



# Liberia Elections Observation Network (LEON)

## LEON PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Monrovia:** *LEON reports on a positive voting and counting process overall, and continues to observe the tallying and post-election environment. There have been problems with slow application of procedures, poor queue control and lack of direction for voters on which polling place they are assigned to. Although this led long queues in many precincts on election day, Liberians exercised their vote in a generally calm manner.*

*Tallying is on-going around the country and it is positive that the NEC has started to issue partial results as they come in. LEON continues to monitor the tallying process in all centers around the country and notes that the process is extremely transparent for both party agents and observers.*

**Methodology:** LEON has deployed 1140 observers throughout Liberia for election day who were stationed in approximately half of all polling precincts and 20% of polling places. They observed opening, voting and the counting process sending findings on these different processes by text directly to a computer database. Reports are still arriving from remote areas and data verification is on going. This statement is based on the checked and verified reports from just over one third of these observers. LEON issued two reports on election day on opening and voting. LEON observers are still observing the tallying process in all centers around Liberia and LEON will release further statements based on their reports. LEON will also issue a final report once all its observers reports have been received which will include an analysis of the entire process from voter registration onwards.

### **Voting:**

By the end of voting LEON observers assessed that the voting process was good or very good in 87% of polling stations observed. This was a slight improvement on their morning assessment and can be linked to the fact that, in many places the queues had subsided and the polling process was smoother in the afternoon.

Voting procedures were generally observed to be followed correctly which meant that important safeguards against multiple voting and intimidation such as checking fingers for ink, punching the voting card and voting in secret, were in place.

Long queues were a problem in many polling stations observed, and led to disorder and tensions in around 10% of precincts. Some queues were caused by late opening of the polling places, mostly due to late arrival of either polling materials or staff. However, the majority of problems were caused by poor queue control, which was noted in 26% of polling places observed, and lack of clear identification of which polling place voters should go to. For instance, in Precinct 30097, Montserrado district 3, there were only two queue controllers for seven polling places.

LEON Observers noted people leaving polling places without voting, It is not known if they returned later and were able to exercise their right to vote. From the NEC gender control sheets in the polling places observed, approximately 52% of voters were women<sup>1</sup>. There is thus the possibility that some men, who would not have had preference in the queues, did not return to vote.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on 103,359 voters

Poor line management also led to tensions in the precincts affected. However, the tensions only spilt over into violence in 13 of the polling precincts where LEON observers were stationed, which indicated the commitment of Liberians to a peaceful process.

Observers also reported interference by candidates or partisans in 2 precincts (33080 Nimba district 1 and 24003 Margibi District 4).

### **Polling staff:**

LEON Observers noted that, on average two of the polling staff were women. However, the Presiding Officer was a woman in only one fifth of polling places observed. Polling staff were following procedures accurately and in full view of observers and party agents. However, they were often very meticulous, particularly during counting, which made the process very slow in some places.

### **Quality of the Voter register**

A small number of voters were missing from the Final Registration Roll in half of polling places observed. These were allowed to vote if their voter ID card numbers fell within the range assigned to the polling place, in accordance with procedures and added to the supplementary voters list.

A few polling places had much larger numbers added to the list, sometimes as many as a third of all people voting. Special categories of people, such as security services and people working with the NEC or observer groups, were allowed to vote at a different polling precinct to where they had registered, and would account for some of these additions to the supplementary register. However, there are strong indications that not all inaccuracies in the voters list were resolved by the NEC prior to the election. LEON conducted a person to list audit of the voter register during the week the Preliminary Registration Roll was exhibited and found that around 4% of the 3033 voters checked were missing from the PRR. We will continue to follow issues with the FRR through tallying and will give further analysis in the final report.

### **Closing:**

LEON noted people still waiting to vote in 78 polling places at 6.00, with the average being 37 people waiting. In Bong County, Precinct 06017, 370 were still waiting to vote but LEON can confirm that the polling place stayed open until 12.30 until they had all voted. Counting started immediately after, in accordance with procedures, and finished at 7.30 am on 11<sup>th</sup>.

### **Counting processes:**

Observers reported that 99% of the counts observed were conducted correctly with 99% offering a clear view of the process to party agents and observers. LEON commends the NEC for having extremely transparent counting procedures.

92% of observers reported no irregularities or problems and 91% rated the process as good or very good as a result. However, 5% of counts did not conduct the reconciliation of how many ballots were used prior to the opening of the ballot box and counting of ballots. Similarly record of count forms and the Presiding Officer's worksheet were correctly completed in all but 4% of counts observed.

There were problems in 31 counting places of party agents interfering in the process and 5 incidences of minor violence.

### **Party Agents:**

Party agents were present during voting and/or counting in 97% polling places that LEON observed. Most commonly found were Unity Party (in 87% of polling places), ANC (84%), ALP (78%), LP (59%), CDC (55%), MOVEE (51%). Male party agents outnumbered women by 2 to 1 on average. Unfortunately, party agents were reported to have tried to interfere in the process in 10% of polling places and 7% of counts observed.

