



Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) CONTACT

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CODEO FINAL REPORT ON OBSERVATION OF THE DECEMBER 27, 2018 REFERENDUM ON CREATION OF NEW REGIONS

Introduction

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) observed the referendum on the creation of six additional regions as conducted by the Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC) on Thursday, December 27, 2018¹. The EC conducted the referendum in parts of the then existing Brong-Ahafo, Northern, Volta and Western regions which were to be affected by the proposal (by government) to create six new regions. Voters in the affected regions were to decide whether or not the proposed new regions should be created. In all, about 2,260,724 eligible voters were expected to take part in the exercise at 4,798 polling stations in 47 districts. A 50% voter turn-out threshold was required for the referendum to carry through. In addition, 80% of the total valid votes cast in the referendum had to be favorable to the referendum question if the regions had to be created. At the end of the exercise, the EC declared that all the six proposed regions met the required thresholds, allowing the new regions to be created. CODEO, which had deployed observers for the exercise shared its preliminary findings on the referendum in a press release on Friday, December 28, 2018. In its preliminary findings, CODEO noted that the referendum took place in a generally-calm atmosphere and high voter turn-out figures at polling stations where counting and declaration of results had been observed. CODEO also drew attention to the high incidence of manual verification as observed at some polling stations. This report provides CODEO's consolidated final report on the conduct of the 2018 referendum.

Methodology for Observer Deployment

CODEO deployed 50 experienced election observers for the December 2018 referendum. Of this number, 47 (representing 94%) of them were able to observe the exercise in 46 out of the 47 districts within which the referendum took place (please refer to Appendix A for the list of districts where CODEO observed the referendum). To obtain a broader picture of the conduct of the referendum, CODEO observers were each assigned to a district. Only one district, Nkoranzah North in the Brong Ahafo Region had two observers assigned. All observers were, however, asked to observe mainly in the capital towns of the assigned districts due to limited resources. Nevertheless, observers were required to visit at least three polling stations within their assigned district capital in the course of the election-day. At the end of the referendum, observers were able to visit a total of 175 polling stations. At these polling stations, observers followed the various aspects of the polls including set-up and opening, voter verification and voting, and counting and declaration of referendum results. In addition, observers were to observe the conduct of poll officials in respect of poll management.

¹ Prior to this observation, CODEO had observed some key pre-referendum activities carried out by the EC, which included the September 2018 Limited Voter Registration exercise and the Exhibition of the Voter Register all of which took place in October 2018 in areas of the country affected by the referendum. CODEO's findings from observation of these exercises were shared with the general public through the media.

Main Findings

- ***Opening, set-up and voting processes***

Majority of polling stations observed opened on time. Many polling stations were opened by 7:15AM. No CODEO observer reported being denied access to a polling station. Most observed polling stations were found to be accessible to the physically-challenged and the elderly and were also set-up in a manner which promoted the secrecy of ballots. Election officials generally followed electoral procedures by showing ballot boxes to be empty, sealed and placed in the glare of the public before commencing voting. Ballot papers were also stamped with validating stamps before being issued. Voters were generally marked with indelible ink before proceeding to voting. Observers reported that most polling stations had the requisite voting materials, such as ballot boxes, voter registers, and voting screens among others. Persons who showed up with their voter ID cards were allowed to vote at nearly all polling stations observed. Observers indicated that at very few polling stations, a number of persons who did not have voter ID cards nor their names in the voter register were allowed to vote. The elderly, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and people with disabilities were given priority to vote ahead of others at polling stations observed. Observers indicated that they did not witness any attempt to harass or intimidate voters or poll officials at most polling stations observed. Most polling stations had stationed uniformed security personnel. There were other non-CODEO observers at some polling stations visited. CODEO observers indicated seeing some unauthorized person(s) at some polling stations observed.

- ***Performance of Biometric Verification Devices***

Nearly all polling stations observed had back-up biometric verification devices. Observers did not report of any major challenges with the functioning of Biometric Verification Devices (BVDs). They indicated that at most polling stations observed, the BVDs did not fail to function properly at the time they visited polling stations. However, observers indicated that at some polling stations, a few or some voters had their fingerprints rejected by the BVDs during biometric verification. Voters who had challenges with biometric verification were taken through manual verification to be able to vote. At many polling stations where counting was observed, CODEO found a noticeably high number of manual verification of voters, and in some cases more than 50% of the total number of voters who voted. For example, of the 48 polling stations where CODEO observers observed counting and obtained officially declared results, 35% of them recorded between 20% to 58% incidence of manual verifications. Another 22% of those polling stations recorded between 5% to 19% of manually-verified voters.

