Jigjiga: The Abysmal State of Jigjiga's Power Service
A story told in 4 graphs!

By Anwar Shifow
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The summer of 2019, I spent a total of 21 days in Jigjiga, and I wanted to share with the readers the true state of the power service provided to the residents by Ethiopian Electric Utility (EEU). I don't purport to know the reasons behind the service degradation. One might ask the following:

1) Is it just a normal supply and demand issue wherein the exploding population has simply outstripped the available supply?
2) Is the problem nationwide or is it confined to SRS?
3) If other regions are experiencing similar power shortages – then to what degree?

I don't have the answers to the above questions and many others, but what I do know and want to highlight is the erratic nature of the power supply. Transparency isn't EEU's strength and therefore any reason we ascribe would just be speculation.

Is it a power cut or power outage?

There's a difference between power cut and power outage, even though the end result - a service disruption - is the same for the customer.

Power cuts are usually scheduled and communicated to customers ahead of time. Utility companies do this around the world for various reasons. In countries where demand outweighs supply, Utilities resort to this as a means of managing demand. Another name for this is "rolling outages". I've seen this happen in NY and California during the extreme summer heat. Another reason Utility companies do this is to conduct emergency repairs. Safety is the overriding factor in this case.

Power Outages on the hand are not scheduled. They happen as a result of a failed piece of equipment; a need to carry out an emergency repair, or because the Utility failed to communicate a power cut to its' customers.

For the purposes of this article, not knowing whether what I saw in Jigjiga was a power cut or a power outage, I'm going to refer to it as a Power Event or (PE).
The data in this piece covers the period between Monday, August 19, 2019, and Sunday, September 8, 2019.

The data was self-collected and is based on a certain neighborhood in Jigjiga.
It's possible that others have had it worse or better, but the problem appeared to be city-wide.

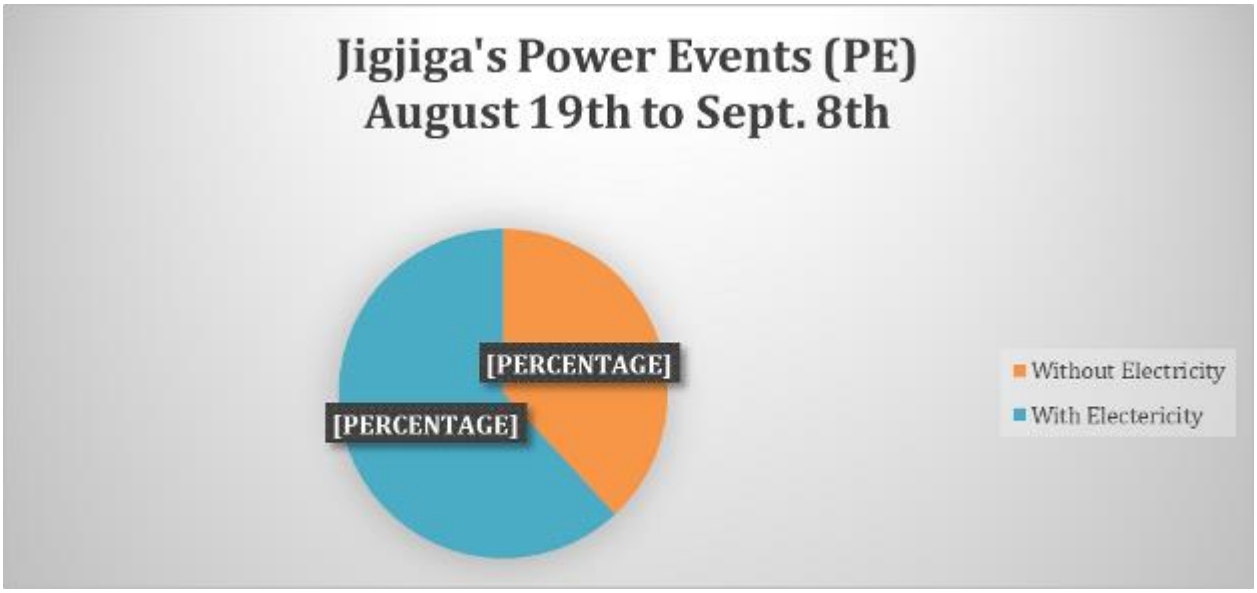
I've ruled out an issue at the customer end. Also, I spoke to residents and asked if in this period power cuts appear more frequent than in the past. The answer I got was: it's normal. This is what they are used to. I wanted to ensure that what I was seeing wasn't a statistical anomaly.

One drawback of this data is that the sample size is small. Be that as it may, and with all caveats out of the way, let's dig into the meat of the data.

