Understanding people’s habits and perceptions of key electoral processes. including: the election date; how people register to vote and whether it is feasible to draw data for the voter’s list from the National Identification Register; factors that influence how people choose who to vote for and differences in choosing women candidates; voter and civic education: trust in the election process.



Survey on Election Reform Issues

Conducted August 6-20 2019

**Liberia Elections Observation Network (LEON)**

# **Report on Survey into issues affecting election reform**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In August 2019 The Liberia Election Observation Network conducted a survey of five thousand two hundred and twenty three respondents (5,223) across all electoral districts in Liberia aimed at understanding peoples habits and perceptions of issues surrounding electoral processes.

Our key focuses were: the election date; how people register to vote and whether it is feasible to draw data for the voter’s list from the National Identification Register; what factors influence how people chose who to vote for and are these factors different in choosing women candidates or not; voter and civic education – where people get information from, what information they would like to receive; and what factors build people’s trust in the election process.

**Key findings:**

**On the election date**: With sufficient awareness conducted around moving the election date from October regarding the advantages of holding it in the dry season, there’s a large possibility that this proposal could gain acceptance in a future referendum. Two thirds of respondents agreed with moving the date because they perceived it would be easier for them and for election preparations.

**Voting and voter registration:** Over ninety percent (90%) of respondents voted in either the first or the second round of the 2017 elections and almost all of these plan to vote in the next general election. Thus, a very high percentage of respondents are still interested in exercising their right to vote. Thirteen percent (13%) of voters said that at some time they had been asked by a candidate or political party to register in a different district so that they could vote for them, commonly known as trucking. Almost two thirds of those offered money had accepted since the amount offered was between 10 and 20 US dollars. This represents some 8% of all voters having been trucked at some point.

A third of people who were registered in precincts with more than one polling place in 2017 found it hard to find their names on the voter list on election day, which caused 10% of these to join the wrong queue. A third of respondents also said it also took over 10 minutes for the Voter Identification Officer to find their names on the names on the voter list. This is because the registration Roll is ordered by registration number and not by name. Changing the election law so that voters appear on the registration roll alphabetically, and splitting voters between the polling places in the same way would make it much clearer for people to know where to go and would make voting faster.

Although seventy percent (70%) of respondents said they had heard of the National Identification Registry, just under a quarter of respondents have registered so far. The main reasons for not registering yet are it not happening in the area, cost and distance to travel to register. Moreover, one third of respondents said that their families don’t register babies for birth certificates and almost two thirds said they don’t get death certificates when someone dies. This could create a serious problem if the voter register is to be taken from a permanent civil register, with increasing numbers of ‘ghost voters’ being present on the registration roll over time.

**Women as candidates**: Key factors in choosing which candidate to vote for were reputation and campaign promises. However, when asked what would influence choosing a woman candidate these issues ranked lower than women being perceived as peacemakers and as understanding the needs of the family. Twenty percent of respondents of either gender said they would never vote for a woman. The biggest reason why not was a perception that women are selfish. Only 5% said that women should not be in politics. Financial issues such as women not donating to the community and not running a good campaign were also important.

When asked what puts women off from running for office the main reasons given were also financial and lack of support from Political Parties. This indicates that parties themselves need to give more support in order to achieve more women in the legislature.

Worryingly, women being afraid to run because of threats from the community was thought to be a factor for almost 12% of respondents.

**Civic and voter education:** Just over half of all respondents generally thought they received sufficient voter education in sufficient time. Issues of voter education such as, ‘*who are the candidates’* and ‘*how to mark a ballot’* were of great interest along with the date of elections and how to find their polling place. These education issues require more interaction such as through meetings, rather than through posters, leaflets and radio jingles.

Radio or TV are by far the most important source of information for respondents with over 80% saying that they receive information this way and a third saying that this is their only way of receiving information. NEC educators were in second place. 22% of respondents received information from informal sources such as religious leaders, elders, family and friends. Almost all respondents agreed that there should be special voter education available for potentially marginalized groups such as the blind, deaf, women and first time voters. Almost all respondents thought that voter information should be available in local languages.

The most common place that respondents had received civic education was at school (half of respondents). However, when we asked where people think civic education should take place, although school was still the most important place, town hall meetings were also seen as key. Topics of greatest interest were how elections work and how elected representatives represent us.

**Factors that are important to ensure an election is free and fair.** Although factors such as an impartial election commission and processes such as a secret ballot were all pr5eceived as very important, 60% of respondents thought that a peaceful process was important and 40% said it was the most important factor.

LEON will continue to track this question in future surveys to determine if people are feeling more or less secure and to increase our understanding of what people mean by a peaceful process. Greater confidence in electoral processes or Political Parties desisting from malpractice and harsh rhetoric could all add to feeling that peaceful processes are under threat.