- ***Closing and Counting***

CODEO observers followed counting and results declaration at various polling stations and were able to obtain officially declared figures at the end of voting. CODEO found at that voter turn-out was very high at most polling stations observed. For example, of the 48 polling stations where observers obtained officially declared figures, 33% of them recorded a voter turn-out of 95% and above. Another 29% of those polling stations recorded a voter turn-out of between 80% and 94%. Thus, overall, 62% of observed polling stations recorded a turn-out of 80%-100%. These high turn-out figures also reflected the regional level official turn-out figures declared by the Electoral Commission at the end of the referendum, with 5 of the 6 proposed regions recording 80% and above turn-out figures.

Commendations and Recommendations:

- CODEO commends all stakeholders and voters for the relative calm and peaceful atmosphere within which the referendum took place despite certain developments in parts of the affected regions in the pre-referendum environment.

- CODEO, however, reiterates its call made in the preliminary statement (Appendix B) to the EC to investigate and make public its findings on the high incidence of manual verification recorded during the referendum.
- While CODEO recognizes that manual verification is allowed in our electoral processes, especially in aiding voters who through no fault of theirs could be disenfranchised from voting in the event of failed biometric verification, CODEO wishes to emphasize, that manual verification was introduced in the electoral process to take care of particular circumstances or instances where there are real challenges with biometric verification of a voter. CODEO is concerned that if the full circumstances of the use of manual verification during the referendum is not established, including the extent of the practice and contributing factors, and adequate measures taken to address them, the practice could be liable to abuse in future elections and the consequences, particularly for the highly partisan presidential and parliamentary elections could be dire for the country.

Signed:



Albert Arhin,
National Coordinator, CODEO

Dated: June 10, 2019

**APPENDIX A: LIST OF DISTRICTS WHERE CODEO DEPLOYED OBSERVERS FOR
OBSERVATION OF THE REFERENDUM**

S/N	NAME OF REGION	NAME OF DISTRICT
1.	Brong Ahafo	Atebubu Amanten
2.	Brong Ahafo	Kintampo North
3.	Brong Ahafo	Kintampo South
4.	Brong Ahafo	Nkoranza North
5.	Brong Ahafo	Nkoranza South
6.	Brong Ahafo	Pru East
7.	Brong Ahafo	Pru West
8.	Brong Ahafo	Sene East
9.	Brong Ahafo	Sene West
10.	Brong Ahafo	Tachiman North
11.	Brong Ahafo	Tachiman South
12.	Brong Ahafo	Asunafo South
13.	Brong Ahafo	Asutifi North
14.	Brong Ahafo	Asutifi South
15.	Brong Ahafo	Tano North
16.	Brong Ahafo	Tano South
17.	Brong Ahafo	Asunafo North
18.	Northern	Bole/Bamboi
19.	Northern	Bunkprugu-Nakpanduri
20.	Northern	Chereponi
21.	Northern	Sawla/Tuna/Kalba
22.	Northern	West Gonja
23.	Northern	North Gonja
24.	Northern	Central Gonja
25.	Northern	East Gonja
26.	Northern	East Mamprusi Municipal
27.	Northern	West Mamprusi Municipal
28.	Northern	Mamprugu-Moagduri
29.	Northern	Yunyoo-Nasuan
30.	Volta	Biakoye
31.	Volta	Krachi West
32.	Volta	Jasikan
33.	Volta	Kadjebi
34.	Volta	Krachi East
35.	Volta	Krachi Nchumuru
36.	Volta	Nkwanta North
37.	Volta	Nkwanta South
38.	Western	Bia East
39.	Western	Bia West
40.	Western	Bibiani/Ahwiaso/Bekwai
41.	Western	Bodi

42.	Western	Juaboso
43.	Western	Sefwi Wiawso
44.	Western	Sefwi Akontombra
45.	Western	Suaman
46.	Western	Aowin

APPENDIX B: CODEO PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE DECEMBER 2019 REFERENDUM



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CODEO FINDINGS ON OBSERVATION OF THE DECEMBER 27, 2018 REFERENDUM

On Thursday, December 27, 2018, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) deployed fifty (50) observers to various districts and constituencies across the country within which the referendum on the proposed creation of additional regions was taking place. CODEO observers visited an average of four (4) polling stations within their assigned districts in the course of the referendum exercise, spending between several minutes and a couple of hours at each polling station visited. Overall, the referendum took place in a calm and peaceful atmosphere. However, a number of electoral anomalies recorded during CODEO's observation raise serious questions about the integrity and credibility of the referendum.

