

OBSERVING PRESIDENTIAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN LIBERIA



*Final Report on the International Observation Delegations
Sponsored by the National Democratic Institute
and The Carter Center*

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The National Democratic Institute
The Carter Center

Observing the 2005 Liberia Elections
Final Report

October 11, 2005
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National Democratic Institute
2030 M Street NW, Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: +1 202 728 5500
Email: contact@ndi.org
Web: www.ndi.org

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The Carter Center
One Copenhill
453 Freedom Parkway
Atlanta, GA 30307
Tel: +1 404 420 5100
Email: carterweb@emory.edu
Web: www.cartercenter.org

NDI and The Carter Center issued *Election Watch* newsletters throughout the electoral process. The newsletters are available on both organizations' websites.

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International and domestic observers watch as Liberian voters are identified and receive ballots during the runoff election.

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Liberian voters wait in line at a polling precinct in Grand Bassa County.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Liberians went to the polls in great numbers on October 11 and November 8, 2005, to elect a president, vice president, 30 senators, and 64 representatives. In these first elections since the end of 14 years of civil war, voters across the country demonstrated their commitment to peace and democratic governance. Both elections were widely praised as violence-free, orderly, and well-administered. Throughout the electoral process, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and The Carter Center sought to demonstrate international support for Liberia's democratic process and to provide Liberians and the international community with an impartial and accurate assessment of the electoral process and the political environment surrounding it.

In the pre-election phase, approximately 90 percent of eligible Liberians registered to vote, and 21 political parties and coalitions fielded over 700 candidates to contest the presidential and legislative elections. NDI and The Carter Center organized a pre-election delegation to evaluate the political environment, election preparations, and the level of citizens' participation in the process. In-country staff, as well as long-term observers (LTOs) fielded by The Carter Center, also contributed to the organizations' analysis of the period preceding the elections.

For the first time in Liberia, political party leaders signed a voluntary code of conduct in which they committed to abstain from political violence and intimidation. Parties and candidates campaigned vigorously in the areas surrounding the capital city. However, the lack of organized party structures in the counties, as well as logistical difficulties such as impassable roads, contributed to lower campaign activity and limited political party outreach in much of the country. The nationwide voter education campaign, designed by the National Election Commission (NEC) to encourage and facilitate participation, started late and faced similar logistical challenges.

The first round of the elections took place on October 11. The voting was peaceful and well-administered in many polling sites. In some polling sites, however, long lines, complex balloting procedures, and a high rate of illiteracy created problems that led election officials to modify voting procedures during the course of election day. Voter turnout reached an impressive 75 percent, despite difficult logistical conditions in many places across the country. The counting and tabulation processes were relatively free of problems, and official results were announced on October 26. To monitor this round of elections, NDI and The Carter Center fielded an international election observation delegation of 40 election experts and political and civic leaders from Africa, Europe, and North America.

As none of the 22 presidential candidates garnered an absolute majority in the first round, a runoff election was scheduled for November 8 between George Weah of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Unity Party (UP). Campaign activities intensified during the runoff period. Political rhetoric grew more inflammatory, and even civic and media organizations increasingly engaged in partisan activities. In response to problems noted during the first round balloting and

recommendations offered by the NDI/Carter Center delegation, the NEC instated a number of changes to the voting procedures for the runoff, leading to a smoother process. Voter turnout for the runoff stood at 60 percent. NDI and The Carter Center fielded a 28-member international observation delegation during the runoff polling. On November 23, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was declared president-elect with 59.4 percent of the vote.

Displeased with the results of the runoff election, the CDC filed complaints with the NEC alleging electoral fraud. After several weeks of hearings and investigation into the CDC's complaints, the NEC concluded that there was insufficient evidence of widespread fraud to call into question the results of the election; and the CDC decided not to pursue its claim through the courts. NDI and Carter Center staff in Liberia continued to monitor the electoral process during this time and were the only observers to monitor the process to its conclusion.

