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For Immediate Release

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uneven participation of all concerned stakeholders to improve the registration process and ensure the full protection of voting rights for all Nepali citizens.

Structural barriers, particularly when obtaining citizenship certificates, also have prevented many women from registering to vote. And many young people are yet to be included on the voter roll. The report notes that based on 2011 census data, a greater number of persons than previously estimated remain unregistered. The rate of registration between July and December 2012 does not appear to match the rate of demographic change in the country.

Recommendations

The report makes the following

**Fifth Interim Statement on the Election Commission of Nepal’s
“Voter Register with Photograph” Program
Feb. 28, 2013**

I. Introduction

The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) is conducting a nationwide voter registration process to create a new computerized voter register. In addition to its broader efforts to observe the peace and constitutional processes at the local level, The Carter Center was invited and accredited by the ECN to observe the voter registration process. The Carter observers have gathered information about the process from 58 of Nepal districts since March 2010.¹ process, promote confidence in the ECN and the voter registration process, and contribute to the overall strengthening of the democratic process in Nepal.

the most recent of which was published on July 26, 2012 and is intended to provide an impartial assessment of recent phases of the process, including highlighting positive aspects, identifying potential weaknesses, and offering recommendations for steps that could be taken to strengthen the process.²

Voter Registration Program Based on Targeted Marginalized Communities, The Carter Center observed in 11 districts throughout Nepal between November and December 2012.

The report also discusses three main national-level challenges facing the voter registration process to date: voter turnout, citizenship certificates, and voter registration management,³

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www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/FinalReportNepal2008.pdf.

² All Carter Center interim statements on earlier phases of the voter registration process are available at: www.cartercenter.org/news/publications/peace/democracy_publications/nepal-peace-reports.html

³ An overview of the various phases of the voter registration process since its inception in 2010 is provided in

II. Overview and Context

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Since July 2012, the voter registration process has seen relatively limited activity. The ECN continuous voter registration program remains ongoing at district election offices (DEOs) in all 75 districts and is also being conducted at most district administration offices (DAOs), and at some area administration offices, in cooperation with the Home Ministry.⁴ The presence of registration officials at district administration offices is particularly important, as citizens come to these offices in order to obtain citizenship certificates, which are the main identity document required for voter registration.

In October 2012, the ECN initiated an outreach program to marginalized groups whose members are less likely to have registered to vote.⁵ This program, conducted in coordination with the Ministry of Home Affairs, involves the deployment of integrated mobile teams to locations outside district headquarters in each district to issue citizenship certificates and to register voters. The deployment of integrated mobile teams, which include officials from both district election offices and district administration offices, enabled eligible citizens to register to vote without making an often time-consuming and costly trip to the district headquarters. Not all districts had initiated the program prior to Dec. 15, 2012 (the date of the latest ECN voter registration statistics), partly due to winter weather conditions in some districts. However, initial reports indicate that the program has been successful in increasing registration figures where implemented (see voter registration figures section below). Given that previous estimates have indicated that more than two million persons of voting age lack citizenship certificates, the efforts by the Ministry of Home Affairs to facilitate access to these documents through mobile distribution is a positive initiative which corresponds to previous Carter Center recommendations.⁶

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continuing political crisis in Nepal. Following the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in May 2012, the government announced that elections for a new legislative body would be held

government that would administer the country in the run-up to the elections. An agreement on these issues from all parties that were represented in the previous Constituent Assembly would appear to be a prerequisite for an election date to be announced. To this end, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter wrote an opinion piece in early January 2013 where he called on political parties to reach an agreement that would pave the way for new elections and move the peace process forward.⁸

III. Observation of the ECN's Targeted Mobile Voter Registration Program

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including the National Dalit Commission, the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities, and the Badi Community Upliftment Development Committee. On the basis of this dialogue, the ECN concluded that many marginalized communities had low rates of voter registration due to limited awareness about voter registration and lack of

In the majority of districts observed, outreach to marginalized communities was very limited or non-existent. District election offices told observers that this was sometimes due to time constraints or to the absence of functional NGOs in the area.¹⁷ However in Kailali, Kathmandu, and Surkhet, NGOs representing marginalized communities were included in the planning meeting between the district election and district administration offices. These organizations then worked to

television, were rarely credited. For the most part, citizens knew what documentation to bring, although variations were noted.²⁰ Given the short time of the mobile visits (1-3 days), the involvement of NGOs and VDC leaders appeared to be crucial to ensuring significant turnout.