Below are key findings from CODEO's observation.

Summary of Findings

- The atmosphere of voting was generally calm across all polling stations observed. Many polling stations had stationed uniformed security personnel, though a few did not have.
- Voting opened on time for many polling stations, and slightly later at other polling stations (particularly in parts of the Western and Brong Ahafo regions) due to the late arrival of voting materials). For polling stations where there were delays, voting started between 7:15AM and 9:00AM.
- CODEO observers came across some accredited observers and agents representing various interests such as NO campaigners and YES campaigners at some polling stations visited.
- Most polling stations observed attained more than the required turn-out threshold of 50% of total valid votes cast. However, turn-out figures at some polling stations were unusually high – in some cases as high as 99% – raising serious questions about the integrity of the process.

Below are some of the polling stations where such high turn-out figures were observed at the end of voting:

Name of Polling Station	District	Region	Turn-out Rate
SDA Primary School, Jasikan	Jasikan	Volta	99.7%
CMB Shed 'A', Asawinso	Sefwi Wiawso	Western	99.3%
Adankpa Palace, Adankpa	Krachi West	Volta	99.3%
PPAG Office	Techiman South	Brong Ahafo	98%
Naseiya Prim Sch, Salaga	East Gonja	Northern	97%

CODEO also noted similar patterns of extremely high voter turn-out figures from the official constituency collated results, including up to 98.5% voter turn-out at some constituencies. These include Salaga South, (96%), Nkoranza North (97%), Jasikan (97%), and Krachi West (98.5%). A lot more constituencies had turn-out figures of more than 90%.

- For most of the day, CODEO observers generally reported the smooth functioning of Biometric Verification Devices (BVD), with very few instances of reported malfunctioning of the BVDs.
- However, CODEO observers documented wide disparities and unusually high numbers of manual verification across various polling stations. At some polling stations where counting of ballots and results declaration was observed by CODEO, the number of voters who were manually verified were found to be even more than the number of voters who went through biometric verification. Per electoral regulations by the Electoral Commission (EC), manual verification is typically a back-up plan for instances where there are challenges with biometric verification of voters. Given that observers generally reported smooth performance of the BVDs and the fact that all polling stations were equipped with back-up BVD machines, it is still not clear to CODEO why unusually high numbers of voters were manually verified instead of biometric verification.

Below are some examples of polling stations where such high numbers of manual verification were observed:

Name of Polling Station	Region	Total Valid Votes Cast	Total of Manual Verification	Percentage of Voters Manually-Verified
R/C JHS, Krachi East	Volta	710	415	58%
PPAG Office, Techiman, Techiman South	Brong Ahafo	439	241	55%
SDA Prim School, Jasikan	Volta	311	163	52%
CMB Shed 'A', Asawinso, Sefwi Wiawso	Western	703	364	52%
Naseiya Primary, Salaga, East Gonja	Northern	433	208	48%
SDA Primary, Nkonya Nchumuru, Biakoye	Volta	437	202	46%
Ampoma L/A JHS, Kintampo South	Brong Ahafo	277	153	36%
Rest House, Nalerigu, East Mamprusi	Northern	682	197	29%

At other polling stations though, the percentage of voters manually-verified ranged from as low as 0% to 5%.

Other Matters

- CODEO has taken notice of a number of videos circulating within social media showing possible infractions of the electoral rules of the country. Although CODEO is unable to verify the location of the alleged infractions or authenticity of the videos, CODEO strongly urges the EC take an interest in these videos and conduct its own investigations to protect the integrity of the process.

- CODEO has also taken note of the concerns raised by the Ghana Journalist Association (GJA) on restrictions placed by the security forces during the referendum exercise. This was reportedly done to protect journalist from threats of harm from indigenes. It is imperative that the GJA, the security agencies and all elections stakeholders revisit these issues following the conclusion of the exercise to ensure that constitutional rights are protected in the future to promote more transparent, peaceful and credible elections.

Recommendations:

- CODEO is calling on the Electoral Commission (EC) to urgently look into the extremely high incidence of manual verification at the various polling stations where such developments took place and the extremely high voter turn-out figures in some polling stations. This investigation must be done swiftly and the outcomes communicated to the public to promote electoral transparency and integrity.
- CODEO is also calling on the EC and the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to ensure that any person—including electoral officials – found to have violated the electoral laws faces the full rigors of the law. Until individuals are held criminally accountable for their actions, it will be difficult to deter the rampant violations of electoral laws which risk undermining Ghana’s hard worn democratic stability.

Signed:



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Dated: Friday, December 28, 2018