



Wednesday, October 15, 2023 (2:00 PM)  
Monrovia, Liberia

**LEON'S ELECTION OBSERVATION:  
SITUATIONAL REPORT FOR VOTING, CLOSING OF POLLS, AND COUNTING  
DURING THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL RUNOFF ELECTION**

*LEON assesses the voting, closing of polls, and counting processes as generally improved when compared to the October 10<sup>th</sup> presidential and legislative elections.*

*LEON commends National Elections Commission (NEC) officials for largely performing their duties in accordance with its procedures to deliver the presidential runoff election.*

*LEON commends both political parties and the Liberian people for contributing to a peaceful and orderly presidential runoff election.*

*LEON calls on political parties, voters, and all stakeholders to respect the electoral process and exercise patience for NEC to complete its constitutional mandate.*

The Liberia Elections Observation Network (LEON)<sup>1</sup> provides the following post-election day statement on its initial findings during observation of voting, closing of polls, and counting during the second round of the 2023 presidential election. LEON observers reported improved adherence to procedures stipulated by the National Elections Commission (NEC), incidents as reported and verified by its observers and analysts, and preliminary trends from ongoing social media monitoring. This statement follows LEON's mid-day statement issued on November 14, 2023, with its preliminary findings from the opening of polls around the country.

During the 2023 presidential runoff election, LEON continued implementing its sample-based observation (SBO) by deploying 73 long-term observers (LTOs), 53 field coordinators (FCs), and 18 mobile field observers (MFOs) to supervise and support observations from 904 short-term observers (STOs) at a statistically relevant sample of designated polling places in all 73 electoral districts. The STOs were deployed to the same 904 polling places observed during the October 10<sup>th</sup> elections.

LEON reiterates that its observers and coordinators pledged to abide by a code of conduct to maintain their impartiality. Furthermore, LEON is conducting its SBO guided by the Liberian legal framework and domestic and international election observation standards and its observation approach is founded on the principles of neutrality, nonpartisanship, integrity, and independence to assess the overall quality and integrity of the 2023 electoral cycle.

LEON's preliminary assessment that the voting, closing of polls, and counting processes are generally improved when compared to the October 10<sup>th</sup> presidential and legislative elections are based on LEON's observers at assigned polling places from the 15 counties across the country. Observations on the NEC procedures followed are based on data collected and verified as of 9:00

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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AM on November 15, 2023. LEON’s Election Day process data are followed by incidents reported by its observers and trends identified during social media monitoring of the electoral setting.

**Voting Procedures**

LEON’s observers reported the following procedural findings from the polling places observed on runoff Election Day.

Most NEC officials “always” adhered to procedures in the eight categories listed below; however, in two categories – “Ballot Issuer Explained How to Vote Correctly” and “Voters Left Polling Place After Voting” – LEON observed compliance in approximately 78.4% of polling places for both points. The remaining six categories ranged between approximately 90.4% and 97.5% of polling places. The “mostly” category for the two lower categories was 12.7% and 16.1%, respectively, while the other six categories ranged from 1.8% to 5.2% of polling places. The range for the combined figures for procedural adherence increases to a more reassuring 94.5% to 99.3% of polling places.

The observer data indicates that a high number of NEC officials appeared to “always” and “mostly” understand and implement the NEC’s procedures during runoff Election Day at the polling places observed.

Regardless, LEON remains concerned that important procedural steps were observed as “sometimes” or “never” being adhered to. For example, observers reported that queue controllers did not check for valid voter cards in approximately 3.1% of polling places, identification officers did not tick voter names on the final registration roll in approximately 3.9% of polling places, and ballot issuers did not explain how to cast a ballot correctly in approximately 3.0% of polling places.

Notably, NEC officials improved on explaining the use of the tactile ballot to visually impaired voters with observers noting that the voter aid tool was explained “always” in approximately 90.6% of polling places, compared to 77.9% during the October 10<sup>th</sup> elections. Queue controllers checking for valid voter card was observed as “always” in approximately 90.4% of polling places, compared to 85.3% in the previous elections.

LEON notes that voters departed the polling places “always” and “mostly” at a higher rate of approximately 94.5% over the approximately 89.4% of polling places observed during the October 10<sup>th</sup> elections.

LEON recommends NEC to improve its training methods and emphasize the needs of visually impaired and other people with disabilities so they can more fully participate during future elections.

	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Never
<b>Queue Controller Checked for Valid Voter Card</b>	90.4%	5.2%	1.4%	3.1%
<b>ID Officer Put Tick Next to Name on Registration Roll</b>	92.5%	3.1%	0.5%	3.9%
<b>Ballot Issuer Stamped Back of Voter’s Ballot</b>	97.5%	1.8%	0.1%	0.5%

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	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Never
<b>Ballot Issuer Explained How to Vote Correctly</b>	78.4%	12.7%	5.9%	3.0%
<b>Tactile Ballot Explained to Blind / Partially Sighted</b>	90.6%	5.1%	2.1%	2.2%
<b>Box Controller Marked Voter with Indelible Ink</b>	96.5%	1.9%	0.3%	1.3%
<b>Secrecy of the Ballot Respected During Voting</b>	95.5%	3.2%	0.4%	0.9%
<b>Voters Left Polling Place After voting</b>	78.4%	16.1%	5.1%	0.4%

LEON's observers also reported that in approximately 8.3% of polling places observed, individuals were allowed to vote without a valid voter card and people were seen campaigning at the polling place during voting in approximately 5.8% of polling places observed. Even though most polling places adhered to NEC's procedures, LEON considers these deviations as concerning.

