

For Immediate Release

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PRESS CONTACT:

Atty. Oscar Bloh
Chairman, ECC Steering Committee
Phone: +231(0)886554109
Secretariat: +231(0)775186929 / 880521998
Email: eccsecretariate2011@gmail.com
Website: eccliberia.com

Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) 2020 Special Senatorial Elections and Referendum PRELIMINARY STATEMENT.

Introduction

This preliminary statement is based on reports that the Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) has received from 483 out of 498 Short-term Observers (STOs) deployed to polling places proportionally nationwide to observe the Special Senatorial Elections and Referendum on December 8, 2020.

Key Findings

Based on reports from ECC observers deployed to polling places in all 73 districts, Liberians turned out peacefully to vote with some instances of intimidation and harassment, campaigning in or near the voting precincts and suspension of polling due to violence.

For example, in Montserrado district 17 at precinct 30198 polling place 1 named Sarah Barclay High School, a group of CDC supporters were at the queue encouraging voters to vote for the CDC candidate. When the CPP Party agent complained about the action, tension erupted which later resulted into violence. It took the police time to calm the situation. In another instance, at Precinct 30247 in Montserrado electoral district 5, polling place 1 at the Police Academy Public School, a man was involved with campaigning and giving voters money to vote for the CDC candidate. Another voter who complained about this was arrested and dragged away by the police instead of the perpetrator who remained at the polling place until the counting was completed.

ECC observed NEC officials conducting civic and voter's education on the Referendum to voters on Election Day.

For example, in Nimba electoral district 1 at precinct 33249 named Hope Village at polling place 2 at 5:00pm, the NEC Voter Information Officer (VIO) was educating voters about the propositions of the Referendum but not giving the rightful information about the process. According to the ECC Observer, the VIO informed voters to vote for four of the eight propositions and was later corrected by the CPP Party Agent. This

brought tension between the NEC voter information officer and the party agent that halted the voting process for about 15 minutes.

Voting Process

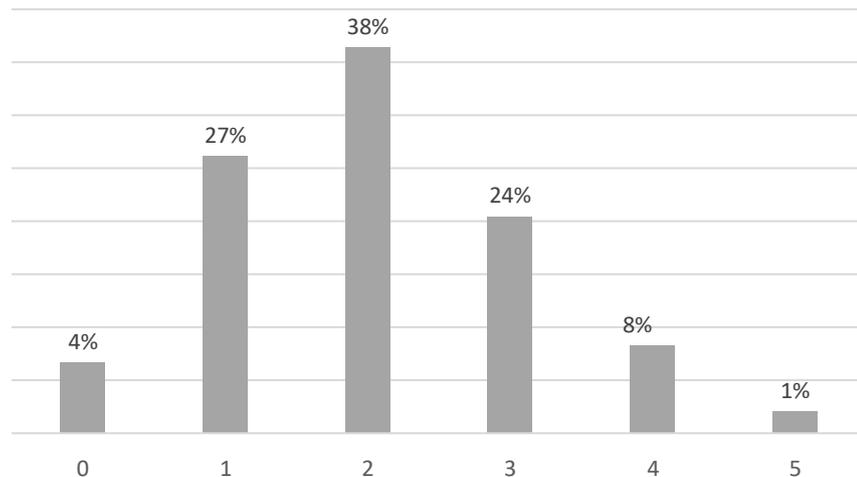
ECC observed the entire Election Day process in their assigned polling places starting with the opening, set-up and continuing through the voting, closing, counting processes and the announcement of the results. Observers reported using an observation checklist and sent reports through coded text messages to a central database system at the ECC’s National Information Center.

Within their polling place, ECC observers witnessed NEC staff generally following voting procedures.

- In 99% of polling places observed, voters were always asked to present their voter registration (VR) card before being allowed to vote.
- ECC observers in 99% of polling places reported that the ballot papers were always stamped before being handed to the voter.
- In 98% of polling places observed, the voting screen was placed in a way that guaranteed the secrecy of the vote.
- ECC observers noted that the finger of every voter was inked after voting in 99% of observed polling places.
- In 99% of observed polling stations, voters received both the Senate and Referendum ballots.