The 2005 national elections were a watershed moment in Liberia's history, and Liberians deserve credit for the high level of citizen participation, and the peaceful conduct and administration of the elections, which all bode well for the country's nascent democracy. However, for the country to achieve lasting peace and development over the long-term, Liberia's new leaders and its people must demonstrate a sustained commitment to credible elections and democratic governance.



Crowds of voters wait in line to vote on October 11.

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of democratic governance offers the best hope for attaining sustained peace and development in Liberia following close to two decades of conflict and civil war. Liberia's first post-conflict elections, held in October and November 2005, were an important step towards peace, offering Liberians an opportunity to further overcome a history of civil conflict and authoritarian rule. The presidential and legislative elections brought to a close the two-year transition period that followed the end of Liberia's civil war.

As part of a comprehensive effort to contribute to the enhancement of democratic processes in Liberia, NDI and The Carter Center worked together to observe Liberia's 2005 electoral process. Through a pre-election mission, two observer delegations, and long-term observation, NDI and The Carter Center sought to demonstrate international support for Liberia's democratic process and to provide Liberians and the international community with an impartial and accurate assessment of the electoral process and the political environment surrounding it.



Banners in many parts of the country encouraged Liberians to vote in the 2005 elections.

NDI and The Carter Center monitored all phases of the electoral process, including voter registration, candidate nomination, the campaign, the first and second rounds of voting, the complaints procedure, and the announcement of the results. Beginning in March 2004, both organizations monitored political developments in-country through field office staff. NDI and The Carter Center participated in the May 2005 pre-election delegation organized by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and conducted a joint pre-election assessment mission in September 2005, before fielding joint international observer delegations for the first and second rounds of voting in October and November 2005.

An assessment of every election must take into account all aspects of the election process: the legal framework, the political context before and during the campaign, voting and ballot counting processes, the tabulation of results, the investigation and resolution of complaints, and the conditions surrounding acceptance of election results and the swearing-in of newly elected leaders. This report is a summary of assessments made by NDI and Carter Center delegations and staff throughout the electoral process. NDI and Carter Center electoral assistance in Liberia, which included international and domestic election observation and civic education, was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Government of Ireland, and the National Endowment for Democracy.

POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Since gaining independence in 1847, Liberia's history has been characterized by human rights violations, outright denial of the rights of citizens to freely participate in the electoral process, and electoral fraud. Successive undemocratic governments fomented discontent that in the 1980s finally escalated into a military coup, violence, and civil war. Despite a temporary reprieve and multiparty elections in 1997, the country's transition to post-conflict democracy has been fraught with many challenges.

Liberia was founded in 1820 as a settlement for freed slaves from the United States of America. The freed slaves, known as Americo-Liberians, modeled the country's constitution and political institutions after those of the United States and governed the country uninterrupted for 130 years. For much of that time, political and economic power was limited to a small minority of Americo-Liberian men. Despite reforms introduced after 1950, the population suffered political marginalization and poverty, which eventually sparked violent demonstrations in 1979 over the price of rice.

In 1980, Master Sergeant Samuel Doe, an ethnic Krahn of native African descent, led a group of junior military officers in a coup against then-President William Tolbert, ending the long-serving Americo-Liberian oligarchy. Doe formed a People's Redemption Council (PRC), which sought to redistribute political and economic power to indigenous Liberians. Doe became popular with much of the population at the beginning of his term. However, he soon lost that good will as his leadership style turned increasingly authoritarian, and certain segments of the population continued to feel excluded from political and economic power.



Building projects abandoned during the civil war dot Liberia's countryside.

In December 1989, Charles Taylor (a former member of the Doe government) and a band of rebels formed the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). The NPFL began an armed struggle against the Doe government, sparking a brutal seven-year civil war. It is estimated that the war claimed 200,000 lives (in a country of three million) and displaced one million others. In 1990, a group led by Prince Johnson, known as the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), splintered off from the NPFL, captured Doe, and tortured him to death.

In a bid to broker an end to the fighting, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deployed an international observer force and established the Interim Government of National Unity under the presidency of Dr. Amos Sawyer to fill the void following Doe's death. Taylor continued to wage war throughout the country until 1996, when, after nine broken peace agreements and 13 violated ceasefire agreements, he finally agreed to demobilize his rebel army and participate in elections.

