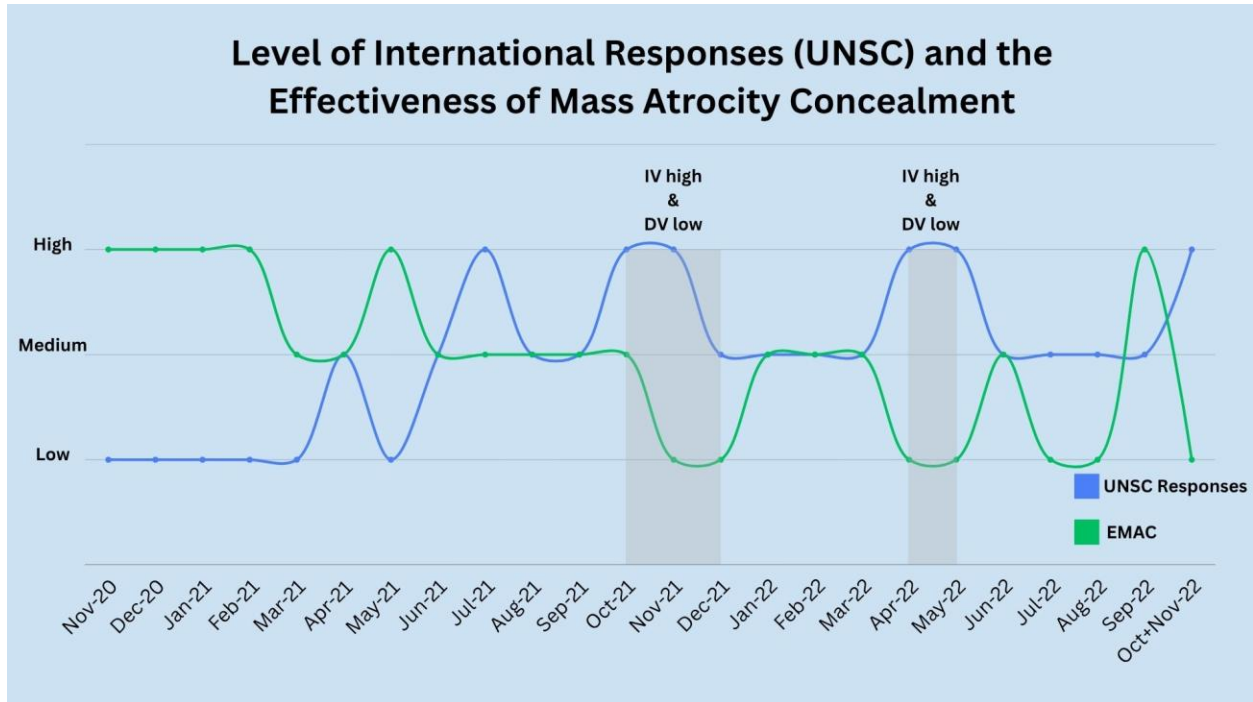


5.5 The relationship between independent variable and dependent variables

Between 4th November 2020 and 2nd November 2022, the levels of both the international responses and the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information fluctuated over time. Although these values varied considerably, several patterns can still be identified in relation to the study’s hypotheses.

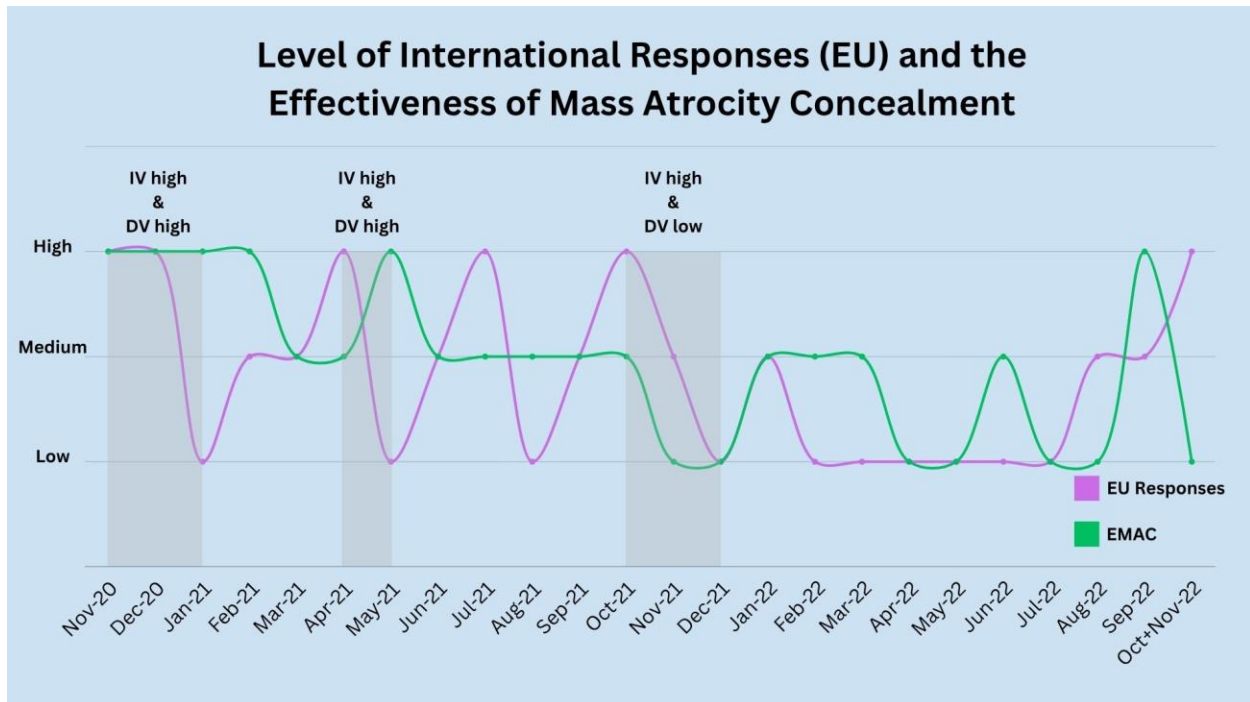
Regarding the first hypothesis, certain periods appear to support the expected relationship. Specifically, when the level of international responses increased, the effectiveness of mass atrocity concealment appeared to be low. This pattern is observable between October and December 2021, as well as between April and May 2022, in relation to responses from the UNSC. While for the EU responses, this pattern also appeared in the same period as for the UNSC, October and December 2021.