LEON acknowledges that procedural adherence was reported between 91.7% and 99.4% at polling places observed, but LEON also recommends NEC to continue improving these important areas for procedural improvement and policy enforcement.

	No	Yes
<b>Individuals Allowed to Vote without Valid Voter Card</b>	91.7%	8.3%
<b>People Campaigning at Polling Place During Voting</b>	94.2%	5.8%
<b>Polling Place Ran Out of Ballot Papers During the Day</b>	99.4%	0.6%
<b>Polling Place Ran Out of Indelible Ink During the Day</b>	99.4%	0.6%

LEON is also concerned that unauthorized individuals were observed at polling places but also recognizes that this area of observation improved from the October 10<sup>th</sup> elections. Traditional leaders at polling places decreased from 4.4% to 2.1%; local government officials decreased from 8.4% to 7.9%; and candidates or party officials decreased from 8.6% to 7.1%.

LEON calls on traditional leaders, local government officials, and candidates or party officials to adhere to the procedures of the NEC to avoid presence at polling places.

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Unauthorized Individuals at Polling Places	Percentage of Polling Places Observed
Traditional Leaders	2.1%
Local Government Officials	7.9%
Candidates or Party Officials	7.1%

LEON's observers reported that the pace of voting was dramatically improved over the October 10<sup>th</sup> elections increasing from 66.9% to 90.1% of voters casting their ballot within five minutes. This increase in efficiency is expected given that only one ballot with two options needed to be completed, instead of three different ballots with many candidate options to choose from.

LEON notes that this increase in the pace of voting may have contributed to a decrease in long lines and a backlog in voters waiting to cast their ballots.

Average Time to Process One Voter	0-5 Minutes	5-10 Minutes	10+ Minutes
	90.1%	9.9%	0.0%

LEON commends NEC for providing a polling place layout that enabled political party agents/poll watchers and domestic and international observers to view the electoral process “very well” in approximately 87.1% of polling places and “well” in approximately 12.6% of polling places, for a notable combined rate for agent/observer access of approximately 99.7%. LEON notes that this high figure is a slight increase from the 98% combined figure during the October 10<sup>th</sup> elections.

Agents/Observers Able to Observe	Very Well	Well	Not Well	Not Allowed
	87.1%	12.6%	0.0%	0.3%

In the lead up to the runoff election, LEON experienced challenges in receiving timely accreditation badges for its replacement and supplemental observers from NEC headquarters in Monrovia. LEON recommends that during future elections, NEC consider a procedure for its magisterial offices to be authorized to issue observer accreditation to enable a more timely and logistically efficient method for allowing citizen observation groups to distribute badges to its polling place observers.

**Closing of Polls**

LEON's observers reported a marked increase in the number of polling places closing on time at 6:00 PM, improving from 30% to 72.6% when compared to the October 10<sup>th</sup> elections. The number of polling places closing after 6:31 PM also decreased from 42.5% to 3.2%, comparatively.

LEON notes that there were no voters in line at 6:00 PM at 70% of polling places observed, which is a large difference from the 27.9% observed during the October 10<sup>th</sup> elections. Instances where there were more than 20 voters in line after 7:00Pm also decreased considerably from 38.7% to 5.4%, comparatively.

Polling Place Closing Time	At 6:00	6:01–6:30	6:30–7:00	After 7:00
	72.6%	24.2%	1.5%	1.7%
Voters in Line at Close of Polls	0	1–10	11–20	More than 20
	70.0%	21.2%	3.3%	5.4%

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LEON's observers reported that voters in line at the close of the polls were permitted to vote at approximately 95.9% of polling places, an increase from the 89% observed during the October 10<sup>th</sup> elections. Notably, the voters not permitted to vote also decreased from 11% to 4.1%, comparatively.

LEON notes positively that NEC officials sealed ballot boxes at the end of voting in approximately 99.8% of polling places and packed voting materials away before counting in approximately 96.1% of polling places observed.

	Yes	No
<b>Voters in Line at Close of Polls Permitted to Vote</b>	95.9%	4.1%
<b>Ballot Box Sealed at End of Voting</b>	99.8%	0.2%
<b>Voting Materials Packed Away Before Counting</b>	96.1%	3.9%

**Overall Observer Assessment**

Most of LEON's observers, reporting from all 73 electoral districts, assessed the Election Day process as "very good" at approximately 74.7% or "good" at approximately 23.6% with a combined assessment of approximately 98.3% considering the process as good or very good. These observer assessments show an increase from the 66.2% "very good" but slight decrease from the 29.9% "good" for a combined increase from the assessment of 96% during the October 10<sup>th</sup> elections.