1. What was the total duration of these Power Events?

The 21 days I was in Jigjiga translate to a total of 504 hours or 30,240 minutes. In my own rudimentary way, I logged a total of 11,128 minutes of PE or 37% of all the time I was there. In other words, 8 days out of the 21 days were without power.

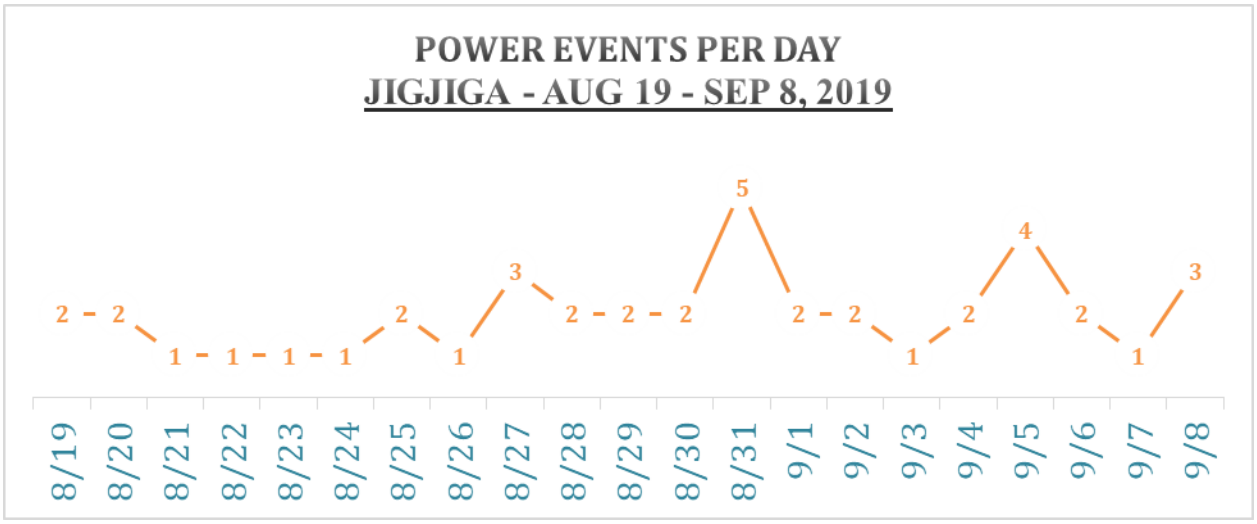
The longest was 24 hours - an entire day without power. The shortest power event lasted 2 minutes.



2. **How Frequent were the PE?**

During this period, I recorded a total of 43 power events i.e incidents where power service was disconnected. That translates to more than 2 a day. The day with the most frequent power events was 08/31. There were a total of 5 events on that single day.

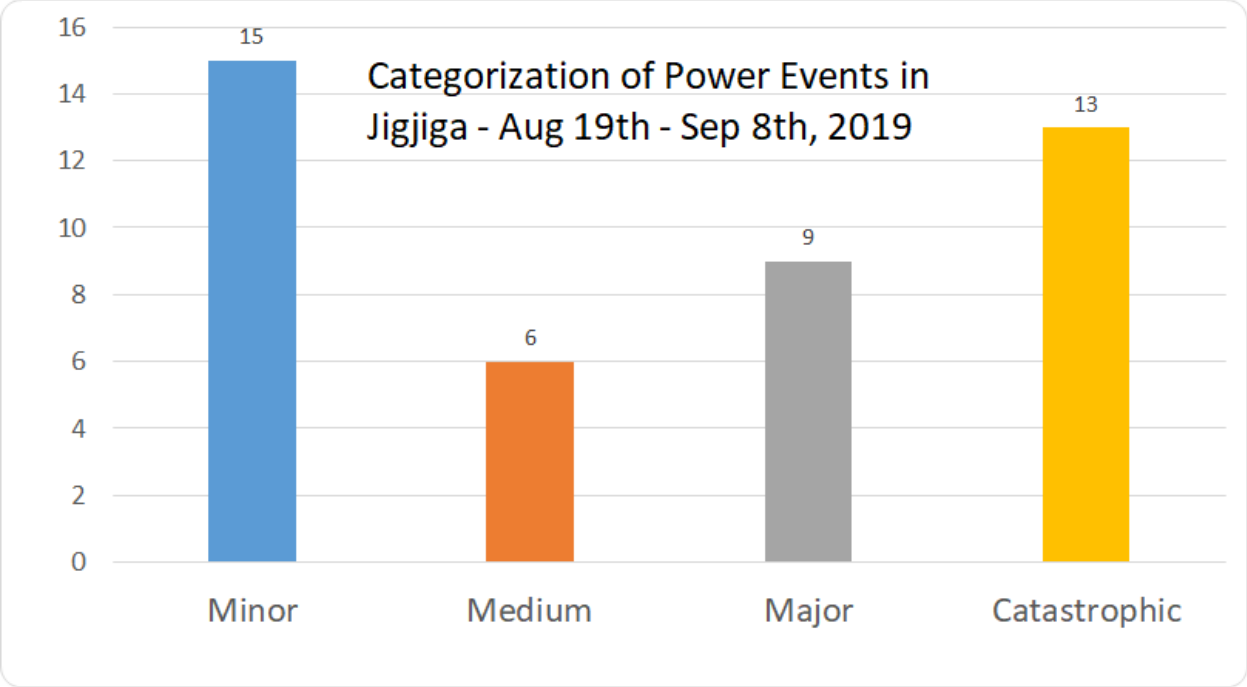
Another detrimental effect of these frequent PEs is that they cause a high number of electronic equipment to go bad. I've seen neighbors who lost anything from fridges to wi-fi routers.