Figure 9: Level of UNSC responses and the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information.



In contrast, the second hypothesis does not display a consistent pattern across the dataset from UNSC. However, the graphical analysis highlights several periods in which high levels of international responses coincided with high levels of the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information in EU dataset. It is observed during two specific intervals: from November 2020 to January 2021, and from April to May 2021. Outside these periods, the monthly data fluctuate without demonstrating a clear relationship corresponding to either hypothesis. These variations suggest that while certain short-term correlations between international responses and the effectiveness of information concealment can be observed, the overall relationship remains complex and influenced by additional contextual factors.

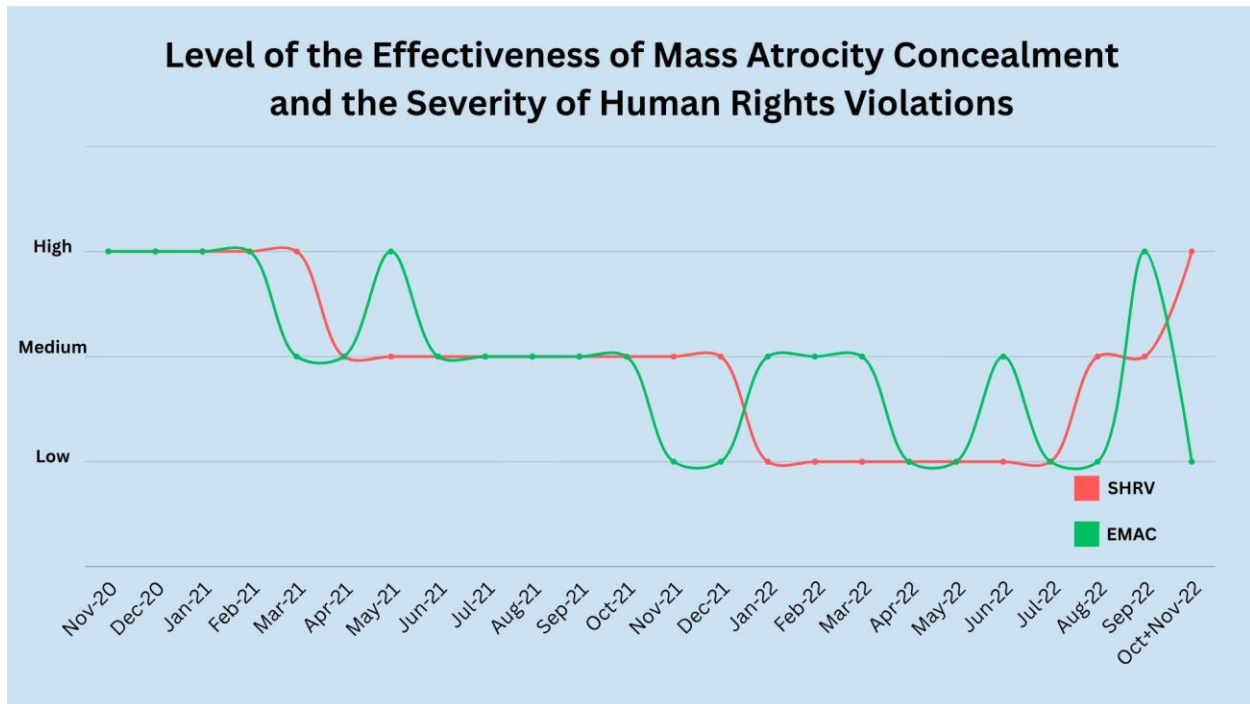
Figure 10: Level of EU responses and the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information.



The final graph illustrates the relationship between the two dependent variables: the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information and the severity of human rights violations. The number of casualties in the Tigray region during the conflict initially appeared at a high level and remained at high severity for several months. The level of casualties declined to a medium level in April 2021 and further decreased to be low in January 2022. However, the number of deaths began to increase again in August 2022 and rose sharply to a high level in the final month of the observed timeframe.

Overall, the trend suggests that the number of civilian deaths may not consistently correspond to the level of effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information. In other words, fluctuations in the severity of human rights violations do not always align with changes in concealment strategies. Nevertheless, several periods appear to support the second hypothesis. When the first dependent variable, the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information, reached a high level, the severity of human rights violations also tended to remain high. This pattern is most evident during the early phase of the conflict between November 2020 and January 2021. Because of this potential relationship, this study further examines this period using congruence analysis.

Figure 11: Level of the effectiveness of concealment mass atrocity information and the severity of human rights violations.



5.6 Congruence analysis

From a postcolonial perspective, conflicts in Africa often receive limited international attention due to global hierarchies of visibility. However, when international organizations increase their responses to a particular crisis, the level of global scrutiny also rises. This heightened visibility can generate diplomatic and reputational pressure on state actors, potentially limiting their ability to suppress information or lead to policy change. As a result, increased international attention may influence the level of human rights violations by constraining the ability of governments to conceal mass atrocities. However, the contrast theory from realism perspective suggested that international responses do not play a crucial role nor influence state behavior. Hence, congruence analysis will be employed to assess which set of observations is more consistent with the expectations of the first theory, based on liberalism and transnational advocacy networks, and the second theory, based on realism.

5.6.1 Vertical congruence analysis

The analysis begins with a vertical congruence approach. This section is divided into subsections based on four specific periods identified in the empirical data. The first set of periods is characterized by a high level of independent variable while the first dependent variable remains low. These periods are October to December 2021 and April to May 2022. The analysis examines whether the observed data patterns in these periods correspond to the expectations of the first hypothesis or liberalism perspective. The second set of periods shows both a high level of independent variable and a high level of the first dependent variable. These periods are November 2020 to January 2021 and April to May 2021. The empirical evidence from these periods is therefore analyzed in relation to the second hypothesis or realism perspective.

