

Helpdesk Research Report

Voluntary voter registration

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Question

Provide examples of voluntary registration during elections. Where have these been undertaken, how does it work and the effectiveness of such registrations?

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1. Overview

Voter registration is the process of verifying the identity of potential voters, and entering their names and other substantiating information on a voters' list. The role of voter registration is especially important when it comes to emerging democracies.

Different systems use differing registration methods and assign varying responsibilities to electoral administrators and citizens. Sometimes registration is primarily the responsibility of citizens, who must initiate the process. In practice, the responsibility is often shared.

Voluntary registration is based on the principle that voting is a right of citizenship. Some voters will choose not to register, thereby depriving themselves of the right to vote. Voter registration is complex and often the most expensive activity associated with elections. Voter registration is not just the technical implementation of an activity; it is a holistic political, administrative and practical process.

Successful voluntary voter registration schemes tend to be:

- Responsive to local conditions including the political, economic and social context of the country hosting the election

- Realistic and affordable given the financial and administrative environment in which it must be developed and sustained
- Accompanied by a voter education drive that fosters necessary awareness by emphasising the importance of registration, explaining responsibilities, and presenting information on how to complete the process
- Sufficient investment is required in the training of staff involved in the registration process to ensure the performance of the voter registration system and quality assurance mechanisms
- Voter registration exercises will often rely on support and management by international staff owing to the short timelines, limited local information technology (IT) skilled staff and the complex computerisation involved

The literature considered in this review was largely gender-blind.

2. Voter registration

The right of citizens to participate in the affairs of their government is considered to be one of the cornerstones of democracy. Voting in free, fair, and regular elections is a fundamental form of participation (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002).

For citizens to exercise their democratic right to vote, relevant authorities need to establish a comprehensive and inclusive voters' list/register. This list/register requires careful maintenance to ensure that eligible citizens are registered to vote in an election.

Voter registration is the process of verifying the identity of potential voters, and entering their names and other substantiating information on a voters' list. For registration to be fair, comprehensive, and inclusive, potential voters must be aware of the registration process and have reasonable opportunities and relatively easy access to complete it. Voter education campaigns foster awareness by emphasising the importance of registration, explaining citizens' responsibilities, and presenting information on how to complete the process (Evrensel, 2010).

Voter registration is complex and often the most expensive activity associated with elections. It is not just the technical implementation of an activity; it is a holistic political, administrative and practical process. Various factors affect these costs, including:

- The type of system used to register voters
- The administrative capacity of the election management authority
- The country's social, economic and demographic characteristics

The role of voter registration is especially important when it comes to emerging democracies. The quality of the process and the product – that is, the voters' roll – can determine the outcome of an election and consequently the stability of the democratic institutions in a country (Evrensel, 2010: 1).

A voters' list separates two important functions of the election management authority – verifying voter eligibility and controlling the legitimacy of the voting process. The list may also be used for voter education. While elections may proceed without a voters' list, it offers advantages that justify its use (ACE, 2012):

- Confirming that voters have met eligibility requirements, the voters' list confers legitimacy on the electoral process. The legitimacy of the process will be called into question if there are problems with the registration of voters, and particularly with the integrity of the voters' list
- Voters' lists support democratic principles by fostering political equality for all citizens and actively promoting the inclusion of eligible voters in the election process

Different systems may use differing registration methods and assign varying responsibilities to electoral administrators and citizens. Sometimes registration is primarily the responsibility of citizens, who must initiate the process by contacting the election administration (US, Guatemala, Bahamas, Belize, Burundi, and Mexico). In other cases, officials are responsible for maintaining continuous voters' lists or developing new lists (Japan, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Germany, Peru, and Sweden).

In practice, the responsibility is often shared. For example, in a country with a continuous voters' list, the election management authority may make registration accessible by establishing voter registration centres, including mobile units and informing voters about the voter registration drive and the establishment of registration centres. It is still up to citizens, however, to visit the registration sites and formally initiate registration.

