



Tuesday, November 14, 2023 (12:45 PM)
Monrovia, Liberia

**LEON'S ELECTION OBSERVATION:
SITUATIONAL REPORT FOR OPENING OF POLLS DURING
2023 PRESIDENTIAL RUNOFF ELECTION**

LEON observes that over 98% of polling places opened within the first 30 minutes.

LEON recognizes that over 80% of polling places are accessible to persons with disabilities.

LEON observes that over 99% of polling places had their electoral materials.

LEON notes that both political parties have poll watchers at more than 96% of polling places.

LEON calls on NEC to improve gender balance among polling place officials in the future.

The Liberia Elections Observation Network (LEON) is pleased to submit to the Liberian people and the international community this mid-day statement on its initial findings from observations during the opening of polling places for the second round of the 2023 presidential election.

LEON is a network of the Liberia Crusaders for Peace (LCP), Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY), and National Union of Organizations of the Disabled (NUOD). Since 2017, LEON has developed into a respected election observation organization operating in the democracy and governance space and has successfully conducted a range of activities, including election observation, legislative monitoring, social media monitoring, political participation of women and persons with disabilities, citizen perception surveys, and advocating for electoral law reform.

Observer Deployment

As of 7:00 AM, on November 14, 2023, LEON deployed 1,048 observers, including 73 long-term observers (LTOs), assigned to each electoral district; 904 short-term observers (STOs), assigned to randomly selected polling places; 18 mobile field observers (MFOs), assigned to designated counties; and 53 field coordinators (FCs), assigned to support data collection. LEON's four Steering Committee members also deployed to monitor electoral proceedings in Monrovia. All observers are fully accredited by the National Elections Commission (NEC). The STOs are assigned to 904 polling places, representing a viable statistical presence in all counties. LEON's observer coverage includes approximately 15% of all polling places from among the 73 electoral districts. LEON provides the following findings from the opening of polls from around the country.

Opening of Polls (Data as of 12:45 PM)

LEON's observers reported the following information on the opening of polling places.

LEON notes that approximately 98.3% of polling places observed opened within the first 30 minutes from the official poll opening time. LEON recognizes that this figure is approximately 8% higher than the approximately 89.1% recorded during the October 10th elections.

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Polling Place Opening Time	At 8:00	8:01 – 8:30	8:31 – 9:00	After 9:00
	74.7%	23.6%	1.5%	0.2%

Accessibility of Polling Places

LEON’s observers reported that among polling places observed, over 80% were deemed accessible to persons with disabilities. LEON calls on NEC to continue to improve its polling place identification process so that this figure is 100% during future elections.

	Yes	No
Voting Precinct Accessible to Persons with Disabilities	81.9%	18.1%
Polling Place Accessible to Persons with Disabilities	81.3%	18.7%

Polling Materials

LEON’s observers reported the presence of the following electoral materials at polling places. LEON notes that in all polling places observed, the materials present exceeded 99%, a commendable achievement by NEC to provide these materials to the polling precincts.

Materials	Yes	No
Final Registration Roll	99.8%	0.2%
Ballot Papers	99.9%	0.1%
Validating Stamp	99.7%	0.3%
Stamp Pad	99.7%	0.3%
Voting Screen	99.8%	0.2%
Tactile Ballot Guide	99.5%	0.5%
Indelible Ink	99.8%	0.2%

Display of Ballot Boxes

LEON’s observers reported the following information during the opening of polling places:

	Yes	No
Ballot Box Shown to Be Empty Before Voting	99.8%	0.2%

NEC Polling Staff

LEON notes that approximately 33.6% of NEC staff are females at the polling places observed:

Gender of Polling Place Staff	Male	Female
	66.4%	33.6%

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LEON recognizes that these figures are a decrease in the same figures of 58.8% for males and 41.2% for females during the October 10th elections.

During the November 14th runoff election, LEON observed the distribution of males and females among the five positions for electoral officials within a polling place. LEON is concerned that women only constituted a low figure of approximately 16.4% for Presiding Officers at polling places observed. Ballot Issuers and Box Controllers showed greater parity between males and females; however, Identification Officers and Queue Controllers also show a large difference between males and females.

LEON calls on NEC to increase its efforts toward gender balance and inclusion of persons with disabilities during the recruitment of polling place officials in future elections.

