The Quest for Fairer Ethnic Representation at Regional Level: A Challenge for Ethiopia's Transition towards Genuine Democracy

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1. Introduction

• Democracy and representation are closely intertwined concepts.

• Parliaments are at the hearts of democracy and representation

•Ethnic representation is serious in countries with ethnic diversity

•In areas where there is feeling of marginalization quest for fairer representation will have political significance

1.1. Methodological Issues

•   Dominantly qualitative research

•Data was gathered from primary & secondary sources through field work & literature review

> ➢ Analysis of archival material was conducted
> ➢ Interviews and
> ➢ FGD with retired politicians, youth activists from different ethnic groups participated

2. The National Context

• Ethiopia is a mosaic of diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic groups

• Ethiopian regimes attempted to handle this diversity in different ways

• Pre-1991 Ethiopian regimes have tendency of centralization

• They considered diversity as a threat for peace and stability

- This caused marginalization and exclusion of many ethnic groups

- In 1991 the country adopted ethnic-federalism

- The post 1991 regime handled diversity in different way,

- Recognizing self-rule rights

- 9regional states were established based on ethnicity

- Ethnic federalism has only decentralized marginalization

- Currently, Ethiopia is in transition
  - Political liberalization (political parties, media, CSO)
  - Gender parity
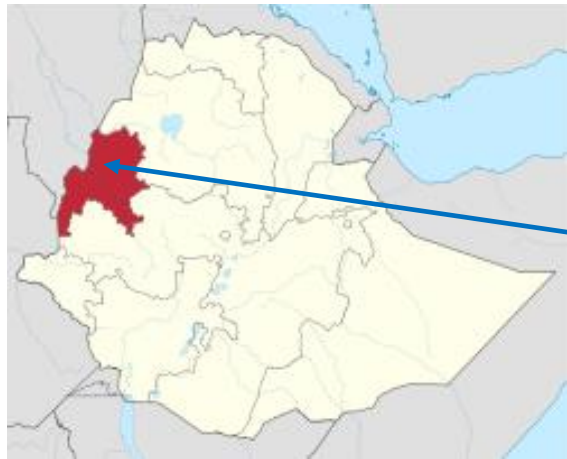 - Rhetoric with regard to conducting genuine election

  But Still in crisis

- Acc. to GRID 2018 Ethiopia is toping the list in the world.

- Quests for fairer ethnic representation, region-hood and identity questions are at the fore front of local politics

- The incumbent regime established Identity and Border Commission, composed of 42 members

3.Benishangul Gumuz Regional State (BGRS

• BGRS is multi-ethnic & multi-lingual region, established by the 1995 FDRE constitution

BGRS

• The area was unoccupied, inaccessible and served as settlement for groups escaping encroachment from the center

