



GUYANA NEWS

Biometrics at place of poll not a feasible option for 2025 – GECOM



By [Stabroek News](#) January 30, 2025



Given the current level of interest in some quarters concerning the introduction of biometrics at the Place of Poll for the upcoming General and Regional Elections, the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) has iterated its position that to introduce biometrics at the place of poll is not feasible

within the time presently available before the elections are held later this year.

In a release on Tuesday, GECOM stated that it has taken note of the constant publication of opposing perspectives in the media over the past week, since the Chairman, Retired Justice Claudette Singh, decided on the matter and its unfeasibility on January 16, 2024.

Further, GECOM considers this matter sensitive and important enough, to deem it necessary to explain to all stakeholders, the rationale behind the Chairman's decision.

According to the release, a motion circulated by Commissioner Vincent Alexander on the introduction of biometrics was first discussed at the Commission on November 22, 2023. This motion for the introduction of such technology, it explained, was premised on allegations of voter impersonation at places of poll and that such a feature could serve as an additional mechanism for enhancing the system of identifying voters on election day.

It said that the issue became a prominent agenda item at the statutory meetings of the Commission and it was during those deliberations that the Chief Election Officer (CEO), Vishnu Persaud, was tasked with undertaking a feasibility study on the introduction of electronic fingerprinting at registration and biometric fingerprint identification of voters on Election Day. This research presented several case studies on the use of biometrics fingerprinting in other countries, and highlighted multiple technical, legislative and administrative concerns.

"However, it has been noted that there are multiple reports in the public sphere that appears to be examining such an important matter in isolation by only attributing prominence to the benefits of the use of biometrics

without due consideration of the legal hurdle and by extension the challenges that can be experienced.”

However, in the interest of transparency GECOM acknowledged that the feasibility study did mention benefits of biometric fingerprint identification, which include: i) a high level of security, as they are unique to each individual, making it difficult for fraudulent activities such as impersonation or multiple voting to occur; ii) a more accurate method of voter identification compared to traditional methods like ID cards or signatures, thereby reducing the chances of errors in the electoral process; iii) guards against electoral fraud, thereby ensuring the integrity of the voting process; and (iv) the use of biometric fingerprints to streamline the voter identification process, leading to faster and more efficient voting.

On the other hand, the release pointed out that there were also several challenges to be addressed such as: i) technical challenges in which the reliability and accuracy of biometric systems have been questioned due to factors such as poor network connectivity, power outages, hardware malfunctions, and software glitches. These technical issues have led to delays in the voting process and raised concerns about the effectiveness of using biometrics for voter identification.

ii) Data security concerns since storing sensitive biometric data raises privacy and security risks, as any breach or misuse of this information could have severe consequences. For example, there have been instances of data breaches and leaks in India’s Aadhaar system, which has heightened apprehensions about the safety of voter biometric data. Inclusivity issues have also emerged regarding the use of biometric fingerprint identification for voting. Certain segments of the population, such as the elderly, manual labourers, or individuals with disabilities, may face difficulties in having their fingerprints accurately scanned due to factors such as worn-out fingerprints

or physical impairments. This raises concerns about disenfranchisement and unequal access to voting rights.

iv) Legal and ethical concerns, particularly since questions have been raised about the legality of collecting and storing biometric data on a massive scale without robust data protection laws in place. There are also additionally ethical dilemmas that could arise concerning consent, transparency, and accountability in handling voter biometrics.

v) The accuracy and reliability of biometric fingerprint identification systems were also questioned. Concerns were raised about false positives or negatives, which could lead to voter disenfranchisement or fraudulent activities if not properly addressed.

vi) Infrastructure challenges due to vast size of terrain and diverse population could pose infrastructure challenges for the widespread implementation of biometric voter identification. Remote areas often lacked the necessary infrastructure to support biometric technology, making it difficult to ensure universal access to this voting method. Limited access to electricity and internet connectivity in some areas hindered the effectiveness of the system.

vii) Operational challenges of implementing biometric technology for voting also be a challenge as well. Training election officials, maintaining equipment, and ensuring smooth operations on election days required significant resources and coordination.

And in addition to the aforementioned issues, the feasibility study also outlined cost implications, inadequate voter education, allegations of manipulation, resistance by political parties and public trust as challenges.

The legal hurdles were also mentioned. "Notwithstanding the benefits and challenges of biometric technology, it must be emphasized that within the context of Guyana, there is no legal provision and therefore, any such introduction at the place of poll would be unconstitutional since it will impose additional conditions on a person's right to vote."

The release pointed out that it was against this backdrop and having considered the deliberations at the Commission, that the Chairman decided that even if GECOM were to implement biometrics as a supplementary tool to identify persons, this will still require legislation since such a system would impose an additional requirement on voters and would therefore be unconstitutional.

Notwithstanding the challenges of biometrics, the Chairman decided that it would be unrealistic for GECOM to be ready for the upcoming elections considering all the things that it would be required to do such as: a) hold stakeholder consultations to determine whether GECOM should introduce biometrics; b) consult with stakeholders including the government and the parliamentary political parties to determine whether it is even possible to do so now, considering things like costs and any legislative amendments necessary to cater fully for it; c) procure equipment for the introduction of biometrics in the registration process and at the place of poll; d) train staff on the use of such equipment; and e) educate the public on the introduction of these systems and how they are to be used to aid in registration and in voting.

The release reiterated the necessity for all stakeholders to understand that GECOM must operate within the constitutional and legislative provisions while ensuring that no voter is denied his/her constitutional right to vote. "GECOM takes this opportunity to categorically state that it will ensure the safeguards and integrity of its processes in the conduct of elections that will

guarantee public confidence in a system that is free, fair, transparent and credible.”



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February 17, 2025

PRESS RELEASE

(Georgetown, Guyana)

For immediate dissemination

PATROL COMES UNDER FIRE FROM ARMED MEN ON CUYUNI RIVER

The Guyana Defence Force (GDF) wishes to notify the public that earlier today, a regular patrol on the Cuyuni River, Georgetown to Mahaboa area, under fire from a group of armed men positioned on the Venezuelan bank of the Cuyuni River. The patrol immediately responded to the attack and engaged the assailants with return fire.

During the exchange, several members of the patrol sustained gunshot injuries. Immediate efforts are underway to secure their safe extraction and medical treatment.

The GDF has been authorized to reinforce its presence in the area, ensuring the security of its personnel and safeguarding the operational integrity of Guyana. The force remains committed to protecting its borders and will take all necessary measures to address any threats to national security.

The GDF is closely monitoring the situation and will provide updates as more information becomes available. At this time, the safety and well-being of our troops remain our highest priority.

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