Several district election offices felt that there had been insufficient time to organize effectively the mobile teams, given the tight deadlines and that they had been notified of the program only shortly before Dashain, a holiday season in Nepal. As a result the ECN was forced to push back the original deadline of Nov. 15 to Dec. 15. Nevertheless, in 35 districts, district election offices managed to implement the target mobile program in time.

In many cases, citizens appeared to attend mobile registration to 1 184.82 65.02 Tm(nan)372ukun[TE

IV. Voter Registration Figures

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As of July 15, 2012, the ECN reported that 10,713,329 citizens were registered to vote. As of Dec. 15, 2012, ECN figures showed that the number of registrants had risen to 10,911,424, an increase of just less than 200,000 registrants. From July 15 to Nov. 15, voter registration was conducted on a continuous basis at district election offices. However, according to ECN data, 80 percent of new registrants during that time were added to the rolls through registration sites established at most district administration offices and at some area administration offices, as these sites enabled people to register to vote in the same place that they obtain their citizenship certificates.

The month between Nov. 15 and Dec. 15, 2012, showed an increase in the registration rate for the five month period: 50,217 registrants for the month as opposed to the 36,970 monthly average for the previous four months. This increase is likely due to the start of the targeted mobile registration program and the consequent easier access to citizenship certificates. It is probable that the total registration for the month would have been significantly higher if targeted mobile registration and citizenship distribution had been carried out in all districts.

In the 35 districts for which targeted mobile registration data was reported for this period, some 50 percent of new registration was done by the mobile teams. Although deployment of mobile teams in at least some districts caused the temporary suspension of registration efforts at the district administration offices impacting registration rates at those sites, the program clearly seemed to facilitate access to citizenship certificates and to voter registration for many citizens living far from district headquarters.

i. Targeted Marginalized Communities

evidence reported to observers of active coordination with these communities from the district election or district administration offices.

ii. Number of Registrants Nationwide

Below are the figures for the total number of registrants nationwide.²¹

Time Period	Voters Registered		Total
July 15, 2012			10,713,329
July 15 - Nov 15, 2012	Monthly Average	36,970	10,861,207
	Sub-Total	147,878	
Nov. 15 - Dec. 15, 2012	At DEOs	5,709	
	At DAOs	25,532	
	At Targeted Mobile Centers	17,742	
	Other	1,234	
	Sub-Total	50,217	
Dec. 15, 2012			10,911,424

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As noted above, the data from the 2011 nationwide census increases the overall number of potential eligible voters beyond the estimate made by the ECN in 2011. The estimated figure was approximately 14.7 million persons aged 16 and older, but according to the census figures the actual number was closer to 16.6 million persons aged 16 and older. In 2012, some 650,000 people

older, lower than previously believed. Given the very low rate of registration of 16 and 17 year olds, however, the registration rate for the voting age population is somewhat higher, approximately 67 percent.²³ This means that some 6.3 million potentially eligible people aged 16 and older are not registered, with 5.2 million of these being 18 years and older and eligible to vote in any upcoming election.

The census data also gives an indication of some challenges for the future management of the voter registration process. First, each year an average of 665,000 people will become 16 years of age over the next four years. This is therefore the minimum number that must be registered to vote on a yearly basis in order to keep pace with demographic change. In 2012 overall, there were some 838,000 new registrants, although most of these were registered in the first

²⁴ Second, at present, there is no systematic effort to remove the records of deceased voters from the voter list, although it is expected this will be achieved primarily through the claims and objections process.

VI. Management of Voter Registration

Since the previous Carter Center interim statement, the ECN has finalized the correction of data from the display, claims and objections period in 2012 and especially the problems in ward assignments and other issues identified in that report. The data has not been independently verified. Although the ECN is confident in the quality of the register, representatives stated that the quality of the corrections may vary by district. An expedited audit of the current voter roll would be prudent to allow for the identification and correction of errors prior to election day, as well as to identify specific groups or geographic areas with lower than average registration rates.³¹

The ECN now has the software and hardware needed to process voter registration, including checking biometric data for duplicates. New registration data is checked against the centralized register for duplicates as a matter of routine, with identified likely duplicates returned to district election offices

VII. Conclusions

A few districts have not been conducting voter registration at district administration office headquarters, apparently due to resource issues. In some other cases, registration at headquarters was temporarily suspended in order to conduct targeted mobile registration.

