

Date Printed: 04/20/2009

JTS Box Number: IFES_63
Tab Number: 134
Document Title: Some Questions and Answers on Voter
Registration
Document Date: n.d.
Document Country: Ghana
Document Language: English
IFES ID: CE00713



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ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF GHANA



SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON VOTER REGISTRATION

Is the old Voters Register still any good?

No. The Electoral Commission has discarded the old one which had too many errors, and is making a completely new voters' register from September 15th to 30th, so every Ghanaian citizen who is 18 years or older must register anew.

Why should I trust the new voters' register to be better than the old one?

Because the Electoral Commission is rigorously training 60,000 registration officials together with 80,000 political party agents who will observe and report on the registration process. So, this time both registration officials and party agents will have the same knowledge of the correct procedures. Also, this time party agents and any Ghanaian qualified to register can challenge any doubtful registrations by simply filling in a challenge form. An administrative panel will resolve each case, and then if any problem remains, it will be referred to the High Court.

How will the new voter registration process prevent duplication?

Each voter gets a personal voter identity card with a unique number on it that matches his or her same number on the register, and that number will not be given to anyone else. The register will be prepared through an electronic scanning process that rejects any duplications. Also, there will be no house to house registration to avoid block and absentee registrations that often give rise to duplications.

My brother is working in Sierra Leone just now, but he'll be back next year to vote. Can I register for him?

No. Voters may register only for themselves by reporting personally to the registration center near where they live. This will help insure accuracy.

May I know why voters who live in regional capitals will be given photo ID cards, while in the rural areas voters will be given thumbprint ID cards?

Voters in the regional capitals don't know each other very well, so picture identification is a help; but in the rural areas people generally know each other very well, so they don't need a photo identification which is very expensive.

Just who is qualified to register to vote in Ghana these days?

Ghanaian citizens who are at least 18 years old by September 30th this year can register and should do so as their civic responsibility.

I will be 18 in January next year, 1996. Am I qualified to register?

No. You are not qualified, because you have to be 18 by September 30th of this year, 1995.

If there are two kinds of voter identity cards -- thumbprint and photo -- does that mean that a person can get one of each kind of identity card?

No, because no one can register twice. Each person gets his or her left thumb cuticle marked with indelible ink that lasts for weeks, so would be found out if he or she came to register a second time. The ink has been tested and it's good. Also, remember that it is against the law, it is a punishable offense, to try to register more than once throughout the whole country.

Which is better -- Photo or Thumbprint ID card?

They are both equally valid, because both photos and thumbprints are true proof of identity. Just as everyone's facial characteristics are unique, everyone's thumbprint is unique and can be differentiated from everyone else's. So the photo or thumbprint identifier, along with the voter's unique registration number printed on the card, makes it unique to the voter and the registration list.

When will the voter registration period start?

It will run from September 15th to 30th this year, 1995, during which period neighborhood registration centers will be open every day from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., including Sundays and Fridays.

Where do I go to register to vote? I hope it's not far.

It's not far at all because you register at a centre near where you live, within a five kilometer radius at most. Look out for local posters announcing your local centre; or ask your Assemblyman, or your Unit Committee Member.

How do I prove that I have registered to vote?

Your name on the register is your official proof and you should check the new register when it is put on exhibition to be sure your name is correctly listed on it with your registration number matching your card. If there's any discrepancy, you fill out an error form so your registration can be checked and corrected.

Should I urge others to register to vote?

Yes, please do so. That is the mark of a good citizen.

Is it possible for a party agent to register people in the absence of a registration officer?

A party agent cannot, and should not, take any responsibilities for registration other than to monitor the registration process. It is only trained registration officials who may take and process voter registrations.

My birthday is on September 23rd, and I'll turn 18 this year. Can I register to vote?

Absolutely. Please celebrate your birthday by going down on the 23rd -- not before -- to register. Congratulations!

Can a political party agent decide to open the boxes containing voter registration materials to check up on them?

No. The only one who can open the registration form box is a registration officer, but he or she should do that in full view of any party agents who are monitoring the centre, and in front of any persons who are waiting to register.

Can the party agent deal with anyone trying to jump the voter registration queue?

No. But the party agent should call the attention of the registration officer to this irregularity so he can deal with it.

What if the officials at a registration centre do not handle a registration irregularity properly. In the opinion of a party agent who is monitoring the process?

The party agent should fill out an irregularity form and turn it in. The officials will then complete the applicant's registration form, but set it aside with the complaint for adjudication by an administrative panel, and if necessary, by the High Court.