**Security:**

Security personnel were present at 96% of all polling stations observed. On only four occasions did security personnel enter a polling place when there was no disturbance. LEON also noted that security forces had played a positive role during the campaign period with most of the 382 rallies observed being conducted peacefully.

**Persons with disability**

84% of polling places observed were assessed as accessible to elderly or disabled voters. However, in the large cities many polling places were on the first floor and voters with disabilities had not always been assigned to these and had to be carried up.

The NEC is to be commended for printing tactile ballot guides for blind and partially sighted voters. These were present in polling stations for both presidential and representative ballots. LEON observers reported that blind voters were using the tactile ballot guides in half of all polling places observed. Most of the other polling places had no blind people come to vote indicating that blind voters frequently took up the option of voting for themselves.

Voters can ask for assistance to vote from a person of their choice. LEON observers noted that in 7% of polling stations observed a member of the polling staff assisted the voter which is contrary to procedures.

**The campaign, political parties and women's participation**

LEON observers attended **513 political party rallies** across the country since the start of the campaign on July 31st. Of these, 382 were large rallies of over 100 people, the remaining 131 were smaller, local events of between 40 and 99 people.

LEON observers also noted improper use of state resources at 32 rallies (5.9%) which were mostly use of Government vehicles, presidential appointees canvassing for the candidate or use of Government buildings by one party (not allowed to another). There were a further 25 reports of government employees using their government vehicles to canvass for a candidate.

Women were generally under represented at rallies and as speakers, constituting only 34.7% of speakers and 35.3% of the audience. LEON met with active parties in each electoral district and with senior women and youth leaders in each party to determine how issues affecting youth and women are being adopted and reflected by the parties. We have also analyzed what efforts were made by Political Parties to ensure that 30% of candidates would be women. LEON will be releasing its full assessment of the 'endeavors to ensure' after the election. However, in general, parties made slightly less effort to include women than youth in their structure, despite the fact that they have a specific obligation to support women as candidates. Simply put, the parties who did manage to field more women candidates were those that provided them with financial support.

**Tallying:**

LEON long term observers are monitoring the tally process in shifts in all tally centers around the country. They report that the process is very calm and transparent, with copies of the results forms for each polling place being given to party agents and observers and results being read out loud as they are entered into the system. In 85% of reports the agents have been given copies of the computer printouts to verify the entry. Party agents and both Liberian and international observers are all present and party agents are assessed to be working adequately in 90% of tally observations. However, the process is somewhat slow and some of the counts had 1 mathematical errors in the reconciliation that took time to correct. LEON will continue to observe Tallying until the end of the process.

**Post-election environment:**

LEON observers are continuing to observe the post-election environment in all 73 electoral districts. So far they report everything to be calm with good confidence from voters in the process. There have been peace marches in four districts as Liberians continue to strive for a peaceful process.

**Recommendations:**

LEON offers the following recommendations for the immediate post-election period and in the event of a run-off election based on its findings:

**For the NEC:**

1. In the interests of further enhancing the transparency of the process, the NEC should continue to provide clear and frequent updates on the tally with individual results to be posted on its website.
2. Adjudicate electoral disputes in a clear and transparent manner and in the presence of observers and party agents.
3. Provide additional training for queue controllers and presiding officers to ensure better direction of voters to the correct polling place and clear signs at the entrance of large precincts on which voter ID card numbers are assigned to which polling place.
4. Conduct a large-scale awareness campaign in the event of a run off which should include a simple of explanation for voters on the fact that a run off is called for a Presidential election if no candidate receives more than half the votes.
5. Provide clear instructions to polling staff and information to the public on the procedures to be followed for voters whose names are missing from the FRR given that the text system does not always respond.
6. Introduce quotas or the recruitment of underrepresented and disadvantaged persons as electoral staff.

**For Political parties**

1. LEON calls on all political parties to abide by Liberia's laws, remain peaceful and refrain from announcing election results or claiming victory.
2. In the case of a run off parties should deploy as many agents as possible to polling places and improve their training and capacity.
3. Address all electoral grievances through the official complaint mechanism.

**LEON AS AN OBSERVATION NETWORK:**

The Liberia Elections Observation Network (LEON) is a platform of four Liberian Civil Society Organizations: The Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), Liberia Crusaders for Peace (LCP), Federation of Liberia Youth (FLY) and National Union of Organizations for the Disabled (NUOD) with the goal to meaningfully contribute to the democratization process in Liberia by providing an avenue for civil society to participate in monitoring and observing the 2017 elections. LEON has a core team in Monrovia and 133 observers stationed around the country since June, observing all aspects of the electoral process. It has recruited and trained a further 1000 short term observers who have been stationed in polling places in all electoral districts throughout election day, reporting on the voting and counting processes. The 133 Long Term Observers will continue to monitor the post-election environment and to report on the tallying process.

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