Voluntary voter registration

Voluntary registration is based on the principle that voting is a right of citizenship, and that voters may choose to register or not. If all types of citizens' register in equal proportions, whether men or women, young or old, urban or rural, rich or poor, highly or poorly educated, and so on, the conclusion might be that voluntary registration has no impact on the outcome of an election or on the selection of representatives and governments. Disparities, however, may be seen in who chooses to register and who does not. For example (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002):

- Men are more likely to participate than women
- Young people are less likely to register and vote than middle-aged and older citizens
- Urban voters typically register in higher proportions than residents of rural areas
- Rich are more likely to register than poor
- The highly educated are more likely to register than the poorly educated

If those who participate at higher rates have values, attitudes and political preferences differing from those less likely to participate, the result is that participation and voluntary voter registration will have an impact on the electoral outcome by favouring certain groups. If the population that registers to vote is unrepresentative of the population as a whole, the election outcome may lack legitimacy.

If citizens have no formal or legal obligation to register, the voter registration system is voluntary. In these circumstances, election management authorities may choose from two approaches (ACE, 2012):

- Establish a level playing field by ensuring that the registration process is simple, clear and transparent, with an equal opportunity for all citizens to register. Authorities do not take special measures to encourage registration by individuals or groups of people who are eligible but less likely to register and vote. This is essentially a passive approach to registration.
- Facilitate registration and voting for groups who are historically under-represented in the electoral process, through campaigns targeting those groups. This is a far more active approach.

The election management authority must be non-partisan and independent of both government and opposition parties. If historically under-represented groups tend to support one party over the others, efforts encouraging them to register and vote may favour that party.

Mandatory and quasi-mandatory registration

Mandatory registration is based on the principle that voting is a right and duty of citizenship and voters are obliged to register for an election. If voting is mandatory, it follows that registration is also mandatory even though it may not be legally enforced. Countries where voting is compulsory have much higher voter turnout than countries where voting is voluntary. In addition, if voting is compulsory, the election management authority has a greater obligation to make it easy for individuals to register and vote.

Where the state takes responsibility for initiating the voter registration process e.g. by conducting door-to-door registration or maintaining a compulsory civil registry, registration is near-mandatory. In countries with a civil registry, citizens often have a formal, legal obligation to report changes in their personal status to the civil authority. Thus a voters' list based on data from a civil registry may be viewed as produced through de-facto mandatory registration.

Options for voter registration

Voter registration may take many forms. In deciding how to give substance to the principles of electoral democracy, it is important to choose a system that is (ACE, 2012):

- Most responsive to local conditions
- Realistic and affordable given the financial and administrative environment in which it must be developed and sustained

In the case of voter registration, there are three options (ACE, 2012):

- **A periodic list** is established for a specific electoral process and produced anew for each election. This system is expensive and time-consuming since it requires direct contact with all eligible voters before the election. The periodic list may also be preferred by quasi-governmental agencies, such as electoral management bodies or commissions.
- **A continuous register** or list of current eligible voters is maintained and regularly updated by the electoral administration. This system depends on an appropriate infrastructure to maintain the list. The cost of registering voters is spread over the entire period between elections, so it is less costly than other systems of registration.
- **A civil registry** contains a variety of information on all citizens, such as name, address, citizenship, age and identification number. In certain countries, particularly in Latin America, the voters' list is produced from information contained in the national civil registry. The major drawback of this system is the great level of power it gives to the state. Even though the high cost is justified, data sharing among government institutions may undermine privacy.

3. Case studies

Indonesia

Voter registration in the Republic of Indonesia is not mandatory. Indonesians who are qualified to vote are at least 17 years old at the time of the relevant election. Persons disqualified from being registered include:

- Those who are suffering from a mental disorder.
- Those whose voting rights have been revoked by a final court judgement.
- Those under a final sentence of imprisonment of five years or more as of election date.

Voters who have not been domiciled in an electoral area for at least six months before the date of compilation of the preliminary voters register for that area, as supported by the date on their national identity card (KTP), are disqualified from registering to vote or voting in an election (DAI, 2006a).

