

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR
ELECTION MONITORING
NACEM

Report of the monitoring of the
voters' registration in Liberia
April-June 05

REPORT OUTLINE

National Committee for Elections Monitoring (NACEM) Report

I. Background to the Report

- NACEM -
- Coalition for Democracy in Liberia (CODEL)
- West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP)
- Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL)
- Success, failures, and early warning indications

II. Method of Monitoring the Voter Registration Process

- Voter registration monitors in clusters of counties
- Monitors talk to voter registrars, observers, NEC workers, other monitors
- Monitors fill-in check lists
 - Police/security present at centers
- Observation of procedures by monitors

III. Criteria for Monitoring Voter Registration Process

- Voter registration monitoring in fifteen counties
- Incidence - successful registration of number of voters compare to potential voters turn away. Other problems – violence (Q.22) Notice relevance to (Q.14), in addition to (Q. 12), and (Q. 21).
- Availability or shortage of voter registration material/supplies
- Presence and conduct at centers of NEC workers, political parties' representatives, and other observers – i.e. security agents, journalists
- Compliance with the registration procedures, rules and regulations (Qs. 15 – 17)

IV. Data Summary and Interpretation

- Data in table and chart
- Data analysis
- Valuation meeting report
- Causes and effects

V. Conclusion and Recommendation

I. Background

The October 2005 presidential and general elections are a critical component of the efforts intended to consolidate the peace process in Liberia. The elections are also part of a process that will bring to an end the long civil and political conflicts, which have negatively affected the population and the entire country. Unlike the 1997 elections, in which many Liberians participated with the view to ending the civil and political crisis, the upcoming elections are being viewed by many Liberians as an opportunity to recreate the values and principles of democracy and democratic process in national governance.

Liberians have witnessed and/or participated in elections over the years, but never before in the history of Liberia has there been an organized, well coordinated electoral monitoring mechanism as being currently conducted by domestic civic groups. As a direct result of the non-existence of such elections monitoring mechanisms, elections conducted in the past have been marked by fraud and other vices, a situation that has contributed and continues to contribute to the 14 years of violence in Liberia. It is in this connection that three civil society groups namely, the West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP-Liberia), the Inter-religious Council of Liberia (IRCL), and the Coalition for Democracy in Liberia (CODEL) decided to pool resources under the banner of the National Committee on Elections Monitoring (NACEM) to monitor the October 2005 electoral process including pre-election activities such as registration of voters and electoral campaigns.

The highest decision making body in NACEM is a nine-member coordinating committee which comprises three representatives from each of the three member organizations. Its executive is made up of a Chairman from the Inter-Religious Council, a Vice Chairman from CODEL and a Secretary from WANEP along with a Press as well as Publications sub-committees. The responsibility of the NACEM Executive includes monitoring and supervising the activities of each partner, acting as sole spokesperson for the groups, liaising with other stakeholders in the electoral process and approving statements and reports for publication.

For monitoring purposes, NACEM has divided the country into three zones with each member organization responsible for monitoring one zone. All member organizations jointly monitor in Montserrado County. The three zones are Central, Northwest and the South East. CODEL is in charge of the South-Central zone comprising Bong, Grand Bassa, Margibi, Nimba and River Cess counties (in addition CODEL is responsible for Careysburg and parts of Greater Monrovia in Montserrado County). IRCL is allotted the southeast zone of five counties-Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee and

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Sinoe - (in addition St Paul River district and parts of Greater Monrovia in Montserrado County). The Northwest zone of Bomi, Gbarpolu, Grand Cape Mount and Lofa counties comes under the supervision of WANEP which also has responsibility for Todee district and parts of Greater Monrovia in the Montserrado County

Between April – May 2005, the National Elections Commission conducted voters' registration in preparation for the forthcoming general and presidential elections of Liberia slated for October 2005. NACEM had 150 monitors at the voter registration centers to monitor the process

The monitors reported the results to their various organizations to prepare sector reports. This report is an overall NACEM account of findings by its monitors during the voter registration exercise.

II. Method of Monitoring the Voter Registration Process

Each member organization has a Project Officer who is responsible for the overall management of the monitoring effort in the zone assigned to that organization. Under the project officers are county coordinators. Each county has one coordinator except in Montserrado County where the three project officers act also as county coordinators for their organizations. Below the county coordinators are district monitors. Most districts have one or two district monitors depending on the district's size and population. Project officers, county coordinators and district monitors all monitor under the NACEM banner, but they report first and foremost to their respective member organizations. A final report is then produced and approved for publication at the NACEM level.