The first period: October to December 2021

To evaluate the vertical congruence of the first hypothesis, the analysis compares hypothesis with empirical evidence from the period October to December 2021. The dataset observation in this period does not correspond to the first hypothesis derived from a liberalism perspective and transnational advocacy networks. The hypothesis expects that stronger international responses to the Tigray conflict would reduce the effectiveness of the Ethiopian government's massacre concealment strategies, leading to greater transparency and ultimately a reduction in human rights violations.

During this period, international responses to the Tigray conflict were relatively high. The UNSC addressed the issue of Ethiopia in multiple meetings, including the 8875th, 8877th, 8886th, 8887th, 8899th, and 8906th meetings, in addition to issuing a Security Council press statement on Ethiopia. Similarly, the European Parliament adopted a 17-point resolution on the Tigray conflict urging the European Council to impose an arms embargo on Ethiopia and Eritrea. These actions indicate that both the UNSC and the EU paid significant attention to the situation in Ethiopia compared to other periods.

This heightened international response may be related to domestic political developments in Ethiopia. On 4th October 2021, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was sworn in for a new five-year term following the national election held in July. Shortly after the inauguration, reports emerged of renewed military offensives in the Tigray region (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2021). These developments raised concerns among international organizations that the situation in Tigray

could deteriorate further during Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's second term, prompting increased diplomatic attention and public statements expressing deep concern over reports of atrocities in the region.

Despite the strong international response, the Ethiopian government did not appear to reduce the use of concealment strategies related to mass atrocities. A nationwide state of emergency was declared, while large parts of the Tigray region remained under a digital black hole that had been in place since the beginning of the conflict in November 2020. In addition, a report from EEPA in mid-November indicated that at least 1,000 individuals had been detained by Ethiopian authorities. Both local and foreign journalists were repeatedly warned against disseminating what the government described as "false information" (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2021). These measures suggest continued efforts to restrict the flow of information from the conflict area, particularly by targeting individuals who could potentially provide direct testimony about massacre events.

Although the Ethiopian government claimed that the Tigray region had been opened to journalists, but access remained highly restricted and accompanied by significant threats and limitations. As a result, there is little evidence that concealment information strategies were reduced during this period. Furthermore, available reports indicate that the severity of human rights violations did not decrease significantly. Overall, the empirical data from the first period does not support the first hypothesis. While international responses were relatively strong, there is no clear evidence that these responses reduced the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information or contributed to a decline in human rights violations. This suggests that other factors may explain the persistence of both concealment intensity and ongoing human rights abuses during this period.

The second period: April to May 2022

To evaluate the vertical congruence of the first hypothesis, the analysis compares the hypothesis with dataset observation from the period April to May 2022. The dataset observation in this period does not correspond to the first hypothesis derived from a liberalism perspective and transnational advocacy networks. First, international responses during this period were mainly driven by the UNSC. They addressed the issue of Ethiopia in several meetings, including the 9014th, 9016th, 9018th, 9020th, 9036th, 9039th, and 9042nd meetings. In contrast, the EU paid relatively little attention to the Ethiopian issue during this timeframe. The strong level of UNSC

engagement can also be explained by the broader humanitarian situation in Tigray. On 25th April 2022, António Guterres, UN Secretary urged the international community to secure humanitarian corridors, provide humanitarian assistance, and urged Ethiopian government to lift the blockade against the Tigray region (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2022). In the same month, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs or OCHA reported that more than 33,000 people were facing extreme food insecurity. Other international organizations also played an important monitoring role during this period. For example, Amnesty International published the report *“We Will Erase You From This Land”*: Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia’s Western Tigray Zone, which received extensive media coverage and was widely used as a source of information on the situation in the region (Amnesty International, 2022). Overall, the available evidence suggests that international organizations paid considerable attention to the Tigray crisis, particularly regarding the worsening humanitarian conditions.

Regarding the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information, the level of concealment appeared to decrease slightly in April but increased again in May. Although the digital black hole in Tigray largely continued, the Ethiopian government showed some limited signs of reducing information control between 1st and 6th April by releasing three detained journalists, Amir Aman Kiyaro, Thomas Engida, and Temerat Negera. All three had been detained for approximately four months (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2022). Their release may indicate a temporary adjustment in government behavior. However, this trend did not continue in May. Reports indicated renewed pressure on journalists and media personnel. For instance, Tom Gardner, a reporter for The Economist, reported that his media accreditation was cancelled by the Ethiopian Media Authority for allegedly failing to meet the “standards of conduct for journalists.” In addition, there were reports that at least 18 journalists and media workers were arrested in a media crackdown beginning on 19th May 2022 (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2022).

Overall, despite the absence of official restrictions on journalist access to Tigray and the government's public denial of information control, the continued digital black hole and renewed arrests of journalists suggest that concealment information remained largely. Even though the level of severity of human rights of this period is low but there is no clear evidence to support the first hypothesis of state behavior change. While a temporary reduction in information control occurred in April, concealment practices intensified again in May, especially through actions targeting journalists. Consequently, there is no clear evidence that international responses significantly

reduced the Ethiopian government's concealment mass atrocity information strategies this period. The next section will examine the second hypothesis.

The third period: November 2020 to January 2021

To evaluate the vertical congruence of the second hypothesis, the analysis compares the hypothesis with dataset observation from the period November 2020 to January 2021. The dataset observation during this period corresponds to the second hypothesis, realism perspective. First, international responses during this period were mainly driven by the EU. References to the Ethiopian crisis can be found in several EU press releases and official documents, including European Parliament resolutions, statements from the European External Action Service (EEAS), and European Commission statement and press release. These responses began in mid-November 2020, only a few days after the conflict started on 4th November 2020. In addition to expressing concern, the EU also took concrete measures. On 16th December 2020, they decided to withhold millions of euros in budget support to Ethiopia due to the Tigray conflict (Deutsche Welle, 2020). This decision followed a series of discussions within the European Parliament regarding the deteriorating situation in the region. Considering that Ethiopia has been one of the major beneficiaries of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, the suspension of financial assistance represented a significant political and economic signal toward the Ethiopian government. Although the fighting between the federal government and TPLF continued, these actions demonstrate a relatively strong level of international response to the conflict.