**ABOUT THE LIBERIAN ELECTION OBSERVATION NETWORK:**

The Liberia Elections Observation Network (LEON), launched in May 2017 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 democratization processes in Liberia. LEON observed the 2017 elections with over 1000 observers and has observed subsequent by-elections and is preparing to observe in Grand Cape Mount.

LEON has funding from the Swedish Embassy and received technical assistance from the Carter Center. It has a core team based in Monrovia and a long term observer based in each of the 73 electoral districts across Liberia. It is currently engaged in advocacy on election reform issues, legislative monitoring and conducting surveys into issues affecting democracy in Liberia. It has 200 trained surveyors and will be conducting a further five surveys over the course of the next 12 months.

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**METHODOLOGY**

LEON trained and deployed 242 surveyors across the country in early August 2019. The survey was conducted in all 73 electoral districts across the country between 6 and 20 August 2019. LEON received 5223 completed survey forms in total. The fact that the survey was so large enables LEON to disaggregate data where needed whilst still retaining a robust sample.

The surveyors reported directly to the database through an on-line survey application. The full methodology and survey questionnaire are in annexes 1 and 2.

*Figure 1.*

LEON deployed between three and four surveyors to each electoral district to get an robust distribution of respondents across the country. Comparing the percentage of respondents to the NEC voter registration data from 2017 *(figure 1)* it can be seen that LEON has a lower percentage of respondents in highly populated, urban, areas compared to the voting population. This is because these electoral districts have a higher population than more rural districts, due to boundary delimitation issues. LEON also wanted to ensure that we were capturing the habits and perceptions of people outside of the main conurbations.

Surveyors had to survey 10 people in each of two areas, one more urban and one more rural or remote. Techniques were used to ensure random selection of location, household and respondent within the household. The majority of questions were asked as open questions without prompting the answer: Ie the surveyor would mark one or more of the answer options that best matched their answer or could mark ‘other’.

**DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS**

Surveyors were told to ensure that roughly equal numbers of men and women were surveyed and this was achieved. Four respondents identified as transgender or no gender.

*Figure 2*

Eighteen percent of respondents had some form of disability *(figure 3*). The 2016 UNICEF report gives the percentage of persons with disability in the populations as 16% although the National Union of Organizations for the Disabled thinks it is higher, in line with this survey. The fact that the majority of surveys were conducted in people’s homes will have helped capture more people with disabilities.

*Figure 3*

98% of respondents were Liberian *(figure 4)*

*Figure 5*

LEON surveyors captured people from all age brackets in the survey *(figure 5).* Available NEC voter registration data does not have corresponding brackets but gives a slightly higher percentage of people under the age of 25.

*Figure 6*

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**Section 1: MOVING THE GENERAL ELECTION**

LEON asked three questions relating to the election date – if it should be moved, why or why not?

Even though this proposition failed in the 2010 referendum, when the reason for moving the election is given, as it was in the question, people are more likely to favour it (91%).

*Figure 7*

This indicates that, with sufficient awareness conducted around moving the date, it could gain acceptance in a future referendum. People who agreed with moving the date did so because they perceived it would be easier for them and for the NEC. Political campaigning was of lower importance. *(Figure 8)*

The main reasons given by people who did not want a change in the election date are wanting to preserve tradition and the constitution.

*Figure 9*

**VOTER PARTICIPATION**

90.3% of respondents voted in either the first or the second round of the 2017 elections *(figure 10)* and 89.1% of these plan to vote in the next general elections *(figure 11*). Thus, a very high percentage of respondents are still interesting in exercising their right to vote.

*Figure 10**Figure 11*

The ten percent of respondents who did not vote in either 2017 election but were still eligible, did not vote because they were not in their district or were sick or otherwise unable to go. Incidents of people being intimidated were low (*figure 12).* Just under 5% of respondents didn’t vote because they couldn’t be found on the Final Registration Roll (FRR) despite having registered and 3% didn’t know where to go to vote.

*Figure 12*

**SECTION 2: VOTER REGISTRATION AND NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION**

The following set of questions on voter registration were asked only of the 90.3% of respondents who said they had voted in 2017. Questions on national identification were asked of all respondents.

The majority of respondents reported that they registered to vote where they live normally.

*Figure 13*

*Figure 14*

Thirteen percent (33) of the 5% (236) of respondents who said that they registered in a different place said it was because they were ‘trucked’ *(figure 14)*

It must be noted that the sample size is small.

When we asked all respondents the same question, 13% (609) also said that at some time they had been asked by a candidate or political party to register in a different district so that they could vote for them *(figure 15)*. 61% (367) of those offered money for ‘trucking’ in the past had accepted. People were offered between 10 and 20 US dollars to vote in another district, mostly $20[[1]](#footnote-1).