At least two NEC staff in 71% of observed polling places were women, however, only 20% of observed polling places had a woman as the presiding officer.

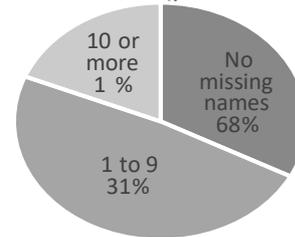
Number of women polling staff per observed polling place



Final Registration Roll (FRR)

In only 68% of observed polling places, all voters who presented a valid VR card found their details on the Final Registration Roll (FRR). However, 31% of polling places observed by the ECC showed that people with valid voter card names were missing from the FRR. ECC observers noted that this caused delays, confusion, and, in few cases, tensions at polling places during the voting process.

Polling places with missing names on the FRR



Elections Coordinating Committee, 2020

ECC observers noted inconsistencies in how NEC staff addressed the issue of voters whose names were missing from the FRR. For instance, in 10% of polling places observed by the ECC, voters with a valid voter's card but whose names were missing on the FRR were permitted to vote. In keeping with the NEC Polling and Counting Manual Chapter 4 on 'Determining Who May Not Vote' sub-section e states that "A person may not vote if she/he cannot be found in the voters' roll". This also applies to the general principle on Exceptional Cases based on the Supreme Court Mandate.

Closing and Counting Process

ECC observers reported that 23% of observed polling places closed after 6:30pm. Similarly, during the closing, there were inconsistencies observed in keeping with the regulations. In 78% of observed polling places there were still voters in the queue at 6:00pm. In 67% of observed polling places, voters in the queue at 6:00pm were allowed to vote. However, in 11% of observed polling places, voters still in the queue at 6:00pm were denied the right to vote.

COVID-19 Health and Safety Protocol

While voting process within the polling place generally ran smoothly, ECC observers reported that NEC staff experienced challenges in ensuring that voters adhere to the social distancing, wear the safety mask and temperatures taken before being allowed to vote in keeping with COVID-19 protocol particularly in areas with higher numbers of registered voters and in voting precincts located in facilities not adequate to accommodate these numbers, this resulted in cluster of voters in a close proximity.

Similarly, during the closing and counting stages of the elections, ECC observers reported that voters generally did not adhere to the social distancing and wearing of mask health and safety protocol for COVID-19. For example, only in 51% of observed polling places, did many voters observe the social distancing protocol and wearing of face mask.

Party Agents

ECC observers reported the presence of at least one party agent at 99% of observed polling places during the voting and counting processes. ECC noted that the CDC and CPP coalitions deployed nearly equal number of party agents in observed polling places

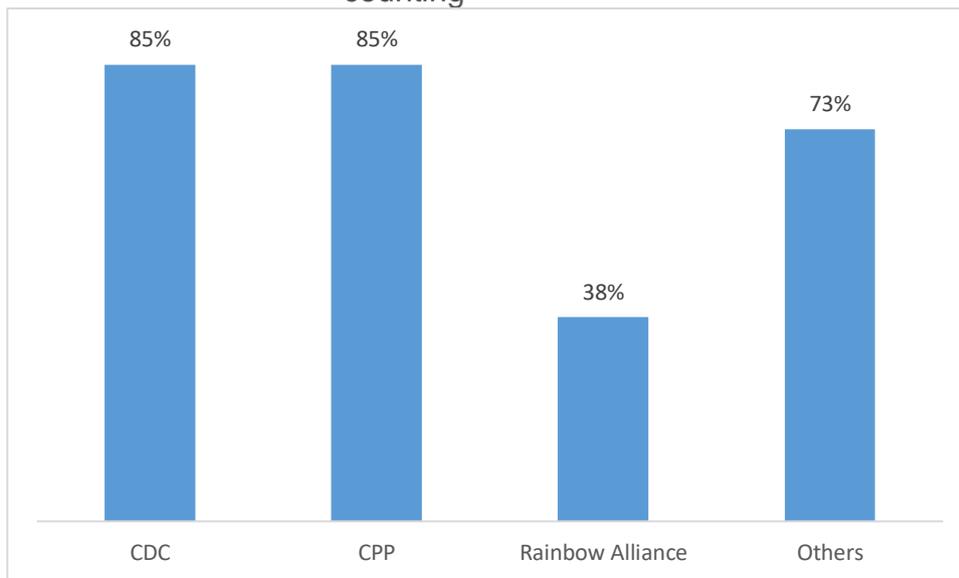
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followed by the Rainbow Alliance during the voting and counting stages of the election. This contributed to a level of transparency in the process.

