

It is Still Voter Suppression of the Ethiopian Peasantry, Stupid!

Makonnen Tesfaye; Aigaforum; February 14, 2020



Holding the Ethiopian General Election at the peak of the rainy season is blatant voter suppression of the Ethiopian Peasantry that constitutes 80% of the electorates and population.

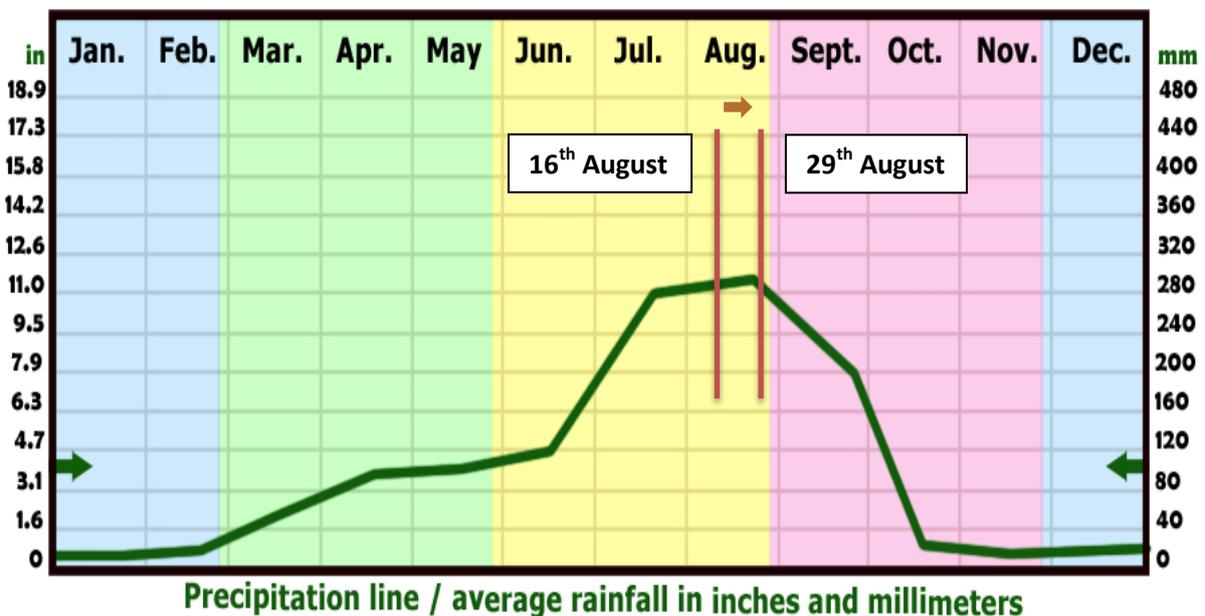
1. It may be recalled an article on “**Abiy Government’s Strategy of Rigging the Ethiopian General Election**” was posted on Aigaforum and Tigrionline on 3 February 2020. It is argued that holding the Election in the rainy season is tantamount to **voter suppression of 80% of the Ethiopian population**, namely the peasantry who live in the countryside, by the Government and the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE). This is as part of an elaborate stratagem of voter suppression that includes ploys, among others:

- The near complete subversion of the NEBE and the Judiciary by the Executive arm of the Government, nullifying the need for a neutral and fair election oversight or adjudication;
- The use of military command posts (illegal military occupation-cum-state of emergency in most of the Regions) to control at will electoral districts and polling stations by the military and allied civilians to facilitate and enable large scale electoral fraud and rigging;
- The widespread repression of the Opposition Parties in the SNNPR, Western and Southern Oromia and the Benishangul-Gumuz Regions amongst many others;

- The extensive use of the coercive state apparatus and institutions; and the unfair near monopoly and control of the media by the Government;
- Collusion with foreign governments and firms to compromise the integrity of the electoral processes, including by printing of excessive ballot papers for ballot stuffing and related electoral frauds and the complete control of the electoral logistics; and
- The selective, self-serving and favoured use of election observers from institutions that have vested interests in the dependent and crony Government of Abiy Ahmed winning the Election; and to the effective exclusion of neutral observers from the country or Africa.

2. The NEBE has just announced, as reported by the BBC on 14 February 2020, the General Election will be held on 29th August as opposed to earlier announced date of 16th August. This was according to the NEBE because **there will be less rain**. This **is a most ignorant reason as well as incredibly insulting to the intelligence and common sense of the Ethiopian people**. If anything and based on the metrological evidence of the Ethiopian climate and weather patterns the latter part of August is even more rainy than the first half of the month.