*Figure 15*

Thus it would seem that candidates do attempt to pay for people to register in a different area and can be successful but the cost is high. The total percentage of people trucked in this way is likely to be in the order of between 5 and 8%[[2]](#footnote-2). There was no appreciable difference between male and female respondents.

**Polling place and Precinct identification**

The percentage of respondents claiming that they checked their names during exhibition is much higher than expected (73%) *(figure 16*). LEON observed the exhibition period in June 2017 and did not observe large numbers of people coming to check their details, possibly half this percentage came to check. It is likely that people confused the question with having checked details on the lists exhibited just prior to the election.

*Figure 16*

*Figure 17*

Over half the respondents know where to go vote because it was their place of registration *(figure 17)* and a similar percentage expect to be informed by the NEC where to go if the Precinct location changes *(figure 18*). This indicates that, over time, voters may have difficulty in knowing where to go if the Voter Register is taken from the National Identification database and that the NEC would need to increase voter information on polling locations.

*Figure 18*

In terms of finding the correct Polling Place on Election Day, if we remove the respondents who voted in Precincts with only one Polling Place, a third of the respondents voting in multiple Precincts found it difficult to find the correct Polling Place. (*Figure 19*) 6.8% of respondents joined the wrong queue, with 1.4% giving up and 0.4% being turned away because they their names could not be found at all.

*Figure 19*

The length of time it took for the Voter Identification Officer (VIO) to find people on the Registration Roll was also reported as being very long, with a third of respondents saying it took more than 10 minutes *(Figure 20).*

*Figure 20*

Changing the election law so that voters appear on the registration roll alphabetically[[3]](#footnote-3), and splitting voters between the polling places in the same way would make it much clearer for people to know where to go and for the VIO to find their name on the list.

**National Identification Registry**

*Figure 21**Figure 22*

Although 70% of respondents said they had heard of the National Identification Registry *(figure 21*) , just under a quarter of respondents have registered themselves *(figure 22*). The main reasons for not registering are: not knowing about it; it not happening in the area yet; cost; and distance to travel to register. *(Figure 23)*

*Figure 23*

*Figure 24 Figure 25*

Over half of respondents who said they had registered with the NIR, registered this year *(figure 24).* The government directive that no civil servants would be paid unless they registered and banks now requesting the National ID card to receive transfers from abroad may have helped towards this increase. The majority of people who had registered found the process relatively easy *(figure 25).*

One third of respondents said that their families don’t register babies for birth certificates *(figure 26)* and almost two thirds said they don’t get death certificates when someone dies *(figure 27).* This could create a serious problem if the voter register is to be taken from a permanent civil register, with increasing numbers of ‘ghost voters’ present on the voter’s roll over time.

*Figure 26 Figure 27*

**SECTION 3: CANDIDATE SELECTION AND WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION**

The following set of questions were asked to discover how people chose who to vote for and whether there are different factors involved when selecting male and female candidates. We disaggregated the answers by gender to see if men and women have different factors involved in their decision making.

Only just over 40% of either gender have ever voted for a female senatorial or representative candidate.

*Figure 28*

However, 66% said they would vote for a female candidate in the future. Just under a fifth of respondents said they would never vote for a woman*.*

*Figure 29*

The main reasons respondents gave for not wanting to vote for a woman were perceived personality faults such as selfishness or factors to do with money such as giving money to the community *(figure 30)*. Around 5% of respondents were affected by negative feelings towards the Sirleaf Presidency. Traditional roles of women staying at home or women not having sufficient education were not major factors. However 5% of respondents said that the party they support is run by men indicating that Political Parties themselves should do more in actively promoting women and by helping with their campaigns.

*Figure 30*

However, there were a perceptions of positive personality traits that were also appealing about women as candidates – women are perceived as less likely to be corrupt, more likely to be peacemakers and to look out for the interests of families (*figure 31).*

*Figure 31*

When asked which of these reasons was most important, women understanding the needs of the family scored highest followed by women as peacemakers and having a positive reputation (*figure 32*).

*Figure 32*

When respondents were asked how normally choose who to vote for, the top answers were for having a good reputation (37%), being known as a good leader (38% and on campaign promises (35%) *(figure 33).* By comparison, when choosing a woman candidate, campaign promises were only important to 15.5% of respondents. The political party a candidate belongs to was only important to 5% of respondents.

*Figure 33*

There was no great difference between how men and women chose candidates except that women said they were more likely to vote for an important person or based on the campaign poster. It should be noted that women said that they chose for themselves - less than 1% of either women or men said they were not the ones who chose who they should vote for.

When respondents were asked what puts a woman off running for office, 28.6% of people thought that political parties are not supportive of women as candidates *(figure 34*). The second most popular answer was that women lack funds to run a successful campaign (21%). Lack of community or family support was thought to be a factor for 14% of respondents and Threats against women from the community was a factor for 11.6% of respondents which could be considered. It should be noted that both of the serious incidents of election related violence in recent by elections have been directed against female candidates[[4]](#footnote-4). Only 6% of respondents thought that women were not interested to run, a figure backed up by the fact that a roughly similar percentage of men and women candidates ran as independents at the 2017 elections, not having been able to find a party to ally with.

