



Coalition of Domestic Election Observers

CODEO Report on the Pre-Election Environment for August 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) is pleased to release the findings of its regular observation exercise on the pre-election environment for the month of August. This report, the fifth since inception of the exercise in March 2008 captures reports from 60 field observers (FOs) deployed across the country.

The FOs filed a total of 634 reports for the month of August, with 574 solely devoted to the Electoral Commission's recently organized 'limited voters' registration exercise. CODEO's report, highlighting key findings on the 'limited registration' exercise, was released to the public earlier in August. The report presents important findings CODEO FOs observed in the same month outside of the limited registration exercise.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Political party activities, especially by the presidential aspirants of the two leading political parties - the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) - have intensified.
- The presidential and parliamentary aspirants focused largely on policy issues in their campaigns.
- The campaigns were generally peaceful. However, simultaneous campaigning in the Central region by the NDC and NPP presidential candidates nearly resulted in clashes between the respective supporters of both parties.
- Intra-party disputes and conflicts marred the parliamentary primaries of the NPP and the NDC in the Ashanti and Central regions.
- A case of a Municipal Chief Executive's using his office for partisan campaigning was reported from a constituency.
- Party supporters destroyed the campaign posters of rival political parties in some constituencies.
- The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) organized civic education programs in some of the constituencies observed.

MAIN FINDINGS

A) Political Party Campaigns

The FOs reported that campaigning by political parties gained momentum during the month. In the Central, Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Greater Accra and Northern regions, all the major political parties, the NDC, the NPP, the Convention Peoples Party (CPP), the Peoples National Convention (PNC) and the Democratic Freedom Party (DFP) were seen conducting political campaigns. Strategies for campaigning included house-to-house campaigns, pasting of posters, radio and television advertisements, and party rallies.

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Secretariat: Page

95 Nortei Ababio Loop, North
Airport Residential, Accra

✉ : LG404 Legon, ACCRA

☎ : 233-21 784293-4/776142

Fax: 233-21 763029

The report also indicated that the presidential and parliamentary aspirants' campaign messages were issue-centred. Economic growth, affordable education, improved healthcare, and women's welfare were some of the issues aspirants addressed in their campaigns. Issues pertaining to persons with disability, however, were absent in the aspirants' messages. CODEO FOs however noted with commendation the initiative taken by the CPP to translate its manifesto into Braille to meet the needs of the visually impaired.

B) Political Party Primaries

The FOs reported intra-party conflicts and disputes in some parliamentary primaries. For example, NPP party executives in the Offinso South constituency in the Ashanti region were unable to resolve a dispute surrounding the selection of their parliamentary nominee. As a result, a faction of the local party leadership threatened to resist any attempt by the constituency chairman to impose the incumbent MP on the constituency. Also, in the Agona West constituency of the Central region an attempt by the NDC executives to replace a duly-selected nominee with another person sparked off disputes between the local party executives and the nominee.

C) Political Corruption

The August field observers' reports allege that undisclosed sums of money were given to electorates by NPP party executives. NPP party executives were observed giving T-shirts and money to electorates ahead of the party's rally in Brakwa in the Asikuma-Odoben-Brakwa constituency (Central region). FOs also reported the misuse and abuse of public office for partisan gain. The Municipal Chief Executive of the Offinso South Municipal Assembly who was on a familiarization tour of the district is reported to have used the occasion to also campaign for the NPP presidential and parliamentary aspirants. The Chief Executive was heard canvassing the electorate to vote for the incumbent to ensure the continuation of the NPP government's programs and projects.

D) Incidence of Violence

CODEO observers reported isolated cases of violence in the ongoing political party campaigns in some of the constituencies observed. For example, at Afransi in the Gomoa East constituency in the Central region, the police had a tough time controlling the crowd and rescuing the incumbent NPP MP who had been attacked by a group of angry youth during his campaign tour. The youth were apparently protesting against the poor performance of the MP. They brought his campaign tour to an abrupt end by defacing and tearing up his posters. The youth's action significantly raised tension in the community.

The FOs also reported that the simultaneous scheduling of political campaigns by the NPP and NDC in the same locality resulted in violent clashes among their respective supporters at Tamale Central constituency in the Northern region. The reports noted the open confrontation and gun shooting between vengeful supporters of the two political parties result in injuries to people and arson of property (motorbikes and party offices) of the parties and individuals. A similar schedule of political rallies by the NPP and NDC at Brakwa in the Asikuma-Odoben-Brakwa constituency of the Central region nearly resulted in a clash between supporters of the two parties when the NPP supporters tried to paste their posters on those of the NDC or to deface them.

E) Political Intolerance

The observers reported manifestations of political intolerance among supporters of various political parties. For example, there were reports that posters belonging to the NPP candidates were being removed and replaced with those of the NDC and vice versa in the Keta and Anlo constituencies in the Volta region.

F) Civic Voter Education

The FOs reported on political parties' forums organized by the NCCE to educate political parties' representatives on the political parties' code of conduct and to ensure violence-free election. These forums took place in the Bawku municipality in the Upper East region and Lawra and Nandom districts in the Upper West region. CODEO commends the NCCE for taking pragmatic steps to build mutual trust among political parties through its forums in the Upper East and West regions and urges it to intensify its civic education endeavors in other regions.

The reports also noted a political forum organized by a radio station (RITE FM) in Somanya in the Yilo Krobo constituency of the Eastern region. The forum was organized in collaboration with the district assembly in their bid to contribute towards an issue-oriented campaign in the constituency. The initiative by some private media, especially those in the district level in promoting issue-based campaigns is commendable.

Finally, the National Chief Imam, Sheik Osuman Sharubutu, is also reported to have used his birthday celebration to advocate for a peaceful election and urged the youth to desist from engaging in violent acts that could ruin the elections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

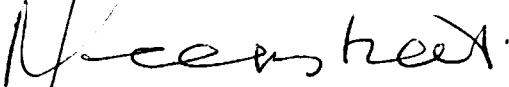
Based on its observations for the month of August, CODEO recommends the following to all stakeholders in this year's electoral process to ensure peaceful, issue-based, free, fair, and credible elections:

- That the political parties and their agents strictly adhere to the provisions of the political parties code regarding campaigning, especially the provision on posting of posters and the scheduling of campaigns;
- That public officials refrain from the use of state platforms and other public resources for partisan campaigning;
- That security at political party campaign events is strengthened; and
- That, the other political parties take a cue from the CPP by making their manifestoes accessible to persons with visual impairment.

For further information please contact John Larvie on 776142, 763029 or 0243714444

Signed)

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Prof. Miranda Greenstreet

Co-Chair, CODEO Advisory Board