County Coordinators and District Monitors played complementary roles. The district monitor's main responsibility was to monitor the voter registration process at the registration centers, complete a separate checklist for each registration center visited and periodically submit completed checklists to the county coordinator for onward delivery to project officers in Monrovia. Thus, the role of the county coordinator was to collect completed checklists from the district monitors, distribute checklists and deliver them to NACEM member organizations in Monrovia. The county coordinator also gave feedback periodically to member organizations on the performance of the district monitors.

III. Criteria for Monitoring the Voter Registration Process

Each time they visited the voter registration centers, the NACEM's monitors carried their checklists. The questions on the checklist sought to assess the registration process with particular attention on the conduct of personnel at the center, the adequacy of materials, the integrity of the procedures as well as the occurrence of incidents of violence or conflict at the registration centers visited. When they arrived at the voter registration centers, the monitors inquired from the National Elections Commission (NEC) registration staff about the number of persons registered as voters and the number of persons denied registration for reasons of ineligibility. They also inquired about the incidence of violence or disruption of voter registration at the centers. Further, monitors collected information on whether or not materials had run out or whether the registration centers had been forced to close or suspend registration for one reason or another.

In addition, each monitor spent enough time at a center to directly observe the application of the registration procedures by the NEC staff. Some of the questions the monitors were finding answers to were: Were the registrants asked the right questions to establish their eligibility, were their photographs taken for the voter ID card, were their fingers marked after the registration and were they finally issued valid voter ID cards before leaving the center? Other questions that related to security and political party observation of the process were asked.

Based on the responses gathered from the NEC registration officers and from direct observation the NACEM's monitors then filled out the checklists with the appropriate "yes", or "no" responses. The checklists were later processed and data generated in tables and charts.

IV. **Data Summary and Interpretation of Monitoring Data**

NACEM monitors covered a total of 1,202 voter registration centers. That number of centers represented 79 percent of the NEC total. As regards frequency of visits each monitor visited several centers at least three times during the period. The table below provides indices to some of the critical elements of the registration process:

TABLE: Voter Registration Monitoring Results

| <i>Category</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>As % of Total of NACEM</i> | <i>As % of Total Official Figure of NEC</i> |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Centers visited | 1,202 | 100 | 79.5 |
| Persons registered | 395,378 | 100 | 29.2 |
| Persons sent back | 2,368 | 1 | 0.2 |
| <i>Category</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>As % of Total of NACEM</i> | <i>As % of Total Official Figure of NEC</i> |
| Photograph taken | 3,086 | 88.7 | NA |
| ID cards not issued | 145 | 4.2 | NA |
| Finger not inked | 0 | 0 | NA |

Did All registrants go through Successful Registration?

From the centers they covered, the monitors collected a representative sample of 395,378 persons who successfully went through voter registration. This figure represents about 29 per cent of the total number of voters who NEC pronounced registered for the October 2005 general and presidential elections. However, for reasons of ineligibility, 2,368 persons were also reported to have been turned away by the NEC registrars from the centers covered by NACEM. This figure is a mere 1% of those successfully registered but it is worth noting some of the reasons provided by our monitors for the rejections. A number of persons were refused registration for reason of not providing sufficient proof of their citizenship when challenged. In this respect a number of persons suspected to be non-Liberian were reportedly turned away. Under-aged children or minors were also rejected by the officials at the centers. Other persons turned away were those caught attempting to do multiple registrations by fraudulently removing the indelible ink mark on their fingers.

Was photograph taken of every person who successfully registered to vote?

From the 3,480 visits made to the registration centers the monitors reported that NEC registration officials took photograph of all persons they registered during 3,086 visits, representing 88.7 of the instances. The few cases where photograph was not promptly taken of registrants were noted, for example, in Gbarpolu, Lofa and Montserrado counties. This lapse was blamed largely on temporary camera

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breakdowns and on incompetent camera operators. In such cases registrants had to pay a second visit to the centers for the photographs to be taken.

Were all registered voters issued with Voter ID cards before leaving the centers?

There were people who registered as voters but were not issued voter identification cards but these cases were discovered only at 4.2% of the centers visited. There were also instances where people were registered, photographed, but their fingers were not inked. But the percentage of instances where registrants' fingers were not inked is however negligible.