*Figure 34*

Perceptions that women lack confidence or education or don’t want to run as candidates factored lower than women being held back by lack of support or funds, particularly support of political parties[[5]](#footnote-5). This indicates that, parties themselves need to give more support in order to achieve more women in the legislature.

 **SECTION 4: VOTER EDUCATION AND INFORMATION**

LEON asked questions separately regarding voter education and civic education, to see if people received information from different sources and which topics they are most interested in.

*Figure 35*

All issues apart from the reason for the election were of interest to at least a quarter of the respondents *(figure 34).* It should be noted that voter education issues such as ‘*who are the candidates’* and ‘*how to mark a ballot’* are best dealt with through meetings, rather than through posters, leaflets and radio jingles.

*Figure 36*

Radio or TV are by far the most important source of information for respondents *(figure 36)* with 81.7% saying that they receive information this way and 36% saying that this is their only way of receiving information. NEC educators were in second place. 22% of respondents received information from informal sources such as religious leaders, elders, family and friends.

However, around half of all respondents reported that they did not get enough voter information

*(Figure 37)*

There was no consistent pattern when we examined the responses county by county. River Gee, River Cess and Grand Cape Mount had greater percentage of respondents who said they did not have enough information, with Margibi, Bomi, Gbarpolu reporting the greatest satisfaction *(figure 38).*

*Figure 38*

Respondents generally thought that information campaigns for both voter registration and for voting started at around the right time *(figure 39).* There was no appreciable difference between male and female respondents to the questions.

*Figure 39*

Almost all respondents agreed that there should be special voter education available for different potentially marginalized groups.

Whether or not a respondent had a disability, they thought that there should be education for blind voters on how to use tactile ballots *(figure 40)* and for deaf voters through sign language in the community *(figure 41)* . This is extremely relevant considering that radio is such an important vehicle for voter information.

*Figure 40*

*Figure 41*

Respondents also thought that there should be specific voter education aimed at women *(figure 42),* in local languages *(figure 43)* and for first time voters *(figure 44).*

This did not vary between male and female respondents. However, women’s education campaigns scored slightly lower on ‘Strongly agree’ than the other special interest groups.

*Figure 42*

*Figure 43*

*Figure 44*

There was also no difference between how respondents of different ages answered the question on first time voters *(figure 45)*.

*Figure 45*

**SECTION 5: CIVIC EDUCATION**

Respondents were prompted for this set of questions to ensure they understood what civic education might cover.

*Figure 46*

Over half the respondents were interested in how elections work and in how elections represent their constituents (figure 46). However, all other topics were also of interest to around a quarter of the respondents. Issues of local government and county development, and how county development funds are allocated, were also raised by respondents and deserve attention.

The most common place that respondents had received civic education was at school (48.3%) *(figure 47).* However, when we asked where people think civic education should take place *(figure 48),* although school was still the most important place, town hall meetings were also seen as key. This was the only answer that scored higher in where respondents want civic education to take place than where they actually receive education. Election commission workers and civil society organizations also scored lower in respondents idea of where civic education should take place than in the reality.

*Figure 47*

*Figure 48*

**SECTION 6: FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS**

Our final questions were on what factors are most important to ensure an election is free and fair. The answers were prompted.

Although factors such as an impartial election commission and processes such as a secret ballot were all very important, two thirds of respondents thought that a peaceful process was important *(figure 49).* This choice became even more pronounced when respondents had to choose which was the most important factor *(figure 50).*

*Figure 49*

*Figure 50*

LEON will continue rack this question in future surveys to determine if people are feeling more or less secure and to increase our understanding of what people mean by a peaceful process. Greater confidence in electoral processes or Political Parties desisting from malpractice and harsh rhetoric could all add to feeling of peaceful processes are under threat.



1. Where people answered in Liberian dollars we used a conversion rate of $90 Liberian to the US dollar, the market rate in early 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 61% who agreed to trucking of the 13% that were asked. The margin allows for the small sample size. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 1986 New Election Law article 3.4… ‘The names shall be numbered in regular progressive arithmetical order, commencing with number 1.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The attack Cornelia Togba’s New Georgia compound in the November 2018 Monsterrado District #13 by election and the attacks against Telia Urey in Logan Town during the July/August 2019 Montserrado District #15 by election. Recent threats against Senator Karnga Lawrence should also be considered as violence against women in politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This echoes LEON’s 2017 survey of women in political parties where the women said the biggest barriers to standing as candidates were lack of finds, difficulty in mobilising support, and the party not taking them seriously. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)