In July 1997, in elections viewed by many as flawed, Liberians elected Charles Taylor president of Liberia. Many Liberians explained that they voted for him because they hoped that he would end the NPFL onslaught on Monrovia if he was elected. However, repressive rule and poor economic development continued under the Taylor regime, and in 1999 an armed insurgency--Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)--invaded the country from the northern Liberia border. The LURD's advance towards Monrovia caused massive waves of population displacement and a deepening humanitarian crisis. A second rebel group--the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)--split from the LURD in 2002 and opened a second offensive against the Taylor regime from the Southeast.

In the summer of 2003, a combination of factors, including domestic unrest and international pressure, brought Liberia to a crossroads. In early June, the United Nations-supported Special Court for Sierra Leone unsealed an indictment against Taylor, charging him with war crimes committed during Sierra Leone's civil war. At the same time, troops loyal to Taylor were unable to defend Monrovia as rebel forces closed in and threatened to seize the capital. Negotiations led by ECOWAS and the international community--represented by the International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL)--ultimately led Taylor to step down on August 11, 2003, and accept asylum in Nigeria.

Taylor's departure paved the way for the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in August 2003 in Accra, Ghana by representatives of Taylor's former government, armed militias (the LURD and MODEL), political parties, and civil society organizations. The CPA defined the structure and scope for a transition authority--the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL)--that would guide the country toward elections in 2005, with the installation of an elected government by January 2006. Disputes arising within the NTGL were to be settled by mediation arranged by ECOWAS in conjunction with the United Nations, African Union, and ICGL. Representatives from the groups signing the CPA were given positions in the NTGL and the new 76-member National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA).



UNMIL soldiers provide security near a polling precinct on election day.

In September 2003, the United Nations Security Council established the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to support the implementation of the ceasefire and peace process. UNMIL's mandate included providing assistance to the transitional government to prepare for the 2005 national elections. UNMIL's Electoral Division provided technical assistance to the NEC and assisted with logistical operations, and UNMIL troops provided security during the elections. UNMIL's support was essential to the peaceful conduct of the elections.

ELECTORAL FRAMEWORK

The CPA set the timetable for the 2005 presidential and legislative elections and called for the existing electoral system to be reformed in advance of the elections. It mandated the reconstitution of Liberia's Elections Commission as an independent body to oversee the elections process. The Agreement also called upon the United Nations, the African Union, and other members of the international community to facilitate the 2005 elections, as appropriate.

National Elections Commission

In accordance with the CPA, an independent elections management body--the NEC--was established to administer the 2005 elections in a manner that guaranteed the rights and interests of all Liberians. NEC commissioners were appointed by the Chairman of the NTGL and approved by the NTLA. Chaired by Counselor Frances Johnson-Morris, the Commission was responsible for drafting the legal framework for the elections, organizing the voter registration effort, creating an environment for peaceful campaigning, initiating a voter education program, and training polling and election staff to conduct the elections with the advice of the UNMIL electoral division. The NEC also served as the primary adjudicator of electoral disputes, with appeals referred directly to the Supreme Court.



NEC Chairman Frances Johnson-Morris (right) meets with the leadership of the joint NDI-Carter Center international observation delegation: (from left) NDI Senior Associate Dr. Chris Fomunyoh, former President Nicéphore Soglo of Benin, and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

Throughout the process, the NEC enjoyed a significant level of public confidence. Political party representatives, candidates, and the news media stated that the NEC conducted activities with impartiality and competence. The NEC also benefited from robust support from UNMIL and other partner organizations.

Electoral Reform Law of 2004

Major reforms to Liberia's electoral code were included in an Election Reform Bill passed by the NTLA in December 2004. The bill suspended certain provisions of the Liberian Constitution, such as the 10-year residency requirement for presidential candidates and the requirement for a national census and redistricting before elections. It also amended sections of the 1986 elections laws and listed new, less onerous requirements for proving voter eligibility, outlined registration and voting procedures for refugees (who were required to return to Liberia for registration and voting) and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and set limits on campaign expenditures.