Regarding the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information, the level during this period was high. From the beginning of the conflict, the Ethiopian government implemented several measures that restricted the flow of information from the Tigray region. Numerous reports indicated that mobile phone networks and internet connections were shut down across the region, creating a digital black hole. As a result, both domestic and international journalists were unable to gain information about that area. Moreover, journalists could not access Tigray region since the border was sealed (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2020). Bekalu Alamrew was reportedly the first journalist who got arrested on 4th November 2020 (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2020). On 2nd December 2020, another Tigrayan journalist, Dawit Kebede, was detained by authorities. Reports later indicated that he was physically abused before being killed by gun on 19th January 2021 (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021). In addition to these actions,

the Ethiopian government repeatedly denied allegations of atrocities and used strong language to describe opposition groups as rebels or criminals spreading false narratives (Al Jazeera, 2020). These actions indicate a systematic effort to control information related to the conflict.

Overall, the available evidence suggests that the level of concealment of mass atrocity information during this period was extremely high. Reports from international organizations and news media described the Tigray region as largely inaccessible due to digital black hole and restrictions on journalists, while civilians were reportedly suffering from extrajudicial killings and widespread looting (United Nations, 2020). At the same time, the severity of human rights violations was also reported to be high. Taken together, the empirical data from this period corresponds to the second hypothesis. Despite the relatively strong international responses, the concealment strategies remained highly effective and severe human rights violations continued to occur. In addition to EU actions, other international organizations such as UNHCR and the World Food Programme also expressed concern and called for humanitarian assistance to address the growing crisis (United Nations, 2020). Therefore, the data pattern observed between November 2020 and January 2021 is congruent with the expectations of the second hypothesis.

The fourth period: April to May 2021

To evaluate the vertical congruence of the second hypothesis, the analysis compares the hypothesis with dataset observation from the period April to May 2021. The dataset observation during this period does not correspond to the second hypothesis. International responses during this period can be identified in several statements and official documents from the EU, including European Parliament resolutions, communications from the EEAS, and European Commission statement and press release. In addition, the UNSC issued its first press statement on the situation in Tigray on 22nd April 2021, expressing concern over reports of human rights violations in the region. Beyond statements of concern, the EU also took political action. In May 2021, they announced the cancellation of its election observation mission to Ethiopia due to the failure to meet necessary conditions for credible monitoring (Dockery, 2021). However, the Tigray conflict was not explicitly mentioned in this announcement, meaning that this action cannot be considered strong evidence of a direct link between international responses and the Ethiopian government's concealment strategies. Nevertheless, the relatively high level of EU attention toward Ethiopia

during this period may also have been influenced by the upcoming national election scheduled for 21st June 2021.

Regarding the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information, the level during this period remained high. Reports indicated that digital black hole continued across much of the Tigray region. In addition, electricity and transportation services were reportedly shut down in several areas, including the Central, Northwestern, and Western zones of Tigray (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2021). Restrictions on journalists also continued. Although the Ethiopian government officially announced that the Tigray region had been opened to journalists since the end of February, access remained severely limited in practice. Many areas were controlled by Eritrean troops who established checkpoints along major roads, preventing journalists and humanitarian aid convoys from entering the region. Arrests and harassment of journalists also persisted. For example, Fitsum Berhane and Tamirat Yemane were reportedly re-arrested in Mekelle city by Ethiopian National Defense Forces on 19th April. And on 9th May, harassment intensified further by the killing of reporter Sisay Fida from the Oromia Broadcasting Network (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021). Additional forms of pressure were also reported, such as the revocation of license for a New York Times journalist after reporting on sexual violence in Tigray.

Official denials also remained part of the government's conceal information strategy. In April, Billene Seyoum, the spokesperson of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed accused the TPLF of shooting civilians while wearing Eritrean military uniforms (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2021). This narrative intensified in May when the Ethiopian government approved legislation designating the TPLF as a terrorist organization, reinforcing the government's framing of the group as a criminal threat.

Overall, the available evidence indicates that the Ethiopian government continued to employ strong concealment strategies during this period. However, the severity of reported human rights violations did not increase in parallel with the high level of concealment. Therefore, the empirical data from this period does not support the second hypothesis. While concealment strategies remained highly effective, the expected outcome, an increase in the severity of human rights violations did not appear. The next section presents horizontal congruence analysis to examine the contested theories between liberalism and realism perspectives.

5.6.2 Horizontal congruence analysis

Based on the vertical analysis, only one period corresponds to the second hypothesis which is based on realism perspective, November 2020 to January 2021. However, to further verify these findings, a horizontal analysis is conducted. In this step, each period is examined by tracing the chain from the independent variable to the first dependent variable, and finally to the second dependent variable, under both hypotheses. The results of this comparative analysis are presented in the table below.

Table 8: Horizontal congruence analysis for the four periods.

Month periods	Variable link	Dataset observation vs first hypothesis	Dataset observation vs second hypothesis	Conclusion
October to December 2021	International responses ↓ The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity	Contradiction	Congruence	Strong evidence to support the second hypothesis.
October to December 2021	The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity ↓ The severity of human rights violations	Contradiction	Contradiction	Contrast to both hypotheses.
April to May 2022	International responses ↓	Contradiction	Congruence	Strong evidence to support the

	The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity			second hypothesis.
April to May 2022	The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity ↓ The severity of human rights violations	Contradiction	Contradiction	Contrast to both hypotheses.
November 2020 to January 2021	International responses ↓ The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity	Contradiction	Congruence	Strong evidence to support the second hypothesis.
November 2020 to January 2021	The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity ↓ The severity of human rights violations	Contradiction	Congruence	Strong evidence to support the second hypothesis.
April to May 2021	International responses ↓	Contradiction	Congruence	Strong evidence to support the second hypothesis.