System and procedure of voter registration

Voter registration in Indonesia may be both state initiated and self-initiated by voters. The General Election Commission (KPU) determines the voter registration period. For the April 2004 legislative elections the law required that the voters' register be finalised six months before election date (a deadline that was not met by the KPU). Subsequent presidential elections and provincial and municipal executive elections have used updated versions of the 2004 legislative elections voters register.

Maintaining the voter register is legally the responsibility of the temporary Village Election Committees (PPS) appointed for each election, on the basis of data provided to them either by individuals, the KPU, or state agencies. Voter registers are not continuously maintained, but are updated nationally prior to any nation-wide election, and in the relevant province or municipal area for the election of a governor or mayor (DAI, 2006a).

In preparation for the 2004 legislative elections, the KPU, coordinating the Department of Home Affairs as population administrator and the Central Statistics Bureau (BPS) as data collector/processor, conducted a nationwide comprehensive population registration (P4B), by door to door enumeration, in April and May 2003. Data collection was organised on the basis of the census blocks used for the periodic population census in Indonesia. All buildings within each of these blocks whether residential or non-residential had to be visited and accounted for by enumeration officers.

For each person to be registered, the enumerator collected data on: ID card number (not mandatory), full name, father's name, mother's name, place of birth, addresses of any other residences, date of birth and birth certificate number (not mandatory), age, work permit number (for non-citizens only), citizenship status, marriage status, occupation, status in the household, education, physical or mental disabilities, religion, voter registration status (either qualified or having a specifically noted disqualification), blood type, any requirements for assistance to vote, and gender (DAI, 2006a).

Data collected during this population registration was electronically processed and amalgamated. For voter registration purposes it was stripped of the names and details of all persons not eligible to register as a voter, and stripped of data for persons eligible to be registered as a voter except full name, marital status, place/date of birth, disability, gender, and full address of domicile. The data was then broken

down into each Village Election Committee (PPS) geographic area, and sent to the relevant PPS to be used as the Preliminary Voters Register for the 2004 legislative elections.

The Preliminary Voters Register was placed on public display by the PPS for a period of 14 days. Voters could apply to the PPS for addition of their names and details to the register or amendment of their existing details. Family members of voters or relevant authorities could advise the PPS of deaths, transfers and omissions and errors on the register. PPS amalgamated approved additions and amendments to the Preliminary Voters Register into a Supplementary Voters Register, which was displayed publicly for seven days. During this period the PPS accepted applications for corrections and additions to, and removal of, entries on the Supplementary Voters Register.

The Preliminary Voters Register and Supplementary Voters Register, as amended for accepted corrections, were combined by the PPS to form the Final Voters Register for each PPS. The Final Voters Registers were placed on public display by PPS immediately after their completion, for five days.

For the continuing process of elections of provincial governors and local mayors that commenced in 2005, the national KPU has had no election management role. Voter's registers for these elections are prepared separately by each municipal area's KPUD. Data for Preliminary Voters Registers is provided to the KPUDs by local administration office of the Department of Home Affairs, and is based on the registers used at the 2004 legislative elections (rather than the updated registers used for the presidential elections), as amended by local population data held by these departmental offices.

Voter education

The KPU was provided with little government funding for its voter information activities - reflecting that voter education is not included amongst the KPU's legal responsibilities. One week prior to the commencement of P4B in April 2003, the KPU ran a public information campaign for voter registration on some national TV stations, radio and print media, and produced print materials for distribution. Limited survey data indicates that less than 50% of the population was aware of the voter registration process when P4B commenced. From April 2003, UNDP funded \$125,000 additional airtime for the KPU's television information campaign, and information spots on state radio and local TV stations (DAI, 2006a).

Following the funding of a Media Centre at the KPU by UNDP, this Centre undertook further voter registration information activities such as the production of print materials including for publicising the review periods for voters' registers. Comprehensive IFES surveys in the January-March period of 2004 indicated that around one third of voters were aware they could check voters' registers, but around two thirds believed that they had insufficient information about voter registration.

Information on overall KPU and donor expenditure on registration information programmes is not available.