The electoral law provided for an absolute majority to determine the winners of presidential and vice presidential races, which meant that if no single candidate won an absolute majority in the first round, a runoff election was mandated between the top two vote-getters. For the legislative elections, each of Liberia's 15 counties was allocated two seats in the Senate and two seats in the House of Representatives, with the remaining 34 House seats distributed to the counties based on the number of registered voters. A simple majoritarian electoral system was adopted to determine the outcome of the legislative races. For the senatorial races, the two candidates receiving the highest and second highest number of valid votes would be elected, although the law was unclear with respect to how many senators a voter could select on the ballot. A consensus was developed among registered political parties to create 64 electoral districts for the 2005 elections, even though there is a large disparity in the ratio of constituents to representative among various counties.

The legal framework for the 2005 elections in Liberia contained numerous provisions that were seen by many as among the most advanced in the world. For example, campaign finance regulations are among the most comprehensive on the continent, though they proved difficult to implement in the Liberian context. Provisions concerning voting for persons with physical disabilities, which are particularly relevant in societies that have suffered armed conflict, are also highly developed.



Senatorial candidates discuss policy positions during a debate in Grand Bassa County.

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION DELEGATIONS

NDI and The Carter Center worked together to observe Liberia's 2005 elections process through in-country staff, LTOs, a pre-election assessment mission, and international observer delegations. The observer delegations were conducted according to international standards for nonpartisan election observation--in particular with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observers and accompanying Code of Conduct for International Election Observation--and in conformity with Liberian law.

From September 1 through 9, 2005, an international pre-election delegation assessed the political environment in Liberia in advance of the October 11 presidential and legislative elections.¹ The delegation met with a broad spectrum of Liberian political and civic leaders, government officials, electoral authorities, and representatives of the international community in Monrovia. In addition, the delegation traveled to Bomi, Bong, and Grand Bassa Counties,² where it was briefed by Liberians in those localities. In-country staff members and LTOs who visited all 15 counties in the months preceding the delegation also briefed the delegation.



Former President Nicéphore Soglo of Benin and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter discuss the findings of the NDI/Carter Center international observation delegation during the first round of elections.

NDI and The Carter Center fielded a 40-member multinational delegation during the first round of elections. The delegation was co-led by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former President Nicéphore Soglo of Benin. The delegation held meetings in Monrovia with: Gyude Bryant, Chairman of the NTGL; Frances Johnson-Morris, Chair of the NEC; Alan Doss, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General; representatives of UNMIL; several presidential candidates and their representatives; leaders of the political parties contesting the elections; civic leaders, including leaders of domestic nonpartisan monitoring groups; and representatives of the international community. The delegation also met with the leadership of other international election observer delegations and worked closely with the European Union, IRI, ECOWAS, and the African Union.

NDI/Carter Center delegates deployed to 10 counties, observing the electoral process in Bomi, Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado, and Nimba. Due to the conditions of Liberia's roads, significant numbers of polling places could not be visited by the delegation. Meetings conducted in

¹ Members of all NDI/Carter Center delegations are listed in Appendix 4.

² A map of Liberia is attached as Appendix 1.

Monrovia were replicated at the local level. On election day, the teams observed the voting and counting process in approximately 140 voting precincts (approximately 10 percent of precincts across the country). Following the election, delegation members returned to Monrovia to share their findings, debrief with the delegation leadership and formulate a statement of findings later released to the Liberian and international media.³ Additionally, some observers remained to observe tabulation.

A 28-member delegation was deployed for the runoff elections. It was led by former Nigerian Vice President Alex Ekwueme, Carter Center Democracy Program Director David Carroll, and NDI Senior Associate for Africa Chris Fomunyoh. As with the first round elections, the delegation held a series of meetings in Monrovia with NTGL Chairman Gyude Bryant, NEC Chair Frances Johnson-Morris, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss, representatives of UNMIL, senior representatives and leaders from political parties that contested the October 11 elections, civic leaders, and representatives of the international community. The delegation deployed to nine counties--Bomi, Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado, and Nimba--and on election day observed the voting and counting process in more than 80 voting precincts. Following the elections delegation members returned to Monrovia to report on their observations and participate in the drafting of a statement circulated to local and international media.