In some districts, the success of the targeted mobile registration process could be increased by improving cooperation between district election and district administration offices, more advanced planning, and more effective voter information. Bottlenecks in the distribution of citizenship certificates sometimes limited the numbers of those who could receive citizenship certificates and be registered to vote during mobile field visits.

Political party efforts to support voter registration appear to be improving but remain uneven.

VIII. Recommendations

and regional civil society organizations could further improve the effectiveness of the commission nationwide.

Consider ways to ensure that the names of deceased voters are identified and removed from the voter list.

Consider ways of sharing best practice among district election officers.

Ensure that an audit of voter registration takes place as soon as possible, in order to address any areas of concern and to improve future registration efforts.

To Political Parties:

Play a more active and supportive role in the voter registration and voter education process. It is in the interest of all political parties to support the registration process by mobilizing eligible voters.

To Civil Society:

Similarly to political parties, engage more with voter registration and voter education efforts conducted by the election commission. Additionally, help existing civil society voter registration e55 Tm[)/12 Ting

ANNEX

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The ECN is creating a new computerized voter register to replace the register used in the 2008 Constituent Assembly elections, which was believed to contain many mistakes, including missing or misspelled names, entries of the same locations, and possibly some ineligible voters. The computerized register contains registrant photos and fingerprints, as well as additional personal information intended to enable greater quality control over the voter list and reduce the possibility of voter fraud. At the same time, the ECN is implementing a long-term project to provide permanent continuous registration facilities at the district level, which will be electronically linked to a central database in Kathmandu. These activities are being carried out with the technical support of UNDP and IFES. The ECN is also coordinating with the Ministry of Home Affairs to share registrant information for the purposes of creating a civil registry and proposed national identification cards.

The ECN is implementing voter registration in accordance with the Interim Constitution of Nepal and developed policies and procedures to govern the conduct of voter registration, including voter registration eligibility requirements and implementation measures. To be included on the voter roll, citizens must come in person to a registration site. Individuals are eligible to register if they are aged 16 or older and possess a Nepali citizenship certificate. In principle, citizens register to vote for the municipality or Village Development Committee listed on their citizenship certificate. If a citizen wishes to register for a different municipality or Village Development Committee, he or she must present proof of migration.

The voter registration program was initiated with a pilot program in seven Village Development Committees in five districts in March/April 2010. The program began with a door-to-door enumeration campaign to identify, inform, and document eligible individuals, which was followed by actual voter registration. Following the successful completion of the pilot exercise, voter registration has continued in multiple phases, with major field phases accompanied by voter education campaigns:

A municipalities phase that registered eligible voters residing in 58 municipalities in 43 districts (completed between September and December 2010).

A bridging phase that registered voters in areas nearby municipalities in 43 districts (completed between December 2010 and March 2011).

A nationwide phase to register voters throughout the rest of the country (March 2011 through mid-July 2011). The nationwide phase entailed mobile registration teams visiting most remaining Village Development Committees in Nepal.

In June 2011, the ECN announced that people residing outside their home district would be allowed to register for their place of permanent residence through out-of-district registration.

Following the end of the nationwide phase, registration continued at district election offices throughout the country. In some districts, enhanced continuous registration

was conducted on a temporary basis at district administration offices and area administration office locations (July 2011 – February 2012).

From November 2011 to January 2012, mobile voter registration was conducted at municipality and VDC level in 11 priority districts where the process could not be finalized previously and/or data was lost during the nationwide phase.

From December 2011 to March 2012, registration data was verified at district level and then transferred to the ECN. The ECN aggregated the data and screened it for duplicate registration records.

In April 2012, the ECN printed the voter roll and distributed copies to the districts. Public display of the voter roll at VDC and municipal ward level began on April 15, 2012, on a rolling basis within each district, with provision for registering claims and objections. Simultaneously, the ECN also conducted another round of mobile field registration for voters who had not previously registered. This field registration was conducted in all VDCs and municipal wards in Nepal, except those in which field registration had already been held in 2012.

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The Carter Center conducts its observation through meetings with the ECN, political parties, domestic observers, civil society, marginalized groups, citizens, and other stakeholders at the central and local levels, and through visits by long-term observer teams to registration sites for direct observation. Carter Center