Voter registration cost

The KPU's specific budget for P4B in 2003 and voter registration activity in 2004 was around US\$50 million. However this did not include a number of costs such as printing, distribution and administrative costs subsumed into general expenditure categories, nor the costs of updating voters' registers for the second round of the presidential elections (DAI, 2006a).

Performance of the voter registration system

For the presidential election of 2004, approximately 153 million Indonesians were registered as voters. The KPU made considerable efforts to ensure that voters had opportunities to correct errors and omissions of the P4B process. Following joint KPU and BPS conducted surveys; registration was reopened in early 2004 and over two million voters added to the voters register. Between the legislative and first round presidential elections, an additional seven million voters were added to the voters' register. However, quality control by Village Election Committees on this process was poor and there were subsequently around two million deletions from the register for the second round of the presidential election (Carter Centre, 2004).

In its reports on the 2004 legislative and presidential elections, the EU Observer Mission made the following comments on voter registration (DAI, 2006a):

- Using BPS for a census style method of voter registration was an important strategic decision appropriate for the limited time available,
- The voter lists for the 2004 legislative elections were of high quality, but the practice of using Village Election Committees rather than BPS to update voter lists for the presidential elections provided insufficient quality assurance on the data,
- Problems with distribution of voter lists to polling stations opened up possibilities for manipulation,
- A permanent, centralised, computerised voter register is required.

The Carter Centre's report on the 2004 elections noted that the voter registration process, due to its massive volume and lack of institutional focus, appeared disorganised, and there were problems with unregistered, multiple registered and fictitious voters, that could have been exploited for fraudulent purposes (the Carter Centre, 2004). These reports also noted that distribution of voter ID cards and invitations to vote letters was unreliable.

However, a voter's register audit undertaken by the NGO network Jurdul Pemilu in March 2004 indicated that around 91% of eligible voters were on the voters' register. The audit found 90% accuracy in name and address data recorded on the voters' register, and a level of 'ghost' voters of 2%. The only voters register data found to be inaccurate to a great extent was on date of birth (DAI, 2006a).

The KPU's lack of capacity to identify multiple registrations caused general concern. In its report to parliament on the April 2004 legislative elections, the KPU noted that multiple entries in the voters' register were a significant reason why it appeared that 16% of the total number of registered voters did not vote (in comparison to pre-election IFES survey data that indicated that well over 90% of voters intended voting (The Carter Center, 2004).

No 2004 election result was successfully challenged on the basis of voter registration errors. However, the KPU and BPS have not been involved in voter register preparation for subsequent provincial governor and local mayor elections held from 2005. Updates to the voters' registers for these elections were provided to KPU by local administrative offices of the Department of Home Affairs. Registers for these elections have been regarded by observers, such as the NGO CETRO, as having poor accuracy and in some cases as unusable. Alleged gross errors in the voters' register were the cause of a court reversal of a significant election result in 2005 and subsequent conflict.

Philippines

In the Philippines, the qualifications for voting are:

- Filipino citizenship
- At least 18 years of age
- Residence in the Philippines for at least one year and residence in the place where the voter intends to vote for at least six months immediately preceding the election

The qualifications to vote are the same as to register as a voter, although a person who has not yet reached the required voting age or period of residence is allowed to register provided that he/she will have the required qualifications on the next election date.

Otherwise qualified persons are disqualified from registering to vote and voting:

- During, and for five years after, serving a sentence of imprisonment of one year or more (unless granted amnesty or pardon), or having been convicted of any crime of disloyalty to the state or against national security (unless restored to full civil and political rights);
- If declared insane or incompetent by a competent authority;
- If their Filipino citizenship has been removed in accordance with Philippine law;
- If they have renounced their Philippine citizenship and have currently pledged allegiance to another country, or if they are an immigrant or permanent resident in another country, unless eligible to vote under overseas absentee voting provisions.

System and procedure for voter registration

Registration as a voter is not mandatory, and is self-initiated by the voter, although the government actively campaigns for voter registration. In 1996, the Philippines adopted a permanent voter register. To facilitate the transition from a periodic to a permanent voter register, in 1997, there was a county-wide general registration of voters and redrawing of precinct maps of voters (DAI, 2006b).