•Among the people of the region there was feeling of marginalization

3.1. Ethnic Composition of Benishangul Gumuz Region

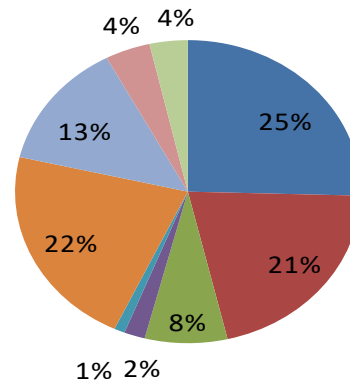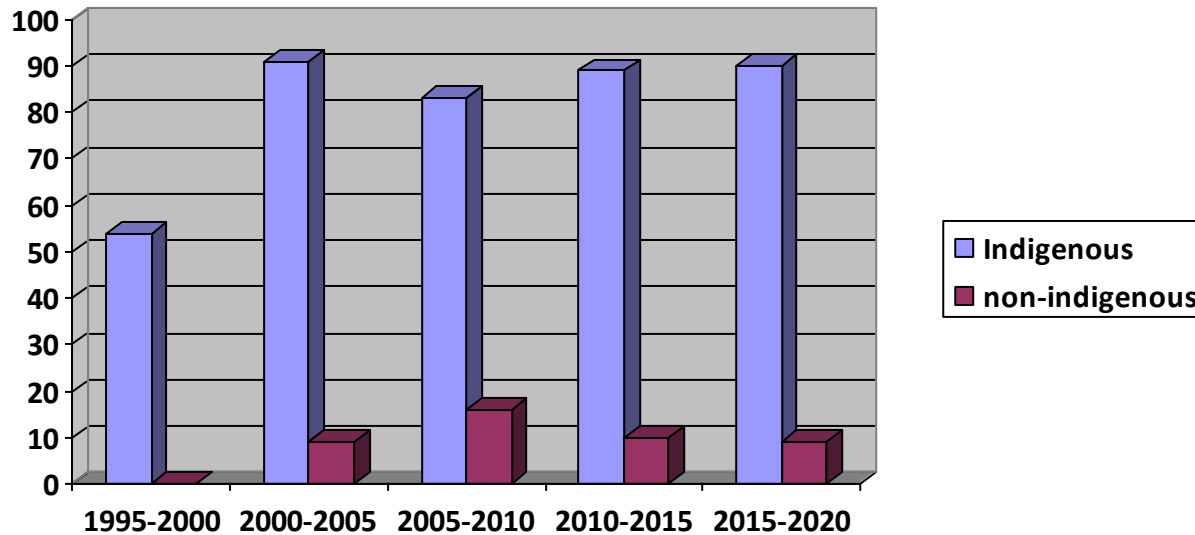| Indigenous/Owners	Non-Indigenous/others
• Bertha	• Amhara
• Gumuz	• Oromo
• Shinasha	• Tigre ----
• Mao & Komo	

popolation of B.G in % according to 2007 Census

Legend: Berta ■ Gumuz ■ Shinasha ■ Mao ■ Komo ■ Amhara ■ Oromo ■ Agew ■ others

Pie chart values: 25%, 21%, 8%, 2%, 1%, 22%, 13%, 4%, 4%

3.2. Ethnic Representation in BGRS Parliament

• Representation in modern sense started in 1995 with the first election for RP conducted in the region
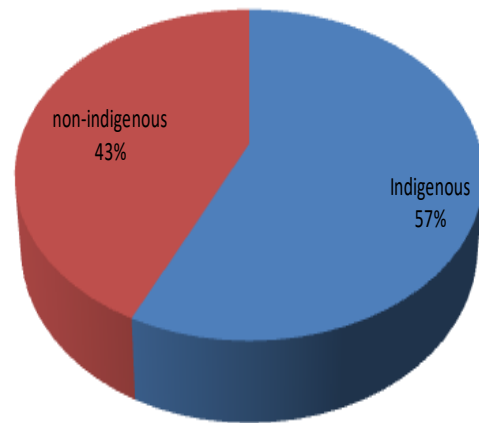
- In lower tiers of government (Kebele) there is better representation of ethnic groups

- In the upper tiers, there is marginalization & quest for fairer ethnic representation among the NIG
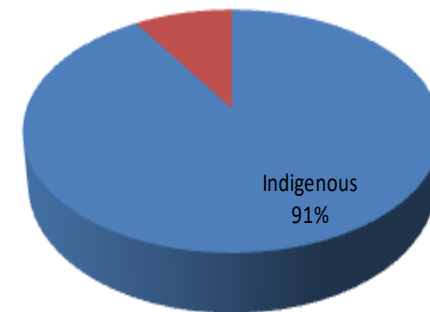
Share in population and share in parliamentary seats compared