Have party agents the right to challenge applicants?

Yes, anyone qualified to register can challenge an applicant for voter registration. All they have to do is fill out and turn in a challenge form.

Are women qualified to register as voters?

Of course, women are qualified to register provided they are 18 years or older and are citizens of Ghana. They should definitely vote because they are half the population.

Should a husband decide whether his wife should register or not?

No husband has the right to dictate to his wife or any other person whether to register or not. Registering and voting are fundamental rights of all individuals in a democracy.

I'm not sure this new registration process is going to work. What do you think about boycotting the registration?

It is wrong to boycott the registration. Voting is the only way of making sure that the leaders who make decisions in the country really represent the people. If you don't vote for the kind of leaders you want, others will elect their choices which may be different than yours, and you'll have only yourself to blame.

Is the right to report irregularities in the registration process vested on party agents alone?

No, anyone qualified to register can report irregularities and should do so if they see any. If you hear of any problem, urge the person who saw it to report it, but do not yourself report hearsay which can't be verified, as that's just rumormongering and a waste of everyone's time.

Can men register for their wives?

No. No one is allowed to register for anyone other than himself.

Can a pregnant woman suffer any harm when her photograph is taken?

No, any doctor or health official will assure you that women cannot be harmed in any way by photo taking. Such belief is superstition.

Can a person who is a citizen or both Ghana and another country register to vote?

No, Ghana does not allow double citizenship. Only citizens of Ghana alone may register.

What should we do when people cross borders to register to vote?

Go and report them immediately to registration officials and fill out a challenge form at the registration centre. This is your duty as a good citizen.

Can I still register to vote if my left thumb is bandaged and can't be marked after I have registered?

Sure, the registration official will mark another finger on your left hand instead.

I am working hard at the farm these days and it is difficult to take time off to go to register to vote. What should I do?

Busy farmers like you can go to register on taboo days when you do not go to the farm. Don't forget that your registration centre is open seven days a week for 16 days from September 15 through 30th, so you can surely fit in a visit to your centre during that period.

I am always kept busy at my office. How do I get time off to register and vote?

Employers are requested to encourage their employees to register and give them some time if necessary to do so. You should plan time when you can get away briefly from your job to register, or start early and do it before going to work, or go after work on the way home. The registration centres are open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. to give you plenty of time to register, whatever your schedule.

I cannot read or write. How can I register to vote?

Don't worry, a trained official will fill out the registration form according to the verbal information you give, so you don't need to read or write. You only need to be a Ghanaian citizen of 18 years of age or older.

Is the Electoral Commission controlled by the ruling government or any of the political parties?

Absolutely not. All of the Electoral Commission's activities are strictly non-partisan and aimed at producing orderly elections open to every qualified voter regardless of his or her electoral preference.

Will anyone harass me when I go to register?

No one will be allowed to intimidate you within 100 meters of a registration centre, and any attempt to do so anywhere should be reported to the police or the Electoral Commission.

I'm not sure about the exact year I was born, but my mother told me she thinks it was in 1977 during the rainy season. Can I register?

Yes, you probably can because 1977 was 18 years ago and the rainy season usually ends before September, so you should be over 18 when the registration period begins. To be sure, you could take your mother, or someone who knew your family 18 years ago, to verify your age when you go to register and answer any questions the registration official or any party agent might have.

What happens if someone challenges another's registration?

It's very simple. The challenger fills out a challenge form stating why he or she thinks the proposed registration is not valid, and turns it over to a registration officer who puts it and the registration form aside for a special panel to investigate and decide. If the panel can't decide, then the issue may be referred to the High Court for final decision.

Why is the voter registration period so early -- a whole year before the next elections?

It's important to start early to allow the time needed to record the registrations of over 8 million voters, and then to verify them and correct any errors.

What happens if I lose my voter ID card?

You MUST report the loss to the District Electoral Office or the police station nearest where you live. You will be issued a new ID card. Your lost ID card will be canceled and its unique number will be struck from the registration list so that no one can use the old card.

Can I loan my card to anyone else?

No! If you give your ID card to someone else, you may not be able to vote on election day. Moreover, if the person to whom you give the card tries to vote with it, he or she will be committing the offense of impersonation and both of you will be subject to arrest and sanction.

What if I move after I register, but before election Day?

You can apply for the transfer of your registration from where you registered to a polling station near your new residence. The period for applying for the transfer will be announced by the Electoral Commission.

Can I vote with a thumbprint ID card in a photo ID card area?

