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CODEO GHANA
Coalition of Domestic Election Observers

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON GHANA'S 2024 LIMITED BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION EXERCISE

CONTACT

Mr. Albert Arhin

CODEO National Coordinator

Phone: +233 (0) 24 474 6791 / (0) 20 822 1068

Secretariat: +233 (0) 244 350 266/ 0277 744 777

Email: info@codeoghana.org

Website: www.codeoghana.org

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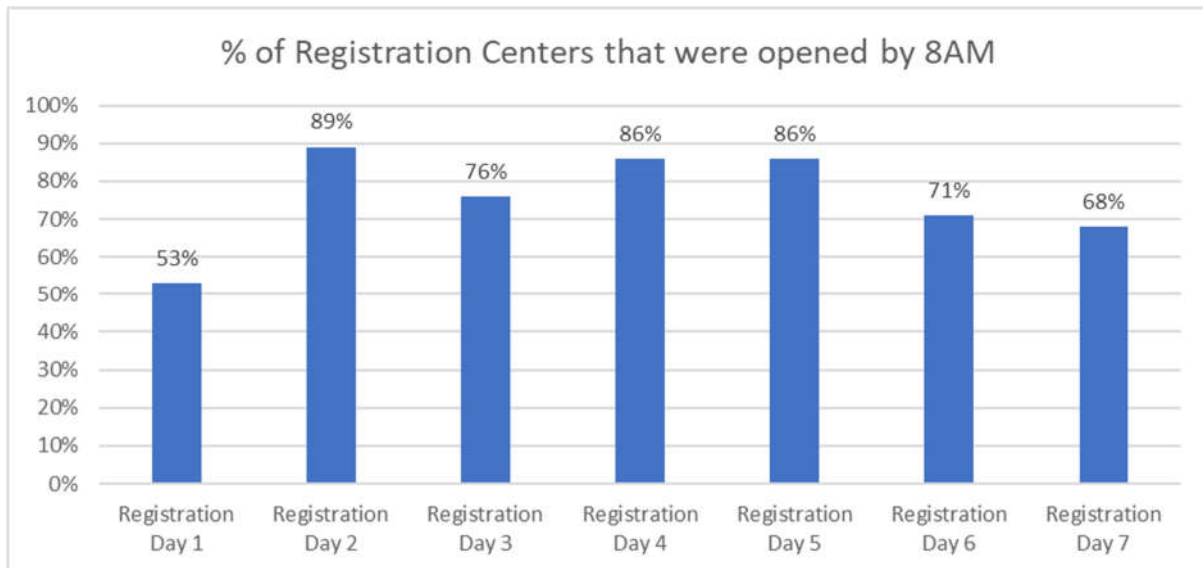
Introduction

On Monday, May 06, 2024, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), deployed a total of 195 trained, independent, and non-partisan observers in selected districts to observe the ongoing limited Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise by the Electoral Commission (EC) which commenced on May 07 and is scheduled to run till May 27, 2024. The observers comprise 25 Regional Coordinators, 84 stationary observers and 86 mobile observers.

This Preliminary Statement highlights CODEO's BVR observation findings relating to the conduct of the registration exercise for the first seven days, that is, from Tuesday, May 7 to Monday, May 13, 2024. The findings from the first five days include reports from EC district offices and hard-to-reach areas while the last two days cover reports from registration centers in hard-to-reach areas. This Preliminary Statement is based on a total of 710 reports CODEO received from 241 registration centers in 136 districts across the 16 regions of the country and it covers our observation of the "arrival" and "set-up", "registration" and "closing" stages of the Biometric Voter Registration exercise.