	The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity			
April to May 2021	The effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity ↓ The severity of human rights violations	Contradiction	Contradiction	Contrast to both hypotheses

As a result, the theory that best corresponds to the dataset observation in the Tigray massacre case aligns with the realism perspective, on which the second hypothesis is based: *the stronger the international response to the Tigray conflict, the more effectively the Ethiopian government can employ massacre concealment strategies, leading to higher levels of human rights violations in the region.*

The period that corresponds most clearly to this hypothesis is November 2020 to January 2021. During this period, links from the independent variable to the first dependent variable, and from the first dependent variable to the second dependent variable, are consistent with the expectations of the second hypothesis. This pattern aligns with the realism perspective which suggests that international responses often have limited influence on state behavior. However, the remaining periods also show partial congruence with the second hypothesis. In most cases, the relationship between international responses and the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information follows the expected pattern. This suggests that strong international responses may be associated with a high level of effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information. Nevertheless, the relationship between the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information and the severity of human rights violations does not consistently appear in the dataset observation for the rest of periods. The next section will analyze the result in the framework of postcolonial theory and necropolitics. The section will explain the reasoning behind the second hypothesis, or realism

perspective: when international responses are high, the effectiveness of concealing mass atrocities may also increase, as observed in the case of the Tigray massacre.

5.7 Analyzing the results through the lens of the theoretical framework

The findings of this research reveal notable insights regarding the Tigray massacre. When international organizations, such as the EU, increased their attention and responses to the conflict in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian government intensified its concealment of mass atrocity information. Consequently, this contributed to an increase in the severity of human rights violations in the Tigray region. This pattern supports the second hypothesis of the study but contrasts with conventional expectations of human rights protection. According to the concept of transnational advocacy networks, increased visibility of mass atrocities should enhance human rights protection. This is referred to as the Boomerang pattern, when international organizations pressure certain states to follow their demands (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). However, in the case of Tigray massacre, even as many international organizations raised their voice by publishing documents, statements, or making announcements via media platform, the Ethiopian government did not reduce the concealment of mass atrocity information like one would expect. One possible explanation is that international pressure, rather than constraining mass atrocities, prompted the Ethiopian state to adapt its strategy. By concealing more information, the government sought to reduce external pressure while allowing human rights violations to continue under conditions of reduced visibility. Realism theory can explain state behavior that focuses on survival. In the world of realism, coordination between states is not a top priority, but survival in an anarchic system is paramount (Burchill et al., 2005). Hence, the behavior of the Ethiopian government during the initial period can be understood through the lens of realism, or the conduct in a situation when human rights are overshadowed by concerns for security and power. However, this perspective does not reveal the relationship between international organizations, which are largely established on Western values, and African governments that represent formerly colonized states. In contrast, postcolonial theory can reveal the underlying power-driven dynamics that reproduce historical hierarchies and inequalities in international politics, which shape the behavior of African states, as in the case of the Ethiopian government during the Tigray conflict. In the following section, I analyze the empirical results and the final of dataset observations, including those that are congruent with the second hypothesis, through the framework of postcolonial theory.

Based on postcolonial theory, the focus is on hierarchical power structures and the task of deconstructing and critiquing ideals produced from a Eurocentric perspective. Moreover, postcolonialism aims to give a voice to countries that were formerly colonized, often referred to as the Third world, as they have historically been oppressed and marginalized (Brown, 2025). As a result, rather than producing a single theory to explain every phenomenon in international politics, postcolonialism seeks to explain the world by uncovering how states and societies have been affected by imperial processes from the colonial era to the present (Carey, 2002).

Starting with the first concept in postcolonial theory, hierarchies. This can be explored through selective responses. The international responses examined in this research reflect hierarchical structures in international politics. According to the data from the UNSC and the EU, both organizations consistently paid attention to Ethiopia. However, when compared to other conflicts occurring worldwide during the period between 4th November 2020 and 2nd November 2022, the Tigray conflict received fewer responses and was not a top priority in UNSC and EU meetings. These organizations tended to focus more prominently on issues, such as the Myanmar coup d'état beginning in February 2021 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine beginning in February 2022, rather than on conflicts in Africa. By mid-2022, when the conflict in Tigray had reached a stalemate, the issue was increasingly downplayed to a secondary point within broader discussions at UNSC meetings. For example, at the 8983rd meeting devoted to Ukraine agenda Mr. Filippo Grandi (Italy) said: *“Finally, let us remember that Ukrainian refugees, like all others — and please let us not forget the continuing plight of Afghans, Syrians, Ethiopians, the Rohingya people from Myanmar and many others — never wanted to be refugees. They never wanted to be forced to flee their homes, and they all hope to return to their country as quickly as possible”* (United Nations Security Council, 2022, p. 5).

Notably, Ethiopia was never listed as a standalone agenda item in UNSC meetings but was instead referred to under the broader agenda of “Peace and Security in Africa.” Moreover, conflicts in other African countries were designated as primary agenda items, such as “The Situation Concerning the Democratic Republic of Congo” (8813th meeting) and “Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan” (8825th meeting). In contrast, the EU documents referred explicitly to the conflict in Ethiopia or included it as a subtopic within discussions of other African conflicts. These responses indicate that international organizations continued to mention the violence in Tigray intermittently, but it was no longer treated as a primary topic of deliberation.