Voter registration is required to be done in person within the Philippines at a city or municipal Election Officer's office and overseas at the relevant Philippine mission for the voter's residence, or at a mobile registration office. The Commission on Elections (Comelec) provides special facilities for those going overseas for employment to register before they leave the Philippines. The Comelec determines the registration period. No registration of voters is allowed in the 120 days before a regular election or 90 days before a special election (DAI, 2006b).

Failure to vote in two successive regular elections results in the deactivation of a registered voter's voter registration. Voters who register overseas must resume permanent physical residence in the Philippines within three years of being registered, or they are removed from the voter register and are permanently disqualified from voting by absentee ballot.

When a voter attends an Election Officer's office, the Election Officer first verifies that the voter resides within the territorial jurisdiction of the office and, if so, determines which precinct the voter is assigned to. The voter must then prove their identity, by providing an ID card bearing the voter's photo and signature, such as a driver's license or company ID. If the voter does not have such an identity card, his/her identity can be verified under oath by any registered voter of the same precinct or a close relative who is a registered voter in the same city/municipality.

The application is then considered by the Election Registration Board (ERB), which at the same time considers written challenges to the application that may be lodged by any voter, registered political party representative or election observer.

Voter education

Voter education is a legally mandated function of the Comelec. However, it remains one of its weakest areas. Programmes that the Comelec has implemented to inform local voters about voter registration are limited to announcements through the media about the start and end of the registration period in-between elections, the publication and distribution of pamphlets on voter registration, and postings on the Comelec website (DAI, 2006b).

Performance of the voter registration system

The performance of the Philippines' voter registration system during the May 2004 elections has been assessed by IFES (2004), finding:

- The complex programme of validating voter lists through collection of biometric data, producing a centralised voters' list, issuing voter identification cards, and simultaneously renumbering precincts, were poorly designed and implemented;
- The Comelec was unable to validate, gather and merge the numerous data sets required to form a centralised list. Data for many voters remained invalidated on decentralised lists, so the Comelec failed to produce the centralised voters' list required for the registration claims and appeals period. This resulted in the denial of voters' rights to claims and appeals, and lack of information for voters on where they were to vote;
- Centralising the voters' registry failed in its aim of identification of duplicate entries, as the validation process did not cover all areas, it was not mandatory for voters to validate their data, Comelec systems were insufficient to identify duplicates, and the Comelec did not have the legal authority to remove duplicates it found;
- The electoral legal framework does not provide Comelec with the authority to remove voters from the voters' list or provide a simple process for voters to appeal;
- The Comelec was unable to produce accurate voter's lists centrally and the lists that were then produced from the old decentralised system contained out-of-date data, were deeply flawed, and caused confusion on voting day.

IFES cautioned that the Comelec lacked the capacity, and may not be allocated sufficient resources, to implement its tasks effectively.

Liberia

Voter registration in Liberia is voluntary. Liberians who are qualified to vote are at least 18 years old at the time of the relevant election and have proof of identity.

The 2005 voter registration process was observed by a number of domestic and international organisations. All report that the registration process went well, with only a few small incidents that were not severe enough to interfere with the registration exercise (EU, 2006).

System and procedure of voter registration

The registration exercise was designed to establish a credible voters' roll and played a key role in the creation of the electoral districts and the determination of voting stations. Voters were provided with a voting card as proof of identify. Paper-based technology was used for field data collection. Special pre-printed optical mark recognition (OMR) forms were completed in the field and scanned and processed at the National Elections Commission (NEC) headquarters. The use of OMR technology did not reduce the overall workload. Instead, it shifted the work of data capturing to field staff without burdening them with sensitive technical equipment (Cisse and Evrensel, 2010).

The 2005 voter registration exercise was largely implemented and managed by international staff owing to the short timelines, limited local information technology (IT)-skilled staff and the complex computerisation involved. Since 2005 there has been very little IT capacity building within the NEC, and the commission will again have to rely heavily on external advice to plan and administer the upcoming voter registration exercise (Cisse and Evrensel, 2010).