ECC observed that very few complaints were filed on the process. For example, only in 10% of observed polling places observed that party agents filed a complaint. This demonstrates that there were few challenge on the counting process in most polling places.

Party agents by party at observed polling places at the counting



Elections Coordinating Committee, 2020

Recommendations

To the National Election Commission:

- Provide timely information to the public on any challenges emerging on the counting, collating and transmission of results.
- Treat all electoral disputes equally and adjudicate them in a timely and transparent manner.

To political parties, independent candidates, and their supporters:

- Remain peaceful, abide by the laws and refrain from claiming victory until the certified and official results are declared by the NEC.

- If any political party or independent candidate has grievances on the electoral process and results, follow the laws and procedures as enshrined in the constitution, electoral laws and regulations.

To the Supreme Court:

- Adjudicate all electoral petitions, disputes and grievances in keeping with the due process of law.

To the Liberian National Police and other security agencies:

- Demonstrate neutrality and professionalism in dealing with all electoral stakeholders.

To the media:

- Refrain from disseminating misinformation and disinformation during this counting, collating and announcement of results.

To civil society:

- Continue to disseminate peace and civic education messages in order to reduce the heightened tension.

The ECC Deployment Strategy

The ECC deployed 927 trained and accredited observers including 95 mobile observers and 832 polling place observers deployed in all 73 electoral districts. Of the 927 observers, 832 are systematically deployed as Rapid Response Observers, 498 of which are deployed based on a proportional distribution by district. This means that the proportion of polling stations observed by Rapid Response Observers in each district and county closely matches the overall percentage of polling stations in each district and county. This proportional deployment enables the ECC to comment on the process nationally, drawing on data points from every district of the country. Appendix A provides a detailed breakdown of the distribution of observed polling stations by county.

About the ECC and Observation of the 2020 Special Senatorial Elections and Referendum

The Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) is a civil society platform, comprising 30 organizations that observes all aspects of electoral processes in Liberia, including this 2020 Special Senatorial Elections and Referendum. The ECC has a six member steering committee with representatives from Center for Democratic Governance (CDG); Center for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP); Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD); National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections – Partners for Democratic Development (NAYMOTE-PADD); West Africa

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Network for Peace Building (WANEP) and the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL). CDG serves as the chair of ECC.

The ECC's observation effort takes advantage of advanced information and communication technologies (ICTs) to receive near real-time reports from its observers. The ECC has established a National Information Centre (NIC) in Monrovia to which ECC observers submit reports using coded text messages from their mobile phones. Reports are directly transmitted into a sophisticated database and processed. ECC remains the largest civil society platform that observes elections in Liberia. It works in partnership with the National Democratic Institute with support from the USAID.

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Appendix A: Distribution of observed polling stations by county.

County	Distribution of Polling Places		Deployment of ECC Rapid Response Observers	
	Polling Places	% of Polling Places	Polling Places	% of Polling Places
Bomi	158	2.93%	14	2.81%
Bong	502	9.31%	46	9.24%
Gbarpolu	133	2.47%	13	2.61%
Grand Bassa	388	7.20%	35	7.03%
Grand Cape Mount	171	3.17%	16	3.21%
Grand Gedeh	167	3.10%	15	3.01%
Grand Kru	99	1.84%	9	1.81%
Lofa	417	7.74%	39	7.83%
Margibi	382	7.09%	35	7.03%
Maryland	156	2.89%	15	3.01%
Montserrado	1790	33.21%	166	33.33%
Nimba	699	12.97%	65	13.05%
River Gee	95	1.76%	9	1.81%
Rivercess	97	1.80%	9	1.81%
Sinoe	136	2.52%	12	2.41%
TOTAL	5390	100%	498	100%