This phenomenon corresponds to the concept of “coloniality of being” proposed by Walter Mignolo, an Argentine sociologist associated with the decolonial approach, as in *On the Coloniality of Being* (2007). This concept suggests that colonial structures are deeply embedded in lived experiences and in the valuation of human existence. Inequality is structured through race, leading to what Mignolo describes as an “ethics of war” in which violence in certain regions becomes normalized as part of everyday life. In the case of the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, the limited attention given by international organizations when compared to other global conflicts, reflects a global system that not only produces inequality but also determines who is regarded as fully human. When the value of human life in Africa is perceived as lower than elsewhere, conflict across the continent becomes normalized. Consequently, large-scale loss of life in African conflicts that is viewed as routine fails to generate substantial global pressure. This is evident in the relatively limited attention given to Ethiopia by institutions such as the UNSC and the EU, particularly when compared to other conflicts.

Second, the concept of the subaltern voice. During the conflict, both Tigrayans and the federal government of Ethiopia expressed their own narratives to claim the legitimacy of their military actions. Based on the notion of the subaltern voice developed by Gayatri Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), a key problem identified by postcolonial thinkers is that Western intellectuals often position themselves as representatives of the oppressed, or the subaltern. The power structures of the postcolonial world result in these marginalized voices being silenced or constrained, preventing them from fully articulating their own needs and perspectives. This issue is particularly evident in the role of women. For instance, Spivak illustrates through the example of “Sati” the practice of widow self-immolation in India, which was abolished during the colonial period. Both colonial authorities opposing the practice and cultural nationalists defending it, but both failed to include women’s voices in the discourse.

In the case of the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, I therefore examine whether the voices of the parties involved are being spoken for by others. Based on the timeframe considered in this research, there is no strong evidence that subaltern voices are being represented or appropriated by external actors. Both the federal government of Ethiopia and the TPLF actively present their own narratives and perspectives. At the same time, international organizations reporting on the conflict tend to provide space for and maintain a balance between these competing narratives. For example, reports from EEPA often include responses from the TPLF alongside official statements from the Ethiopian

government. In contrast, documents produced by the UNSC and the EU place greater emphasis on human rights violations, particularly highlighting the voices of civilians in Tigray affected by the conflict. Moreover, the role of mediators such as the African Union has been recognized as significant, especially given that the conflict is situated within Africa. The decision by the international community to grant space and responsibility to the African Union in addressing the crisis reflects that subaltern voices are acknowledged and afforded a degree of importance on the global stage.

The attempt to control subaltern voices identified in this research is the concealment of information regarding mass atrocities allegedly conducted by the Ethiopian government, particularly at the beginning of the conflict to control the flow of information. The Tigray region was placed under a digital black hole and isolated from the global community for several months before international journalists and humanitarian aid organizations were able to access the area in March 2021. Prior to this, the federal government communicated with the international community on its own terms, framing Tigrayan actions as criminal acts aimed at destabilizing Ethiopia. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed also continued to assert the legitimacy of the government's military actions through numerous official statements that denied allegations of human rights violations during a period when the Tigray region was unable to represent itself. This situation reflects a full exercise of power to silence the voices of those affected by the conflict in Tigray. The government's narrative was predominantly disseminated through mainstream media, while information from the Tigray side was suppressed and communication severely restricted, making it difficult to verify facts on the ground. Nevertheless, although this phenomenon aligns with the concept of the subaltern, it also presents a paradox. The actors speaking over the oppressed are not Western powers, but it is an African national government that is marginalizing its own population in the context of an ethnic conflict.

Lastly, this section examines mimicry and norm diffusion based on *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* by Homi K. Bhabha (1984). Bhabha introduces the concept of mimicry to describe how non-Western actors may adopt the language and forms of dominant norms in partial and ambivalent ways. In his formulation, mimicry refers not to simple imitation, but to a condition of being "almost the same, but not quite" through which colonial authority is both reproduced and destabilized. Drawing on this concept, this study examines how non-Western states engage with dominant international norms in ambivalent and partial ways. In the context of the

Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, human rights discourse became a central normative framework shaping relations between international actors and the Ethiopian federal government. During the conflict, the Ethiopian government largely rejected allegations of human rights violations while simultaneously expressing formal commitments to humanitarian access, including announcements regarding the opening of humanitarian corridors. However, subsequent developments revealed persistent restrictions on humanitarian access in practice, imposed by both the Ethiopian government and the TPLF.

Rather than indicating straightforward non-compliance, these actions can be interpreted as a form of normative ambivalence: the selective adoption of human rights language alongside practices that undermine its full implementation. The Ethiopian government did not explicitly acknowledge, but this was reflected in situation reports describing the difficulties faced by humanitarian aid convoys in accessing affected areas. From a Bhabha perspective, mimicry does not simply signal inconsistency but instead exposes the instability of international normative authority, where compliance is never fully complete and meaning is continually contested.

Moreover, the Ethiopian government also engaged in the concealment of information regarding alleged mass atrocities to varying degrees of intensity throughout the conflict. This strategy reflects partial compliance with international demands while simultaneously retaining control over information flows in conflict zones to maintain a strategic advantage. When human rights norms were used to pressure the Ethiopian government through calls for international investigations, the government simultaneously accepted and resisted these demands. For example, it allowed access for investigations but still restricting some areas for foreign journalists or threatening them with the legal charge by “propagation of disinformation and public incitement” which under the anti-hate speech law. It also accused international organizations of aligning with the TPLF, while simultaneously acknowledging reports of human rights abuses in Tigray and pledging to investigate it, as demanded by the international community (Europe External Programme with Africa, 2021). This phenomenon reflects what Bhabha describes as hybridity, or an in-between position that is not fully aligned with Western-dominated normative systems but also not entirely outside them.