Voter education

Liberia's 2005 public information and civic and voter education campaigns were carried out at national and local level by the NEC Information and Education Department in all amalgamated towns and wards. The NEC and its UNMIL advisers developed a civic and voter education programme which was launched on 31 January 2005. Donors, funding agencies, CSOs and the media supported this initiative. NEC Information and Education played a crucial role in the voter registration operation in providing neutral and correct information to the population. Such information included the location of voter registration centres, operating hours, eligibility criteria and the documents required for registration (EU, 2006).

Numerous materials were distributed to the county electoral offices for the public information campaign. Special emphasis was given to radio broadcasts because of the high levels of illiteracy in Liberia and the wide coverage of radio. The education materials, media and methodology used in 2005 included banners, posters, flyers, flip charts, radio and television talk shows, dramas, interviews, spot announcements, CDs and cassettes, jingles, parades, workshops, educational and training booklets, face to-face education, information sharing, newspapers advertisements, street theatre, community mobilisation and press conferences (Cisse and Evrensel, 2010).

Voter registration cost

The budget for the 2011 voter registration exercise is calculated at US\$7 million to register about two million voters. This translates into an average direct cost of US\$3.5 per registered voter. If one includes indirect costs (such as logistics provided by other government departments, voter education and costs for international advisors) the average cost per registered voter increases to about US\$4.5.

Performance of the voter registration system

No accurate population data was available for the 2005 voter registration exercise in Liberia. The NEC therefore estimated the size of the population based on a joint UN-World Bank assessment done in February 2004, which put the Liberian population at some 2.9 million with 50% of that of voting age.

The October 2005 presidential and legislative elections voter registration drive was held over a six-week period at 1,533 voter registration centres. Voter registration ended on 4 June 2005. At the cut-off date, a

total of 1.35 million people had been registered, which constituted around 90% of the estimated people qualified to vote. There was no significant delay in the process. All planned actions were held on time, but the rainy season affected some of the equipment and materials; for example, ORM forms were sometimes not readable by the scanners.

The use of polaroid cameras and film worked well in the 2005 registration drive. Field implementation was difficult owing to the poor road conditions but the NEC was able to stick to the action plan because of the support received from UNMIL whose helicopters and trunks helped in reaching remote areas.

The extensive and costly staff training programme run by the NEC, UNMIL and partners was key to the overall success of the collection and processing of data. However, a substantial amount of manual correction was required once the forms arrived in from the field. A system was developed by IT experts and a team of staff to review the forms and data before and after they were scanned. The data needed to be checked manually and corrections were made before inclusion in the voters' roll. OMR is dependent on error-prone bubbling – even if staffs are well trained (Cisse and Evrensel, 2010).

Malawi

Registration to vote is voluntary and is available to all Malawi citizens 18 years or older who, on producing proof of identity, may register where they reside, where they were born or where they conduct their business. Registration is conducted over a 14-day period that ends at least 21 days before Election Day. There is no civil registry in Malawi, though draft plans for such a registry have been in existence since the mid-1990s.

- The franchise is open to all Malawian citizens 18 years of age or older, except the mentally incompetent, those under sentence of death and those convicted of an electoral offence;
- Eligible persons have a single registration to vote, which may be in respect of where they are ordinarily resident, where they were born, or where they are employed or conduct a business.

There were very few reports of voters being disenfranchised on voting day or of election-related violence due to problems with the voter data used at voting stations. Unlike the 1999 and 2004 elections, the 2009 election did not have to be postponed due to deficiencies in voter registration. In these respects, voter registration for the 2009 elections could be regarded as effective. However, this success was achieved only by the Malawi Election Commission (MEC) implementing emergency measures in response to widespread inaccuracies and omissions in voter register data found during the verification period for the register (EU, 2009).

System and procedure of voter registration

Applicants for registration prove their eligibility by producing an authentic proof of identity document such as a driver's licence. If the applicant has no such document they can be vouched for by the village chief or headman of the area, another registered voter or a registration supervisor. Once registered, the voter is placed on the voters' register and given a registration certificate/card. If a voter loses the card it may be replaced. Voters' registers are open for inspection by voters, political parties and international observers during an unspecified inspection period. To prove eligibility to vote, a voter must show their voter card, which is then checked against the voters' register (Wall, 2010).