LTOs fielded by The Carter Center provided briefings and logistical support for the main observer delegations. The observers traveled the country beginning in July, visiting every county to witness all subsequent stages of electoral preparation, including campaigning, voting, and tabulation. These observers provided a comprehensive picture of developments throughout the country during the entire electoral process.



The NDI/Carter Center international observation delegation to the runoff election briefs the media on its findings.

³ All public statements released by NDI/Carter Center delegations are included in Appendix 3.

PRE-ELECTION PHASE

Conditions during the pre-election period impact the degree to which elections can be judged as credible. Monitoring the electoral environment in the months preceding the election provides an opportunity to assess preparations for election day and determine the extent to which candidates compete on a level playing field and citizens participate in the electoral process.



Banners and signs were used to raise voter awareness across the country.

Voter Education

To encourage citizen participation and improve understanding of the electoral process among Liberians, civic organizations co-sponsored extensive, nationwide voter education campaigns in collaboration with the NEC and UNMIL. Among others, NDI, the Carter Centre UK (CCUK), and the Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) worked to support civic education and organized candidate debates in every county. However, many voter education efforts started late, and they were further limited in areas rendered inaccessible by the rainy season and bad roads. Poverty and a high incidence of illiteracy compounded the challenge. Although many voter education programs were broadcast on the radio to increase their reach among the population, the many Liberians who cannot afford radios missed the messages.

While voter education campaigns raised general awareness about the election, many voters remained unsure of the detailed voting procedures. As the date of the elections approached, NDI and Carter Center in-country staff heard concerns about the inadequacy of voter education on both the “why” and “how” of voting. Potential voters raised questions about how to mark their choices on the ballots, particularly for the Senate races in which the Supreme Court mandated last-minute changes to the procedures. Political parties complained they lacked adequate resources to inform voters about the policy positions of their candidates. As a result of the limitations in the voter education process and the complexity of the ballots, relatively high numbers of invalid and spoiled ballot papers were cast during the first round.

Voter Registration

Voter registration took place from April 25 to May 21, 2005. To prove eligibility to vote, Liberians had to present one of several documents, such as a valid Liberian passport, a certificate of naturalization or a birth certificate. Liberians lacking such documents could have oral testimony by a traditional leader confirming their eligibility or sworn testimony of two other registered voters. Liberians registered to vote in extraordinary numbers, particularly in light of the difficult logistical circumstances in the country. Approximately 1.35 million people registered to vote out of an estimated 1.5 million eligible persons (approximately 90 percent). More than half of the registrants

were women, and approximately 40 percent of the registrants were between 18 and 28 years old. The high voter registration demonstrated a commitment that a vast majority of Liberians, particularly women and young people, were interested in using ballots, not bullets, to determine the next leaders of the country.

In IDP camps, an estimated 61,000 Liberians registered to vote, with 71 percent planning to vote in their respective counties of origin. When it became clear that large numbers of those could not return home for election day, the NEC ruled that such persons would be allowed to vote for the president and vice president in their camps, but not for the county-based House and Senate seats. This decision was heralded as an effort to enfranchise as many voters as possible, although it was made very late in the electoral process and only after IDPs threatened to disrupt the electoral process.



A polling official checks a voter's identification card against the final registration roll on election day.

Also, to meet demands of a large number of Liberians living outside the country's borders, the NEC extended the voter registration deadline to June 4, 2005, for returning refugees. However, limited voter education in refugee camps, combined with refugees' uncertainty about the security of the country, contributed to rather low returning refugee registration. In many cases, the long distances that rural electorates had to travel to reach a registration center inhibited many returnees from registering.

Liberians who were rejected during the voter registration process had the opportunity to present proof of eligibility before NEC magistrates during the Determination of Objections phase in July 2005. Through this process, 184 voters were added to the voter rolls.