Population of B.G in % according to 2007 Census

non-indigenous 43%

Indigenous 57%

Distribution of parliamentary seats across indigenous and non-indeginous groups in the current parliament
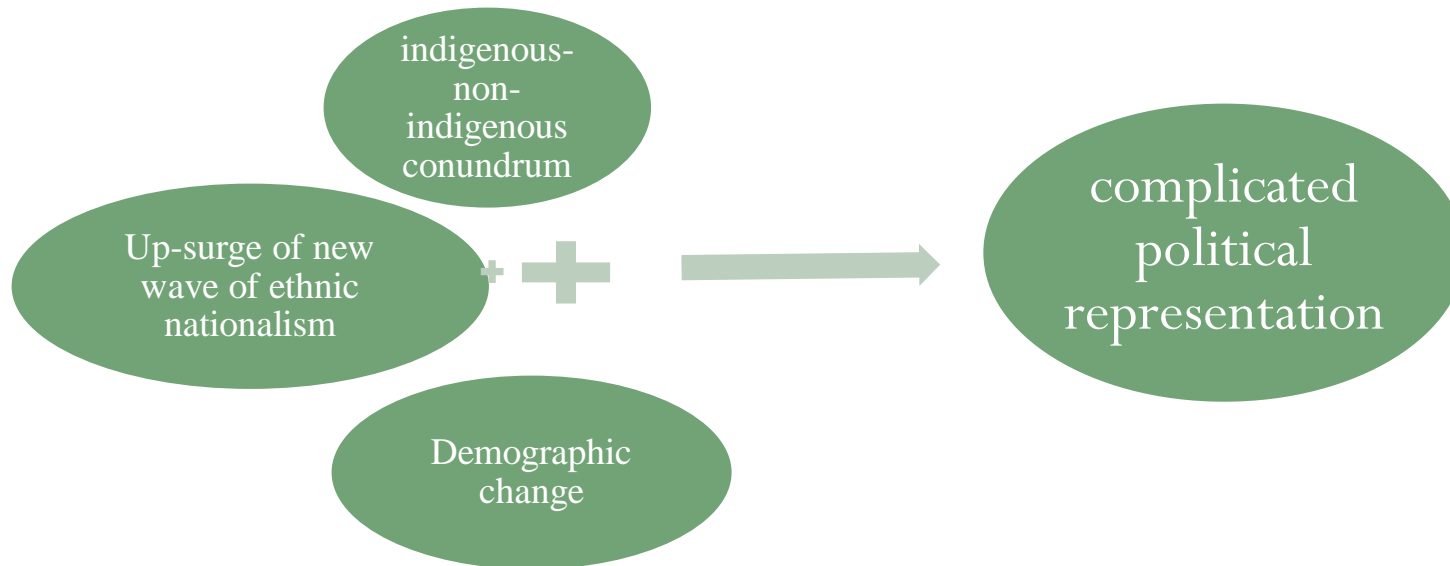
non-indigenous 9%

Indigenous 91%

- It was in place for over quarter of century due to **weak /absence of competitive multi-party system**

- Parliamentary seats were **negotiated among** the dominant ruling party (BGPDP) and affiliates

- . But can't/should not continue due to increasing role of **social media activism** & **up-surge of wave of ethnic nationalism**

3.3 Challenges of Political Representation in BGRS

indigenous-non-indigenous conundrum

Up-surge of new wave of ethnic nationalism

Demographic change

complicated political representation

•Indigenous and non-indigenous Conundrum

• Constitutionally the people in the region were categorized as owners (indigenous) and others (non-indigenous).

•The IG want to preserve their self rule rights, which is provided by the federal arrangement while

•The NIG perceive themselves as marginalized and demanding fairer ethnic representation in parliaments at different levels

Impact of Demographic Change

- Currently, there is shift in demography of the region

- Previously, there were small groups spontaneously settled in the region

- The planned population resettlement in the region has brought fundamental change

- Over 135,000 people were resettled by the government in Assosa, Bambasi and Pawi weredas in 1980's

• As a result indigenous people are becoming minorities in their localities.

• There is increasing quest for fairer representation among NIG

• There is mistrust among the IG of losing their self rule rights in their locality

•This has caused violent conflicts and huge number of IDP (over 100, 000 since sept 2018)

• **Up-surge of new wave of ethnic nationalism**

• Recently, Ethiopia is experiencing up-surge of new wave of ethnic nationalism

• Ethnicity replacing ideology and programmatic party policy is basis for establishment of political parties

•This has brought the issue of ethnic representation to the forefront of politics

• This parties are demanding fairer representation, proportionate to their number of population

3.4. Future Implications

• Ensuring representation is a must for peace & the transition

• **Adopting PR electoral system** & competitive multi-party politics will be vital

• But precautionary measures have to be taken so that fairer representation should not override self-rule rights of IG.

• Increasing the number of **regional parliamentary seats** will also be helpful.

• This needs constitutional amendment

Conclusion

• The current regime must balance quests for fairer representation among NIGs and self-rule rights of IG in regions

• Inability to balance these contending quests will negatively influence Ethiopia's transition towards genuine democracy

I THANK YOU!!