LEON commends NEC for deploying well-trained polling officials who generally adhered to the policies and procedures to deliver the presidential runoff election.

Overall Observer Assessment	Very Good	Good	Average	Bad	Very Bad
	74.7%	23.6%	1.6%	0.1%	0.0%

**Counting Procedures**

LEON's observers reported that five main counting procedures were implemented by NEC officials at high rates ranging from approximately 99.3% to 100% at the polling places observed. LEON notes that the presidential counting forms were published for public view at the polling places approximately 99.4% of polling places observed.

	Yes	No
<b>Reconciliation Done Before Counting Started</b>	100%	0%
<b>Sorting of Ballot Papers Done Correctly</b>	99.3%	0.6%
<b>Presiding Officer Worksheet Filled Correctly</b>	100%	0%
<b>Presidential Record Count Published for Public View</b>	99.4%	0.6%

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	Yes	No
<b>Materials Packed and Sealed Correctly at End of Counting</b>	98.8%	1.2%

Notably, LEON observers reported that party agents/poll watchers were present at 99.8% of polling places observed and they signed the presidential counting forms in approximately 99.9% of polling places. LEON notes that party agents/poll watchers signing the counting forms is a clear sign of acceptance of those results. This high rate of procedural compliance during the counting process provides further confidence that NEC officials performed their duties in a professional and transparent manner among the polling places where LEON observed.

Party Agents	Present	Signed Record Count	Did Not Sign Record Count
CDC	99.8%	99.9%	0.1%
UP	99.8%	99.9%	0.1%

## Incidents Reported

### *Western Region*

- ◆ In Montserrat County, Electoral District No. 4 (polling precinct No. 30111, polling place No. 2), an STO observed that a press agent from the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism, over objection from the Presiding Officer, forced his way into the polling place to video record proceedings. This led to a delay in voting for about 10 minutes.
- ◆ In Montserrat County, Electoral District No. 4 (polling precinct No. 30125 (Stronger Hope School), polling place No. 6), controversy sparked over a ballot paper that was “found” on the floor and the Presiding Officer (PO) assigned it as “discarded.” The assigned CDC agent requested that the ballot paper be placed in the ballot box. The PO refused. This caused serious tension and delayed the counting process for 15 minutes. The PO later gave the agent a complaint form to file his complaint.
- ◆ In Montserrat County, Electoral District No. 5 (polling precinct No. 30246), on the AB. Tolbert Road, a CEDEM observer was seen removing voters from the queue and giving them observer tags to observe the election. CDC agents protested this behavior. The “observers” left for other polling places.
- ◆ In Montserrat County, Electoral District No. 4 (precinct No. 30117 (Sammy M. Dukuly, Soul Clinic), polling place No. 1), an STO observed that a polling place staff member voted without a voter card. When he was questioned by other NEC staff, the official told them that he misplaced his card. This brought tension into the polling center.

## Social Media Monitoring

Since November 14th, our dedicated team has analyzed the social media engagement of more than 50 political elites and influencers across prominent platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter. LEON scrutinized 375 posts during this period, with 86 posts successfully coded for more detailed analysis.

This report outlines key findings, categorizing posts into positive and negative sentiments, highlighting specific themes, and recommending future actions.

### ***Sentiment Analysis***

- ◆ Positive Posts: 50 posts (58%)
- ◆ Negative Posts: 36 posts (42%)

These data points were captured from key political actors, influencers, elected officials, political parties, and media using the Junkipedia platform.

### ***Themes and Topics***

- ◆ Discrediting NEC: 12 posts (14%)
- ◆ Supporting NEC: 8 posts (9%)
- ◆ Discrediting Electoral Process: 17 posts (20%)
- ◆ Preliminary Election Results: 7 posts (8%)
- ◆ Discrediting Political Parties: 12 posts (14%)
- ◆ Electoral Irregularities: 12 posts (14%)
- ◆ Offensive Speech: 8 posts (9%)
- ◆ Misinformation and False Narrative: 10 posts (12%)

This preliminary analysis provides insights into the social media landscape of political elites and influencers. While positive sentiments outweigh negative sentiments, specific themes such as discrediting electoral processes and spreading misinformation require careful attention. By implementing the recommended actions, we aim to foster a more informed and constructive online environment, particularly during critical periods such as elections.

### **Conclusion**

LEON congratulates Liberians on the peaceful exercise of their Constitutional right to vote and participate in democratic practices. Following the end of the presidential runoff election, LEON will issue a preliminary statement and then a final report on the conduct of elections that includes findings on the overall integrity and quality of the 2023 electoral cycle.

LEON calls on NEC to continue performing its professional duties efficiently and effectively during the results tabulation process. LEON also calls on all political parties and stakeholders to be patient and respect the electoral process to maintain a genuine, credible, transparent, safe, and inclusive second round of the 2023 presidential election in Liberia.

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

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