Overall, international responses that do not adequately prioritize African conflicts create conditions in which African governments recognize their limited exposure to global monitoring. In relation to the concept of subaltern voice, the Ethiopian government appears to have adapted its

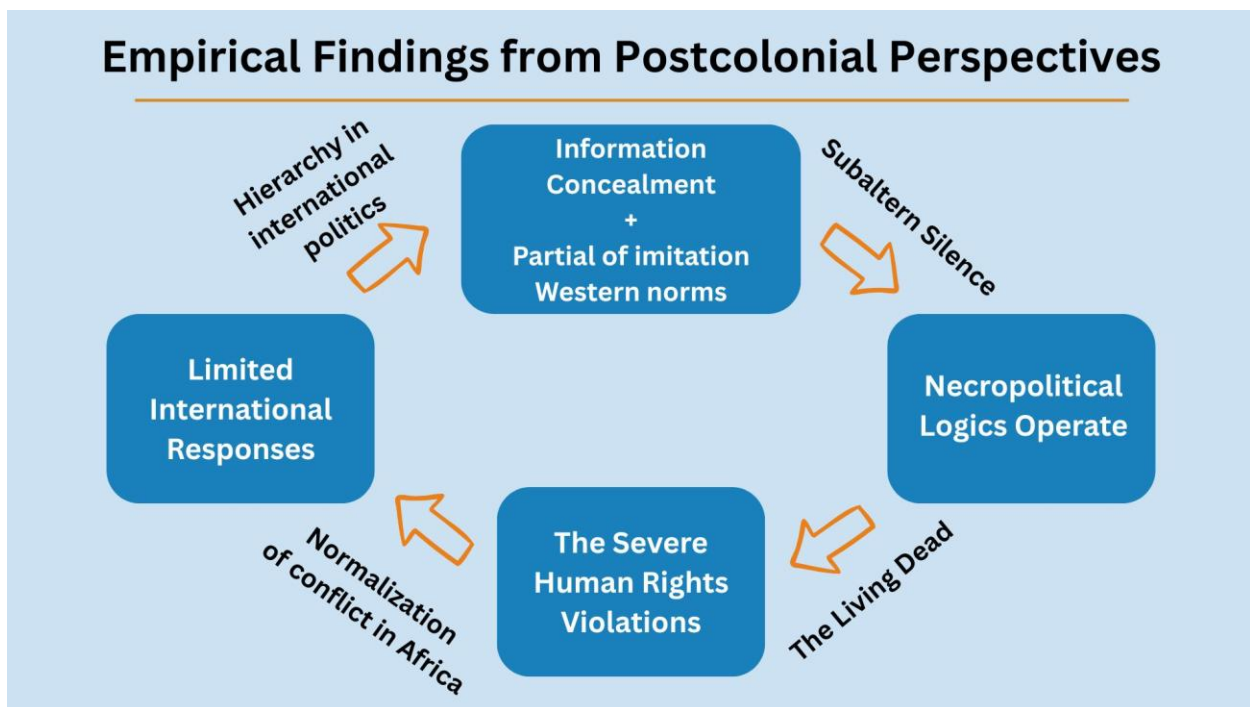
strategies in response to international scrutiny by increasing its capacity to control the flow of information. This is further reflected in the concept of mimicry, whereby the Ethiopian government responds to international pressure through partial and selective adoption of external norms. The result of this dynamic is reflected in the dataset observations between November 2020 and January 2021, when periods of heightened international responses coincided with intensified efforts to conceal information regarding alleged mass atrocities, and were followed by continued human rights violations in the context of the Tigray conflict.

Consequently, this phenomenon contributes to a strategic dynamic in which African governments may take advantage of the limited attention, time, and resources that international organizations can allocate to conflicts on the African continent. This suggests that, in protracted conflicts, African states may employ a dual strategy of information concealment and partial imitation of Western norms, particularly in relation to human rights protection to reduce international pressure. In this context, the primary objective is not necessarily the genuine resolution of conflict. Rather, governments may recognize that selective responses to Western or international demands are often sufficient to delay external scrutiny or reduce the intensity of pressure. As a result, conflict dynamics may become prolonged, as these performative or partial compliance strategies contribute to sustainability. While new conflicts tend to emerge every year, this process also reflects broader discursive patterns in which recurring conflicts in Africa risk being normalized within international perceptions, thereby reinforcing postcolonial hierarchies of attention and concern.

However, what would the implications be for international organizations? In the case of conflicts in Western countries, increased international attention and responses are generally assumed to enhance human rights protection. In contrast, in the case of conflicts in Global South countries, this assumption does not always hold. International responses may instead encourage states to appear compliant while continuing coercive practices in less visible forms. This finding reinforces the argument that Western human rights norms cannot be uncritically applied to the Global South and highlights the importance of critically assessing the universality of human rights discourse. Moreover, within the concept of necropolitics, this research shows that international responses and external pressure can contribute to state power in shaping life-and-death outcomes. The Ethiopian government, alongside allied Eritrean forces, committed human rights violations that have been associated with ethnic cleansing objectives, consistent with the necropolitical notion of the state exercising sovereign power over who may live and who must die. However, the violence that

occurred in the Tigray region demonstrates that necropolitics is not necessarily driven by the state alone. Rather, regional actors such as the TPLF, as well as external actors like Eritrean forces, also exercised control over territory at different points in time and used this control in acts of violence against opposing civilians. In this sense, international inaction or selective attention can indirectly structure conditions of death. As a result, the Tigray region became a “living dead”, whose inhabitants are allowed to die, this situation being shaped by multiple factors, including a digital black hole and the limited attention of international organizations. Ultimately, when the lives of civilians in Tigray were rendered invisible, this contributed to large-scale of human rights violations during the early stages of the conflict, which corresponds to what necropolitics conceptualizes as a silent death.

Figure 12: Empirical findings from postcolonial perspectives.



Nevertheless, these findings do not negate the importance of international organizations, who can make conflicts visible and advocate for human rights especially in contexts where information is restricted, like in African conflicts. Furthermore, obtained results also highlight differences between Western countries and Global South countries in terms of normative frameworks and political contexts. This suggests that the ways in which international organizations apply

diplomatic pressure to encourage conflict resolution should be carefully considered, as such pressure may also produce unintended negative consequences. Excessively strong international responses can contribute to increased human rights violations, while insufficient responses may also create conditions that enable African governments to commit atrocities with reduced scrutiny, as they may perceive limited monitoring by external actors. As a result, balancing the level of international responses through a combination of diplomatic, informational, investigative, and economic tools may represent a more appropriate approach. However, the central question remains “how” this balance should be achieved, given the absence of clear guidelines within the international community for addressing conflicts in Africa specifically.