Voter registration data for the 2009 election was collected using OMR forms. The system was chosen independently by the MEC due to its high processing capacity and because it was familiar. Equipment and

form costs were shared between donors and the Government of Malawi, with donors providing some two-thirds of the funding. Voter registration data was collected using a three-part form: Part A was the voter's application for registration; Part B was the OMR form on to which the data from Part A was transferred ('bubbled') and a photo and thumbprint attached by field registration centre staff; and Part C contained a voter identity card. Each registration centre had an equipment pack comprising a solar rechargeable battery-powered digital camera, a printer and a fingerprint pad. Voter ID cards were produced and given to voters at the time of registration. Registration was staggered across the country since available funding could only purchase 870 equipment packs to service the 3,897 centres.

When planning voter registration for the 2009 elections in 2007, the MEC expected a target population of 7.5 million. This was revised down after the 2008 census reported that there were around 6.2 million Malawians aged 18 years or older. The actual registration achieved was 5.8 million – or 94.4% of the target eligible population of 6.2 million.

Voter registration cost

Based on published figures, direct expenditure for the 2008/2009 voter registration exercise in Malawi was some US\$4.27 per registered voter. Of this, US\$1.58 per voter can be attributable to equipment costs for equipment that would be serviceable for at least two further local government elections and one, or possibly two, further national elections. Straight line allocating equipment costs over a further three elections would give an estimated voter registration cost for the 2009 elections of some US\$3.08 per registered voter.

Performance of the voter registration system

There were very few reports of voters being disenfranchised on voting day or of election-related violence due to problems with the voter data used at voting stations. Unlike the 1999 and 2004 elections, the 2009 election-day did not have to be postponed due to deficiencies in voter registration. In these respects voter registration for the 2009 election could be regarded as effective. However, this was achieved only because the MEC implemented last-minute emergency measures in response to widespread inaccuracies and omissions in voter registration data found during the public inspection of the registers (Wall, 2010).

Wall (2010) reports that the cumulative impact of delays at each stage of the registration process was not recognised until too late: there was insufficient shared information or flexibility to ensure that plans could be effectively amended to meet changed circumstances. System problems were exacerbated by flaws in the management of basic administrative tasks such as warehousing and training.

Data quality issues were a significant problem. The scale of the errors revealed during the inspection of provisional registers led to a recheck of all applications for registration: around 40% of the data could be checked before the final voters' registers were printed. No identified duplicates were removed from the register as there was no process in place for their removal. However, some progress was made towards meeting the expectations of a registration system. The system produced a high-integrity voter ID card that has become a de facto general ID card for Malawians. Also, once the data is fully cleaned of errors, the voters' register will be updatable for future elections (EU, 2006).

Registration for the May 2004 elections used the same DRS system of OMR forms and polaroid cameras. The registration period for the 2004 elections was initially scheduled to commence in June 2003, but was postponed due to problems with MEC readiness and the late procurement of materials. It eventually took

place from 5-18 January 2004, and had to be extended to 25 January. Not all registrations could be processed in time for the April 2004 verification period.

The MEC had estimated that some 300,000 new voters would register. However, it announced in April 2004 that there was total of 6.5 million registered voters: this was around 2.5 million higher than the total at the 1999 election. This figure was much higher than census estimates of the 18-year-old and over population. As there were no checks on duplicate registrations or on transfers of registration it was suspected that many of these were multiple registrations. The final registers published on 9 May 2004 showed around one million fewer voters than the MEC had previously advised (Wall, 2010).

High Court petitions against the MEC's conduct of the registration and verification process were lodged by political parties and NGOs. The election day was subsequently postponed for two days, to 20 May 2004. As an emergency measure, persons who were not found on the 2004 voters' register were allowed to vote if they could be identified from the 1999 voters' register or had a voter registration card.

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Key websites

- ACE – The Electoral Knowledge Network:
<http://aceproject.org/>

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