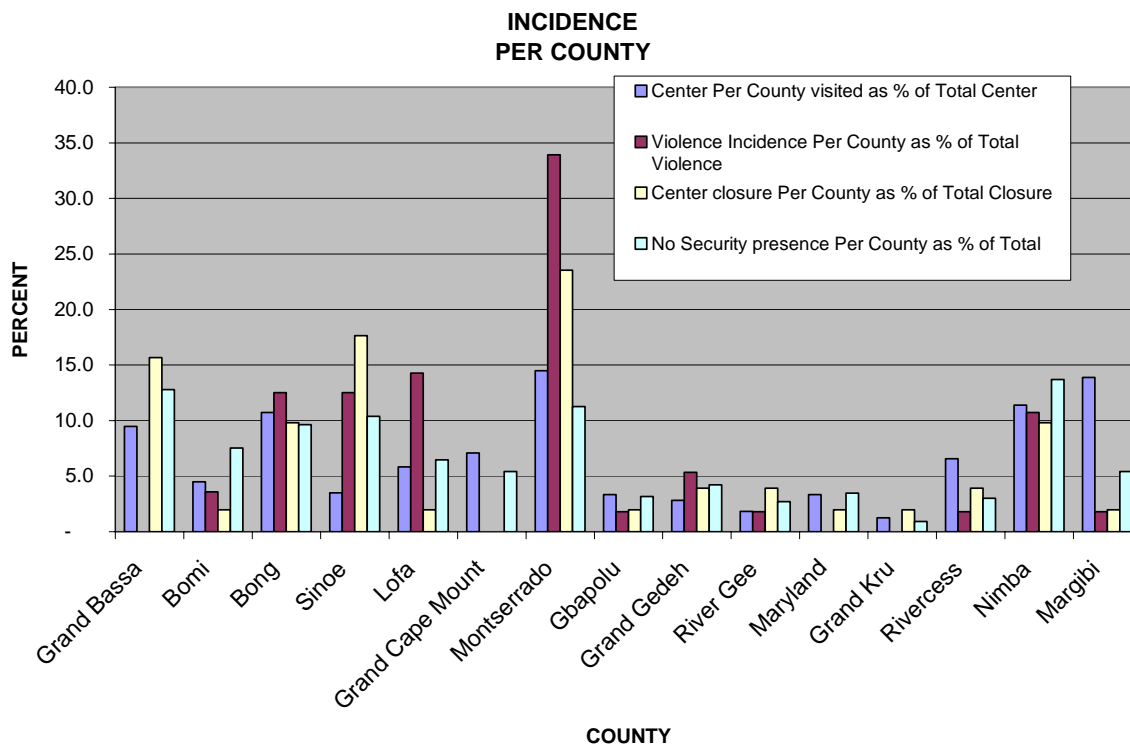
Incidence of violence and disruption

Frequencies of incidents at the voter registration centers are given in the table below and also stacked in a column chart. These are the incidents of violence or no violence, closure of centers or no closure of centers, and security presence or no security presence at the voter registration centers.

TABLE: FREQUENCY OF OCURRENCE OF INCIDENCE AT CENTER PER COUNTY

| County | Center Per County Visited by Monitor | Center Per County visited as % of Total Center | Violence Incidence at Center Per County | Violence Incidence Per County as % of Total Violence | Incidence of Center closure Per County | Center closure Per County as % of Total Closure | No Security Presence at Center Per County | No Security presence Per County as % of Total |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|--|--|--|
| <i>Grand Bassa</i> | 114 | 9.5 | 0 | - | 8 | 15.7 | 85 | 12.8 |
| <i>Bomi</i> | 54 | 4.5 | 2 | 3.6 | 1 | 2.0 | 50 | 7.5 |
| <i>Bong</i> | 129 | 10.7 | 7 | 12.5 | 5 | 9.8 | 64 | 9.6 |
| <i>Sinoe</i> | 42 | 3.5 | 7 | 12.5 | 9 | 17.6 | 69 | 10.4 |
| <i>Lofa</i> | 70 | 5.8 | 8 | 14.3 | 1 | 2.0 | 43 | 6.5 |
| <i>Grand Cape Mount</i> | 85 | 7.1 | 0 | - | 0 | - | 36 | 5.4 |
| <i>Montserrat</i> | 174 | 14.5 | 19 | 33.9 | 12 | 23.5 | 75 | 11.3 |
| <i>Gbapolu</i> | 40 | 3.3 | 1 | 1.8 | 1 | 2.0 | 21 | 3.2 |
| <i>Grand Gedeh</i> | 34 | 2.8 | 3 | 5.4 | 2 | 3.9 | 28 | 4.2 |
| <i>River Gee</i> | 22 | 1.8 | 1 | 1.8 | 2 | 3.9 | 18 | 2.7 |
| <i>Maryland</i> | 40 | 3.3 | 0 | - | 1 | 2.0 | 23 | 3.5 |
| <i>Grand Kru</i> | 15 | 1.2 | 0 | - | 1 | 2.0 | 6 | 0.9 |
| <i>Rivercess</i> | 79 | 6.6 | 1 | 1.8 | 2 | 3.9 | 20 | 3.0 |
| <i>Nimba</i> | 137 | 11.4 | 6 | 10.7 | 5 | 9.8 | 91 | 13.7 |
| <i>Margibi</i> | 167 | 13.9 | 1 | 1.8 | 1 | 2.0 | 36 | 5.4 |
| Overall Results | 1,202 | 100 | 56 | 100.0 | 51 | 100.0 | 665 | 100.0 |