Ethiopian Climate and Weather Pattern (Rain/Precipitation)



According to the climate and weather metrological data, 29th August is rainier than 16th August!

3. Not only is late August when the rain and precipitation peaks with extensive flooding when torrential rain causes rivers to burst their banks making travelling in rural areas extremely difficult and dangerous

(often life-threatening), but it is also the time when farmers are busy looking after their land and crops and engaging in **existential farming activities**. As argued before the countryside and the vast remote areas in Ethiopia have extremely poor transport and communication infrastructure making travelling extremely difficult, much more so during the peak of the rainy season. Given the vast expanse of the Ethiopian countryside, the distance between villages and polling stations are very long, often requiring long distance travel crossing muddy and rough terrain, forests, rivers, gorges and ravines, hills and mountains. It remains that holding the General Election in the rainy season, in particular when it peaks, is a brazen act of voter suppression that defies any logic, common sense or rationale except for what it is – a blatantly anti-democratic act of voter suppression of the single biggest voting bloc in the country, the Ethiopian Peasantry, by the Government and its crony institutions, in particular the NEBE.

4. The Opposition Parties, democrats, federalists and citizens in general must adamantly oppose the new election schedule; otherwise they will be giving in to the central ploy of the Government's strategy of voter suppression. The upcoming General Election is of critical importance (equal in significance to 1974 and 1991) to the future viability of the Ethiopian State and the safeguarding of self-determination and federalism. In addition to having their say on the scheduling of the election **it is also crucially important for the Opposition Parties to:**

- 1) Collectively and individually design and implement effective measures and strategies for countering the Government's determined and elaborate plan of election rigging, since this is absolutely crucial and without of which it is almost a "game-over" scenario with a stolen election, **precipitating "Regime Failure", disintegration and widespread conflict and crisis** in the country;
- 2) Be cognizant of the fact that the NEBE has so far proved to be neither neutral nor fair in respect of its constitutional remit or conduct; and cannot be relied upon to oversee a free, fair and credible General Election in Ethiopia;
- 3) Be aware of the fact that the Judiciary is completely compromised by the Executive arm of the Government and cannot be relied upon to adjudicate on electoral fraud or malpractice;
- 4) Campaign, beginning now, for the **immediate ending of military command posts** as a must precondition for free and fair election;
- 5) Demand the end of political and physical repression. It is important to move on from merely publishing **communiques condemning the Government (Abiy Ahmed does not give a damn!)** that are not followed up with concrete political actions within the limits of the law that include possible legal remedies, mass demonstrations and civil disobedience as appropriate and necessary;

- 6) Constantly being vigilant and following attentively the minutia of the election modalities, processes and arrangements at all stages with a view to countering election rigging ploys and machinations;
- 7) Build their capacity to monitor and scrutinise the election processes, in particular by smart deployment of their electoral personnel, expertise and resources;
- 8) Think strategically and in partnership but act locally and individually, in particular by enhancing their local presence and knowledge at Kebele, Wereda, Zonal and Federal levels;
- 9) Share and pool together their common resources, in particular the media and electioneering expertise; and
- 10) Unify and synergise their election manifestos, political messages and communication for maximum effects and results.

5. Given a free, fair and credible election, the electoral maths clearly favours the Opposition Parties, and there **is no way the Government could win the Election by other than massive electoral fraud and election rigging on an industrial scale**, but the Government is so determined (as well as unashamedly stating on record its intention to rig the Election!) and will inevitably use its power of incumbency by using the full weight of the coercive state apparatus and institutions, finance, personnel and cadres, media and the abundant resource of its foreign masters. Hence, the writing is on the wall as to whether the Government will get away with stealing the election will depend on the extent the Opposition Parties collectively and individually will design and implement effective counter measures and strategies that deter or minimise Government voter suppression and election rigging ploys.

6. It is crucially important to recognise that in the final analysis the Abiy Government and its foreign masters are paper tigers without mass base or major electoral constituencies in the country when compared to the inherent majorities and preponderance of the nations, nationalities and peoples, and their potential for forging winning strategic alliances. The challenge is realising this potential, which is imperative and existential. What is at stake in this General Election is either a return to the Ethiopian State as **a Prison of Oppressed Nationalities (or rather its demise and disintegration)**, or a democratic and federalist country that guarantees self-determination, unity based on diversity, progress and development, peace and democracy. Indeed, the choices can never be starker.