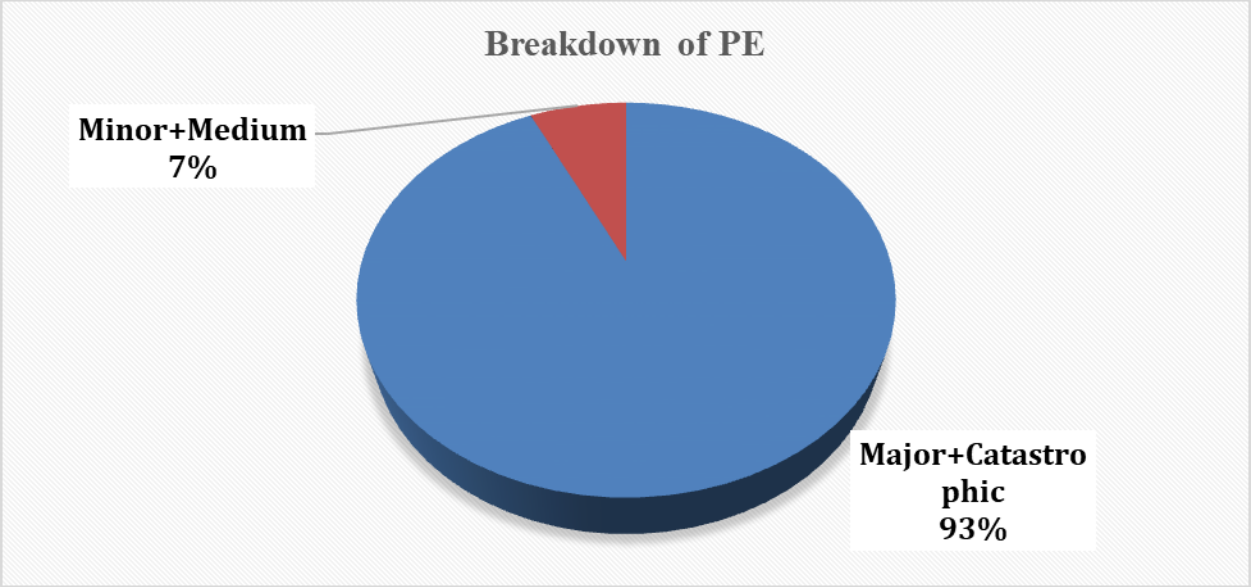
3. How bad are these PE?

Define bad?
I categorized the power events into 4, based on the duration, time of day, and what I thought would be their impact on safety, economic impact, and on the overall quality of life. Based on those factors, I divided them into the following:

a) Minor = Less than 1 hour
b) Medium = Between 1 and 2 hours
c) Major = Between 2 & 4 hours
d) Catastrophic = Between 4 and 24 hours



The catastrophic and medium categories are the most serious ones. They account for 93% of the PE, while at the same time constituting roughly 50% of all outages. What that means is you've a high number of power outages lasting very long time. It's a disastrous combination.



The indispensability of electricity to life is undeniable. Every hour that Jigjiga residents or for that matter the entire region is without power is an hour that:

- a welder can't work and is therefore denied a chance to earn a living wage.
- a parent can't adequately clean their child's feeding bottle, risking disease and a resultant family financial ruin.
- an ATM can't dispense cash resulting in what's essentially a wage freeze for many in a cash economy.
- a parent can't help his child with homework, resulting in the potential that our kids fall behind others.

We can go on and on, but the point is that the cumulative effect of all these is debilitating to the local economy.

In a report prepared by the United States Institute of Peace on the economic impact of power shortages and inaccessibility on Pakistan's economy concluded that this problem shaves 2.6% off of their annual GDP. It's true their economy is more reliant on energy than ours is, but then they don't suffer the same kind of power shortages or lacks that we do.

The SRS administration ought to accord this issue a top priority. It's fairly evident that this a serious drag on the local economy as well the quality of life of residents.

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