Summary of Observation Findings

Arrival and commencement of registration



- Majority of CODEO Observers (75%) met EC officials present at their assigned registration centers upon arrival. However, in 25% of observed registration centers, CODEO Observers arrived before the EC registration officials. It is worth noting that almost all (98%) of the observers who reported that the EC registration officials were not present at the time of their arrival arrived at the registration centers by 7:30 AM. By 7:15 AM, only (39%) of observed registration centers had opened. An additional 39% opened between 7:16 AM and 8:00 AM. Some 18% of the registration centers observed opened between 8:01 AM to 10:00 AM. However, 3% of the registration centers observed opened after 10:00 AM and a few (less than 1%) never opened as originally planned. The first day of the registration exercise recorded the highest incidents of late opening due to network challenges, delayed distribution of activation codes, and a few reported incidents of power outages in some of registration centers across the country. These challenges were acknowledged by the Electoral Commission of Ghana in their press statements issued in the first two days of the exercise.
- While the opening time for registration improved after the first day but still witnessed some fluctuations in the course of the week. For registration days six (6) and seven (7), where CODEO received reports exclusively from the hard-to-reach areas, the opening time for registration was relatively late. In a few of the registration centers that never opened, CODEO Observers reported that the EC had made changes in its movement plans for the registration in the hard-to-reach areas. Examples include some registration centers in Kwahu Afram Plains (Eastern region), Birim Central (Eastern region), Builsa North (Upper East), among others.
- According to CODEO's observation, all the registration centers observed had laptops with webcam and backdrops for photo taking, printers, fingerprint scanners, laminates and ink cartridges. However, it was reported that 25% of the registration centers observed had no indelible ink. They include: Methodist Primary School, Apewosika in Abura Asebu Kwamankese (Central region); Durbar Grounds Wenchi, Denkyembaour (Eastern); Behind the Old Sunyani West Municipal Assembly Block (Bono); the Premises of the Anloga District Assembly (Volta region), among others.

- The set-up of most registration centers observed (**90%**) ensured that persons with mobility challenges (i.e., persons with disabilities, the sick, and the elderly) could easily access them. However, 10% of the registration centers observed did not meet the EC's accessibility criteria which encourages the setting up of centers at low level and wheelchair accessible areas while avoiding sighting centers across gutters and verandas.
- About 2 in 10 (24%) of the EC's registration officers at registration centers observed were women while almost 8 in 10 (76%) were men .
- CODEO observers reported that 6% of registration teams at registration centers observed included persons with disabilities, while 94% did not.
- At the time of set-up, CODEO Observers reported seeing agents of the two main political parties present in almost all registration centers observed (NPP, **99.4%**; NDC, **99.7%**). In **86%** of centers observed, none of the agents of the other parties were present.
- CODEO observers reported seeing uniformed security personnel at **89%** of registration centers observed. Only **11%** of centers observed were reported to be without security personnel.

Voter Registration Process

- Biometric Registration Kits functioned well in about 80% of registration centers observed while in 20% of centers, the kits failed to function at some point in time in the course of registration. The malfunctioning of the BVR kits led to the suspension of the registration process in 16% of centers observed. In most of the cases where the registration kits malfunctioned, they were either fixed (68%) or replaced (13%) but at 18% of the centers observed that recorded malfunctioning of the BVR kits, the devices could not be fixed/replaced.
- A total of 33% of persons with disabilities, the elderly, etc. required assistance to register in the centers observed.
- During the registration process, CODEO observers noted that in 20% of registration centers observed, there was the presence of unauthorized individuals. These individuals, not officially sanctioned by the EC or affiliated with the registration process were observed within the vicinity of the registration centers.
- CODEO observers also reported that at 88% of registration centers observed, priority was extended to vulnerable groups including the elderly, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and persons with disabilities, allowing them to register ahead of others. However, in 12% of centers observed, no such priority was observed.
- Observations by CODEO indicate that at 45% of registration centers observed, some individuals stationed themselves around the registration centers looking out to guarantee registration for applicants.

- CODEO observers recorded no instances of registration materials running out during the registration process.

Closing

- During the first week of the registration exercise, 43% of the registration centers observed had people who were in the queue at 6:00PM when the registration exercise was closing for the day.
- By 7:00 PM, almost all of the registration centers observed (**99.7%**) had closed.