Polling Place Staff	Present	Not Present	Male	Female
Presiding Officer	98.2%	1.8%	81.8%	16.4%
Ballot Issuer	97.3%	2.7%	54.8%	42.7%
Box Controller	96.6%	3.4%	53.0%	43.6%
ID Officer	97.5%	2.5%	61.0%	36.5%
Queue Controller	93.0%	7.0%	68.4%	24.6%

Party Agents or Poll Watchers

LEON's observers reported the presence of party agents/poll watchers at polling places observed. Party agents/poll watchers present are as follows: Coalition of Democratic Change (CDC) with approximately 96.9% and Unity Party (UP) with approximately 98%. LEON recognizes that these figures are higher than the CDC's 90% and UP's 84.5% of party agents/poll watchers present during the October 10th elections.

Party Agents	Present	Not Present	Male	Female
CDC	96.9%	3.1%	82.2%	14.7%
UP	98.0%	2.0%	79.9%	18.1%

Election Observation Groups

LEON's observers indicated the presence of domestic and international election observers at polling places observed:

Presence of Observer Groups					
AU	2.5%	ECOWAS	9.1%	EU	4.7%
Liberia Council of Churches	6.1%	EISA	2.4%	Mandingo National Caucus	2.1%
ECC	34.8%	EON-Liberia	8.7%	Muslim Council	2.7%

Security Presence

LEON observers reported security forces present at approximately 95.4% of polling places observed:

	Yes	No
Security Present at the Voting Precinct	95.4%	4.6%

LEON reiterates its call to the Liberian joint security forces to continue protecting polling precincts and to provide adequate resources to the transit of ballot boxes and to NEC tally centers to enable a safe and secure runoff election.

Social Media Monitoring

The preliminary findings reveal a diverse range of sentiments and themes within social media activity of political actors and influencers. Positive posts dominate, but there is a notable presence of negative sentiments, instances of discrediting NEC and political parties, and discussions around election irregularity. Additionally, a significant number of posts are focused on advocating for specific political behaviors:

- ◆ **Sentiment Analysis:**
 - Positive Posts: 14 posts (67%)
 - Negative Posts: 7 posts (33%)
- ◆ **Discrediting NEC:**
 - 3 posts (14%) were identified as discrediting NEC.
- ◆ **Discrediting Party:**
 - 3 posts (14%) were coded as discrediting a political party.
- ◆ **Irregularities:**
 - 5 posts (24%) discussed irregularities in the electoral process.
- ◆ **Calls for Political Behavior:**
 - 10 posts (48%) emphasized the need for specific political behavior, urging their supporters to turn out to vote.

Incidents Reported

Central Region

Based on the show of pictorial evidence, NEC Magistrate for Lofa County removed a Presiding Officer (Sarkonnedu, polling precinct No. 21080, polling place No. 3) after he was found to be an active member of one of the contesting political parties.

Western Region

Questions around a party agent's possession of the final registration roll (FRR) caused delays in voting in Montserrado County, Electoral District 2 (Hope for Life School, polling precinct No. 30099, polling place No. 5). The party agent was removed from the polling place and replaced with another

agent. LEON notes that a party agent possessing the FRR is legitimate and in accordance with the New Elections Law (2014).

South-Eastern Region

According to LEON's LTO in River Gee County, Electoral District 1, a female was allowed to vote using her 2017 voter registration card at polling precinct No. 42012, polling place No. 4. The woman, along with the Voter Identification Officer were arrested. LEON verified this report with the local NEC magistrate and arresting officer who confirmed the arrest. LEON commends the local security forces for their diligence in addressing this matter.

South-Central Region

A minister from the Ministry of Education caused a serious stir at the Booker Washington Institute (BWI), in Margibi County, Electoral District 4 (polling precinct No. 24110, polling place No. 3). An LTO reported that the minister was seen giving out cash to voters and overtly showing up his two fingers in the air. A political party agent at the polling precinct called on security forces who intervened to stop him.

Conclusion

LEON encourages all Liberians to participate and exercise their constitutional right to elect your political representatives. LEON calls on all political parties to respect the electoral process and exercise patience as NEC continues to conduct the election and then count, tabulate, and announce the final results of the second round of the 2023 presidential election in Liberia.

Thank you. For further information, please contact the LEON Head of Secretariat and Spokesperson.

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2017 Voter ID Card used in River Gee County in South-Eastern Region