

Mistakes led to long lines at polls: CEC

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The Central Election Commission (CEC) yesterday said that it made mistakes that eventually led to the long lines in last month's nine-in-one elections, adding that it would increase the number of polling stations in coming elections and review rules on when to hold referendums.

The 10 referendums held alongside the local elections on Nov. 24 were approved in October, leaving the government with less than two months to make the necessary adjustments at polling stations, whose planning had been finalized in August, the commission said in a report submitted to the Legislative Yuan's Internal Administration Committee, which is to be reviewed today.

The lines were caused by limited space at polling stations, an insufficient number of curtained booths and multiple referendum ballots that prolonged the voting process, it said, adding that it has since the elections purchased an additional 3,503 curtained booths.

As soon as the long lines appeared, the CEC instructed local election commissions to increase the number of voting booths or move some of the election booths to the referendum area if necessary, it said, but added that the measure did not reduce the lines.

The commission said it made mistakes and inconvenienced voters.

The lines significantly delayed the voting process at some polling stations, where voters continued to wait in line after other stations began counting ballots.

Voters who arrive at polling stations before the deadline must be allowed to vote and polling stations must begin counting ballots after the voting process ends, the CEC said, citing the Civil Servants Election and Recall Act (公職人員選舉罷免法).

A total of 295,904 personnel took part in the elections and referendums, but more than one-third of them had no prior experience in handling votes, the CEC said.

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Due to stress from dealing with long lines and complaints from voters, a number of staff might have behaved inappropriately or handled ballots in ways that were not in line with standard procedure, it added.

The CEC said it would convene a meeting with local election commissions this month to review the voting rules and their execution.

For last month's elections, the CEC said it had calculated the number of polling stations as one for every 1,500 voters in cities, and one for every 1,300 voters in counties and mountain Aboriginal districts.

The experience of holding elections alongside referendums showed that the number of people per polling station should be lowered, the commission said, adding that it would increase the number of polling stations and look for possible locations for new stations.

As more referendums could be held alongside elections, the CEC said it would discuss ways to simplify the processes for casting and counting ballots, including changing the voting order, redesigning referendum ballots and replanning line routes.

In last month's vote, voters cast the ballots for local officials first and then moved to a different counter to collect referendum ballots.

To give the public more time to understand the referendum topics and for the government to make preparations, the CEC said it would review the law on when to hold referendums and consider proposing amendments.

Under Article 23 of the Referendum Act (公職人員選舉罷免法), once a referendum proposal is approved, the commission must hold the referendum within seven months and at least one month after its approval.

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However, if there are national elections scheduled to take place within that period, the referendums must be held alongside the elections, according to the act.

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