Reported Incidents

CODEO Observers reported a total of 173 cases of incidents during the opening, set-up and registration process throughout the country during the first week of the registration exercise. These incidents which were verified to be accurate by the CODEO Data Center include the late opening of registration centers, registration centers not opened, registration exercise suspended, non-functioning registration kits, chaos at some registration centers, among others.

Selected Cases of Critical Incidents

Some of the reported incidents are highlighted below:

Registration center never opened due to unavailability of registration materials: On Tuesday, May 07, 2024 at D/A Primary, Kobourkrom in Dormaa East district, a CODEO observer reported that two EC registration officers arrived at the registration center but without any biometric registration kits and materials. The officers explained to the CODEO observer and party agents present that the rest of the EC officials would bring the registration materials. Many applicants who came to the center waited for hours for registration to start but they had to leave after spending hours with no indication of when the exercise would start. At 5:00 PM, the registration officers wrote the names of 15 applicants who were present and told them to return the next day. Notwithstanding, the registration center was opened the next day.

Police personnel stationed at a registration center drove some applicants away because they appeared to be minors: On May 09, 2024, at Yunyoo/Nasuan, the Old Court in Yunyoo District, about eight applicants who appeared to be minors, were standing in a queue when the police personnel approached them, interrogated them about their age and documentation for registration. When the police were not satisfied with the responses, they asked the applicants to leave and return with the right documentation. Some people at the registration center came out to defend the applicants but the police demanded that they should come back with the right documentation.

Double registration: On May 07, 2024 at Market Square Wuruwuru in Sefwi Akontombra, Kramokrom primary school, an Applicant who was the last person to register for the day was detected to have already registered (Double Registration) by the fingerprint machine. Upon interrogation, she confirmed that she had initially registered in the northern region but had lost her voter's card. Consequently, she came to register again to obtain a new voter's card. She was confronted by a policeman on duty but not apprehended after appeals from some party agents.

Physical confrontations between political party members at registration centers: CODEO observers reported of several instances of physical confrontations between agents of

the NPP and NDC. At a registration center at Ledzokuku Municipal Assembly, there was a physical confrontation between NPP and NDC party agents over whether or not some nursing students who had arrived at the center were to be given priority to register. This caused the EC officials on site to call for police reinforcements causing the arrest of one gentleman.

Violence at registration centers: On Wednesday, May 08, 2024, at exactly 11:15 AM. at Presby Primary School in Benkasa B in the Berekum West district, a teacher brought in seven (7) students from St. Augustine Senior High School. While the students were in a queue to register, a white pickup arrived at the registration center with about four heavily built men who attacked the teacher and chased him to a nearby school. In the process, a female teacher who attempted to intervene got beaten and her mobile phone was smashed. About four police personnel who were at the registration center appealed to the ‘macho men’ to stop their action. The case was reported to the District Police office and the district commander visited the registration center but no arrest was made. This incident disrupted the registration for about an hour.

Intimidation of registration officials/interference in the registration process by party representatives. On Friday, May 10, 2024 at a registration center located at the First Floor of the Tema Highway building, Lebanon Ashaiman, opposite Lebanon International School and mosque, an NDC constituency chairman went to the registration table and used his hands to hit the table, disrupting the registration process. The NDC constituency chairman and some party followers protested that they did not understand why some registration centers elsewhere had three workstations whilst the center at Ashaiman had two workstations. They alleged that it was deliberate on the part of the EC to allocate two workstations instead of three, given that Ashaiman has a dense population. This incident halted the registration process for about an hour until the police were able to resolve the issue. There were a lot of people in a queue at the registration center.