The stacked column chart gives a picture of incidents occurring at the registration centers and distribution of occurrence among the counties.



Both the table and column chart indicate that the frequency of incidence occurrence was highest in Montserrado County. Bong, Lofa, Nimba and Sinoe counties came next to Montserrado County with high frequencies of occurrence of violence or disruption at the centers although these counties also enjoyed considerable security presence. In contrast Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Maryland, and Grand Kru had no violence incidence yet they were least covered by regular security presence. Most of the violent incidents generally led to temporary closure of registration centers. According to the monitors the incidents happened in some cases, as a result of ex-combatants holding up registration to demonstrate against government demanding monies promised to them, as it was the case in Bong and Nimba counties. Other instances occurred as a result of controversies surrounding Mandingoes eligibility, as in Lofa and Montserrado. To a small extent ritualistic killings in River Gee, gold rush in Sinoe, illegal political campaigns by political aspirants in Lofa, Maryland and Grand Gedeh, youth demonstration against NEC recruitment in Grand Gedeh and shortage of electoral materials also caused disruption and delay in the registration of voters.

Other Observations

Civic/Voter Education: On civic and voter education every monitor decried the lack of or insufficient public awareness about the election process. As a result public response to the registration exercise was lukewarm initially. In extreme cases some un-informed

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communities stayed away from the centers because they considered the indelible ink marks on the finger of registered voters to be a demonic practice.

Accessibility to Registration Centers: In several communities registration centers were too sparsely distributed. Centers were located far away from settlements so that many registrants had to cover long distances often on foot to register. Instances were reported where NACEM monitors spent hours and days traveling from one center to the next on foot or by canoes.

Mobile Registration Centers: Though created to solve the problem of long distances between registration centers and certain settlements, the mobile centers caused some distortion by the absence of adequate information on movement of the registration teams. Thus several people were compelled to register in communities different from their own because the mobile stations had moved when they had gone to register.

VI. **Conclusion and Recommendations**

As the first major test of its preparedness to conduct free and fair Presidential and Legislative elections in October the National Elections Commission has performed credibly well with the voter registration exercise. The Commission remained on course in the face severe transportation and communication challenges. Many of the NEC registration officials endured the same physical and psychological discomfort as the registrants.

NACEM's mission was to participate in voter registration exercise as knowledgeable onlookers whose presence at the centers could deter fraud and enhance public confidence in the process. It is also important for NACEM to disclose difficulties observed in the field that prevented the full realization of the objective of the exercise. NACEM therefore finds it appropriate to make the following recommendations: in the hope that solution would be found to problems that have challenged the voter registration so that the subsequent activities in the electoral process would be more successful:

- (a) The National Elections Commission, the Electoral Division of UNMIL, other international NGOs and local civil society organization should make a more concerted effort to mount early civic/voter education campaigns throughout the country. As the different stages of the electoral process approach the content of

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the message should be made immediately relevant to the particular upcoming event.

- (b) The question of eligibility to vote must be resolved once and for all. Ethnic disagreements over Liberian citizenship must not be allowed to slow down the democratic process. The NEC, religious leaders, the international community and indeed or well-meaning Liberians should contribute to eradicating this problem.
- (c) Training for the field staff of the NEC should be improved. There should be a reasonable range of circumstances within which discretion could be exercised on the field. Some of the conflicts that occurred at the registration centers were for example a result of the excessive arbitrariness of the NEC registrars in applying the rules of eligibility to register or to refuse registration.
- (d) Given the competition between political parties and candidates security must be of paramount consideration. The campaign period in particular could be difficult to manage unless effective security strategies are put in place to contain disorder and violence.