By applying postcolonial perspectives to the empirical findings, this study seeks to demonstrate how postcolonial dynamics continue to shape contemporary international responses with human rights crises, moving beyond formal normative commitments to reveal underlying structures of power and hierarchy. These findings also highlight the difference between Western countries and Global South countries in terms of normative frameworks and political cultures. The ways in which international organizations apply pressure to Global South states in efforts to resolve crises must be carefully considered, particularly in the context of African conflicts, as Western models may not always be effective in these settings. Finally, this study has several limitations. First, the research relies primarily on English-language sources, which may exclude important materials available in local languages, such as Amharic and Tigrinya. Second, the observed patterns during the period from November 2020 to January 2021 reflect the early stages of the Tigray conflict, when the Ethiopian government may have had a strong preexisting intent to conceal mass atrocity information as suggested by repeated statements from Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed indicating that the Tigray operation would conclude quickly. Since the internal motivations of government actors cannot be fully verified, all assessments are based on available data.

Accordingly, the researcher acknowledges the limitations of both the data and the interpretations within the scope of this study. Moreover, for the English-language dataset, the information was cross-verified across multiple sources to ensure the accuracy of each variable, which aligns closely with observed real-world phenomena. Overall, the findings were not unexpected; however, they provide a clearer and more systematic understanding of the relationship between international organizations and African states in the context of conflict response.

6. Conclusion

This research begins with the question of why African conflicts tend to receive less international attention compared to other conflicts. The Tigray massacre is used as a case study to address this question by examining the level of international responses and the behavior of the Ethiopian government in the Tigray conflict, particularly the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information strategies during the period between 4th November 2020 and 2nd November 2022, from the onset of the conflict to the signing of the ceasefire agreement by both parties. Direct content analysis was employed to measure the intensity of independent and both dependent variables, while a congruence analysis was used to assess which theoretical framework, liberalism or realism, best aligns with the dataset observation. The results indicate congruence with the second hypothesis, which is grounded in realism perspective: *the stronger the international response to the Tigray conflict, the more effectively the Ethiopian government can employ massacre concealment strategies, leading to higher levels of human rights violations in the region.* Between November 2020 and January 2021, international organizations such as the EU issued multiple responses to the Ethiopian government, including official statements addressing the conflict and the use of naming-and-shaming strategies to condemn ongoing human rights violations in the Tigray region. Moreover, the EU adopted a concrete measure by suspending financial support to Ethiopia, representing one of the first direct forms of external pressure from international actors. However, the Ethiopian government's response diverged from these expectations. Rather than reducing the intensity of military offensive, the federal government continued its. Additionally, it intensified its concealment of mass atrocity information during this period. The indicators of this strategy identified in this study include digital black hole, restrictions on journalists' access, arrest and harassment of journalists, and official denials. As a result, the severity of human rights violations in the Tigray region increased. Based on data from Ethiopiantigraywar.com and reports from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, this period recorded as the highest levels of civilian casualties compared to the rest of the study timeframe.

To answer the research question: *How do international responses to the Tigray massacre influence the effectiveness of information concealment strategies by the Ethiopian government and the resulting severity of human rights violations?* this study applies postcolonial theory as an analytical lens. Drawing on Walter Mignolo's concept of the "coloniality of being" (2007), Gayatri Spivak's

notion of the “subaltern” (1988), and Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of “mimicry” (1984), the study argues that limited international attention to African conflicts, shaped by hierarchical structures in international politics, creates conditions in which states perceive reduced external scrutiny as an advantage, thereby enabling greater control over information flows. In response, governments may adopt strategic adaptations that combine the silencing of marginalized voices, consistent with subaltern dynamics, with the selective adoption of international norms through mimicry. Over time, this dual strategy can contribute to the prolongation of conflict, as partial compliance and managed visibility reduce external pressure for resolution. As conflicts persist under conditions of limited sustained global attention, violence risks becoming normalized within both domestic governance strategies and international perception, forming a cyclical pattern.

However, this research is limited by its reliance on secondary data derived from international reports and documentation of Ethiopian government concealment strategies. Future research should incorporate additional methods, such as ethnographic interviews in both English and local languages (e.g., Amharic and Tigrinya), to provide more in-depth and comprehensive insights. Moreover, this study employs an operationalization approach that translates abstract concepts such as international responses and the effectiveness of concealment of mass atrocity information into measurable indices. Therefore, alternative methodologies such as discourse analysis, statistical modeling, and comparative methods between a few cases could also be employed to further examine African state behaviors.

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Appendix

1. All of acronyms in this research are explained in the table below.

Acronyms	Full Name	Explanation
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front	Established in 1975 and came to power in 1991, this political group is the main political group in Tigray region. They used to rule Ethiopia with the federal government until 2018.
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front	A ruling political coalition from 1991 to 2019, after that, PM Abiy Ahmed dissolved EPRDF and merged it with other parties to be the Prosperity Party for more unity.
TDF	Tigray Defense Forces	A military organization who fought with the federal government during the Tigray conflict.
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defense Force	The federal military of Ethiopia and pro-government force.
EDF	Eritrean Defense Forces	Military force of Eritrea, they were involved in the Tigray conflict alongside with ENDF.

UNSC	United Nations Security Council	One organ of the United Nations who has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security with 5 permanent members; China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and United States.
EU	European Union	A political and economic union that contains 27 members from European states. One of their principles is promote and protect human rights.
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	An international organization who having mandated to protect and assist refugees.
AU	African Union	A continental organization that contains 55 African nations with the aims of achieving greater unity and solidarity among the African countries
EEPA	Europe External Programme with Africa	A non-profit organization based in Brussels who provided knowledge about Horn of Africa and beyond. They also do publications of human trafficking of refugees with many local experts from African nations.
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data	An independent global monitor who collects, analyses, and provides data maps on conflict and protest around the world.

2. The dataset from analyzing part is provided in Figshare.com:

<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.31972065>