Late opening of registration centers: CODEO observers reported several incidents of late opening of registration centers across the country. Majority of the reported incidents which happened on the first two days of the registration exercise were largely due to delayed distribution of activation codes for the BVR kits, network challenges, power outages and malfunctioning of registration kits. In some of the centers in Dormaa East, Nkwanta South, Assin Fosu, Berekum West, Kwahu Afram Plains, Birim Central, Kumbugu, Sefwi Akontombra registration started after 1.00 PM. Similarly, the inability of registration officers to access activation codes delayed the start of registration in a number of centers including D/A Primary School at Badule in Nkwanta North (Oti region), District Post Office at Jingi in Berekum West (Bono region), L/A Primary School, Nsugum at Nkoranza South Municipal (Bono East region), Primary School, Kadania in Kassena Nankana Primary School (Upper East region).

Change in EC’s movement plan: The EC made several changes to the movement plans for registration in the hard-to-reach areas in some districts. The changes occurred in districts such as : Kintampo North (Bono region); Kwahu Afram Plains (Eastern region); Krachi Nchumuru (Oti region); Kpone Katamanso (Greater Accra region), Akrofoam (Ashanti region), among others.

Conclusion

CODEO commends the positive steps taken by the EC to address delays and long queues at the centers they observed in the early days of the registration exercise. CODEO still receives

reports of late opening of registration centers in the hard-to-reach areas especially due to the long distance it takes registration officers to commute from one center to another. The changes in the movement plan for registration in hard-to-reach areas have gained broader consensus among political parties and some stakeholders at the local level. However, there is limited public education and information sharing regarding the changes in dates.

The police played a crucial role in maintaining order at registration centers, preventing violent confrontations, and reducing disruptions. However, their actions were limited to arresting election offenders who committed violence in specific places. Many rule violations were resolved directly at the registration centers without further police intervention.

Unnecessary interference and actions of accredited political party agents and in some cases unauthorized party supporters at registration centers across the country disrupted the registration process in centers across the country.

CODEO will continue to observe the remaining days of the exercise and keep informing the public about its findings from the 146 randomly selected districts across the country.

Recommendations

- CODEO would like to entreat the EC and other election stakeholders including the National Peace Council to deepen public education about the conflict resolution mechanisms in the registration process and other aspects of Ghana's elections to reduce the confrontations and disruptions at the registration centers. Again, CODEO encourages the EC to create more awareness on the change of dates in the movement plans for registration in the hard-to-reach areas to ensure that people prepare adequately to participate in the registration.
- CODEO implores the EC and all election stakeholders to ensure maximum transparency and public understanding about the work of the district registration review committees to promote public confidence in the process.
- CODEO urges all political parties, particularly the NPP and the NDC to ensure that party representatives are well informed of the rules and procedures governing the conduct of registration exercises in Ghana. CODEO calls on the NPP and NDC to reprimand their agents and party supporters whose actions adversely affect the processes at the registration centers.
- CODEO calls on the Inspector General of Police (IGP) and the Ghana Police Service to increase police deployment in known election hotspots and ensure more police visibility in all registration centers across the country. CODEO urges the Ghana Police Service to ensure the swift arrest of election offenders and, in collaboration with the Attorney General, prosecute all persons found to have breached the rules and procedures governing the voter registration exercise. Additionally, CODEO would like to remind the Police Service and the Attorney General that ensuring transparency in the prosecution of election offenders is an effective remedy for deterring people from engaging in unlawful actions.
- CODEO entreats all eligible voters, particularly first-time voters, to take advantage of the exercise to register to enable them to vote in the 2024 general elections. We encourage women and persons with disabilities to take advantage of the priority given

to them at the registration centers and come out to register. Your participation is crucial in shaping the democratic process and ensuring representation for all.

Signed:

Albert Kofi Arhin

CODEO National Coordinator

May 17, 2024

About CODEO

CODEO is an independent and non-partisan network of civil society groups, faith-based organizations and professional bodies which observe Ghanaian elections. It was established in 2000 under the auspices of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) to mobilize citizens of Ghana to participate in the electoral process actively and to complement the efforts of Ghana's Electoral Commission in ensuring transparent, free, fair and peaceful elections. The Coalition of 42-member organizations has grown to become the largest and most credible domestic election observer body in Ghana which mobilizes citizens and groups to participate in Ghana's electoral processes.