



Politics



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Ethiopia Alert: National Electoral Board of Ethiopia announces indefinite postponement of June 5 national elections on May 15

Please be advised

- Reports from May 15 citing the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) chairperson Birutkan Mideksa stated that the polls that were slated to be held on June 5 have been postponed indefinitely.
- Birukutan noted that the polls were being delayed due to logistical issues over finalizing voter registration, training electoral staff, printing and distributing ballot papers.
- According to government statistics, at the time of writing only 36.2 million potential voters out of a potential voting number of around 50 million had been registered by the NEBE.
- Election officials noted that the new date for the polls remains unclear, given that the NEBE will now consult with political parties to decide a new course of action.
- However, the NEBE noted that the new poll dates would take into account the rainy season, which runs from about June to September.

Assessment & Forecast

1. The announcement by the NEBE is notable, albeit relatively expected given the sheer number of issues that faced the electoral body as the June 5 polling date approached. Additionally, it is significant the June 5 date was chosen after elections were postponed in March 2020, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as the reason. In this context, since March 2020, besides the COVID-19 pandemic persisting, the security and political situation nationwide has

also deteriorated with the conflict in the Tigray Regional State, as well as burgeoning ethnic violence in several states, killing masses of people and displacing tens of thousands of others.

2. **FORECAST:** In terms of the government response, the government will likely justify the delay by noting that postponement gives the NEBE time to further prepare ground logistics, by extending voter registration deadlines to allow for a more inclusive election process. However, opposition parties are likely to reject these justifications and claim the government has postponed polls in order to consolidate power, albeit with the recognition that the ruling Ethiopian Prosperity Party (EPP) would likely have won the elections if they were held as scheduled.
3. **FORECAST:** In terms of actual ground responses, opposition parties remain unlikely to majorly protest the postponement of the polls given that many prominent parties such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) have withdrawn from the elections, stating that the arrests of their leaders have made campaigning impossible. Given that the government is unlikely to release these leaders citing a threat to national security, means that any consultation with the opposition is likely to be futile. While protests regarding the postponement of the polls cannot be ruled out, these are likely to be dispersed forcibly, further raising tensions between the government and opposition party supporters.
4. – Given that the NEBE stated it would take into account the advent of the rainy season, which generally makes travel difficult in the interior regions, this likely means the board is cognizant of the fact that the polls may be delayed beyond this period as well. Such a possibility is likely given that much of the logistical work in outlying areas is conducted by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), who are currently stretched thin due to the Tigray conflict, and the monitoring and quelling of various ethnic flashpoints nationwide. It is highly likely that these issues will likely not be resolved adequately over the coming months meaning that a further postponement remains highly plausible.

Recommendations

1. Travel to Addis Ababa may continue while maintaining heightened vigilance in crowded areas due to the high risks of non-violent personal property crime.
2. Travel may continue to Ethiopia's outlying regions while avoiding the vicinity of any political gatherings or protests that manifest.
3. Avoid nonessential travel to non-touristic outlying areas of Ethiopia, such as Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, SNNPR, Somali, and western Oromia regions in light of the poor security presence.
4. Avoid all travel to Tigray Region given the ongoing conflict, as well as to areas bordering Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia given the heightened risk of violence.