Yes, but only if you have properly applied for a transfer of your vote. The same holds true for a person from a photo ID area voting at a thumbprint ID card polling station.

I'm 17 years old now, but will be 18 by Election Day next year. Can I register now to vote?

No. The law allows only citizens 18 years or older to register to vote. This is true even if they are 17 now but will be 18 years old by Election Day.

Can I register away from where I normally reside such as my village or home town?

Yes, but remember that you will be electing people to represent you where you currently live -- not some other place. In addition, if you attempt to register where you do not currently reside, you may be challenged. You may also be challenged during the exhibition period next year, or on Election Day.

My grandfather can't go to the Registration Centre to be registered. Can I register for him?

No. The applicant must be assisted to go to the registration centre. The Electoral Commission will develop a programme to register persons who are too ill to go to register.

What about persons in hospital during the registration period. How can they register to vote?

The Electoral Commission will establish a programme to visit all hospitals and register voters during the registration period.

Kofi was sent to prison for 15 years in 1989. Can he register as a voter in 1995?

No, because by now he would have served only about 5 years of his total sentence hence, and prisoners are not allowed to register or vote. Since his sentence ends in 2004, he can register five years later, in 2009.

Mr. Obeng who has been in Britain for the past five years arrived back home in August, 1995. Can he register as a voter in September, 1995?

Yes, Mr. Obeng can register as a voter if he is a Ghanaian citizen of 18 years or older and has not taken dual citizenship in Britain or any other country.

What are the types of citizenship in Ghana, and can all such citizens register to vote?

Ghanaian citizenship may be acquired by birth, naturalization, or registration (marriage), and all such citizens may register and vote, provided they are 18 or older. Ghanaian law decrees, however, that only citizens of Ghana alone may register and vote in Ghanaian elections. So in a nutshell, citizens of any kind, except any who hold dual citizenship, may register and vote.

I live and work in Accra and often stay with my children who live in Kumasi. Can I register in Kumasi to vote in Accra?

You can register in Kumasi if you are known to have a residence there, but you can only vote where you register; so you should think about what issues concern you most and where your vote will count more. You should register and vote where you're more concerned with local issues.

I live and work in Kumasi, but all my children live in Accra. Can my children, who are of voting age, register in Kumasi?

Yes, your children can register in Kumasi if they are known to reside there on a regular basis; but they should consider where they're most concerned with local issues and register and vote in that location.

Can citizens who work abroad in government service, or for the UN or any other international organization in another country, register and vote in Ghanaian elections?

Yes, if there is a Ghanaian Embassy in the country where they are stationed, they may register there. They should go early to call at the Ghanaian Embassy and check out the procedures.

Can a Ghanaian of voting age who is working privately in a foreign country register in the foreign country to vote later in Ghana?

No. Only Ghanaian government servants or international organization employees working abroad may register abroad, according to current law.

What proof is needed to show that a person has been registered?

The key proof needed is his or her name on the new register. An ID card with either a photograph or thumbprint serves as evidence or additional documentation, but is not proof of registration.

Who rules over a challenge on citizenship?

First, an administrative panel will examine and determine each case that is challenged. If there is an appeal, the High Court rules.

May I know what constitute registration offenses?

Most offenses occur when a citizen registers more than once, or if an alien who is not a Ghanaian citizen tries to register, or if someone tries to impersonate someone who has died, or someone who is below 18 years tries to register.

How long will be the period of exhibition of the provisional voters' register next year?

The Exhibition period will last seven days and will be broadly announced so that all voters may check and verify their registrations during that period. If there's any omission or error, they file an error form so correction may be made before next year's elections.

How would people who are less than 18 years old during the registration period this year get their names onto the voters' register later?

They will be qualified to register during the next registration exercise, and should wait till then.

What happens when a person who has already registered at a neighbourhood centre moves to another residential address?

He or she can apply at any District Electoral Office for the transfer of his or her registration to his or her new residence.

What do you do during the Exhibition period if you find a name of a deceased person on the voters' register?

You file an objection form with the electoral official and it will be reviewed and dealt with. Your civic service in reporting any irregularity on the list will be appreciated.

What is the maximum time anybody can be absent from residing in the area prior to the registration period?

A person is qualified to register when he or she has lived in the electoral area for 6 months or more.

How can I become an official observer at a Registration Centre?

That's great, because we need 80,000 observers! Ask your political party to appoint you as a party agent at your local centre and if they do, be sure to go to the Electoral Commission's combined training program for Registration workers and party agents.