The NEC organized a two-week voter registration card replacement session in September 2005 for registered voters who misplaced their registration cards. To safeguard this process against double voting, NEC officials included a list of individuals who received replacement cards in the balloting materials provided to polling stations on election day. Further, the new cards were labeled "replacement" and differed in color from the original cards. The NEC issued over 3,000 replacement voter cards.

Exhibition of Voter Rolls

Following the month-long voter registration process, the provisional registration rolls were exhibited for voter verification. In order to stay within the elections calendar mandated by the CPA, the NEC shortened the exhibition period of the voter registry from five to three days. Nevertheless, from June 30 to July 2, more than 550,000 registrants turned out to confirm that their names were correctly listed on the roll. Approximately 8,000 corrections were made to the registration roll as a result of this

exercise, and more than 900 Liberians in possession of valid voter registration cards were processed and added to the registration roll.

Political Parties

Thirty political parties were registered in Liberia, and 21 parties and coalitions contested the 2005 elections, in addition to independent candidates. Most of Liberia's political parties developed around the personalities of key leaders rather than on the basis of policies, issues, and party platforms. Party organization is centralized in the capital city of Monrovia, and very few parties have sufficient resources or organizational structures to campaign at the grassroots level. The inaccessibility of many regions further hampered communications between party leaders and regional branches.

NDI/Carter Center observers noted that with so many registered political parties participating in the elections, the differences among parties were not always clear to voters. However, candidate debates for the presidential and legislative elections gave citizens the opportunity to raise issues and for candidates to articulate their positions on matters of national interest. Some candidates used audiotapes, distributed to community radio stations for broadcast, to provide greater access to information to voters in rural areas.



Candidates discuss their platforms at a debate in Montserrado County.

Eighteen registered political parties signed a code of conduct in April 2005, and seven other parties that registered later signed a memorandum of understanding in August to abide by the code of conduct. In adopting this voluntary code--the first of its kind in Liberia--political parties and their supporters pledged to maintain acceptable standards of good behavior to ensure an electoral process free of political violence and intimidation. The signing of the code of conduct indicated parties' willingness to respect the process and demonstrated a commitment to contribute to peaceful elections. With the exception of a few isolated acts of violence, the parties adhered to the code. In some counties, local representatives of the political parties also initiated locally-written codes of conduct. Many observers and independent analysts viewed the Political Parties Code of Conduct as a manifestation of the tolerance and respect for fair play that marked the campaign, and a remarkable benchmark in conflict-prone Liberia.

Candidate Nomination Process

The candidate nomination period began on July 21, and ended on August 6. Candidates had to be Liberian citizens, hold valid voter registration cards, and submit petitions with voters' signatures to register. Those running on a party platform also had to submit party endorsements. Most political parties convened nominating conventions to select contenders for the presidential and legislative races. While as many as 50

presidential aspirants declared intentions to contest the October election, significantly fewer actually completed the registration process.

The candidacy requirements set by the NEC posed difficulties for some aspirants. For example, candidates were required to prove they had paid all taxes--a difficult task in a country in which the government barely functioned for several years preceding the elections. Some aspirants complained that the requirement that nomination applications be submitted to the NEC office in Monrovia put independent candidates for legislative races in remote counties at a disadvantage. Candidates were also required to open bank accounts in accordance with finance regulations; however, the only bank is in Monrovia. Nevertheless, by August 13, the NEC approved 762 candidates to contest the presidential and legislative elections. Those approved included 22 candidates for president, 22 for vice president, 205 for the Senate's 30 seats, and 513 for the House of Representatives' 64 seats. Of the total number of candidates, 110 were female, constituting 14 percent of contenders. Although the NEC Political Parties Guidelines called for 30 percent of candidate slots to be reserved for women, few women succeeded in winning nominations in the traditionally male-dominated politics of Liberia.

The NEC rejected five independent presidential aspirants, three vice presidential nominees, and nine contenders for the House of Representatives for failing to fulfill application requirements. Many of the rejected applicants' petitions to contest the elections lacked the requisite number of registered voters' signatures. Due to the short timeline between the nomination period and election day, there was no official appeals process for parties or independent aspirants whose candidacies were rejected.



Partisans of the Congress for Democratic Change rally in support of George Weah for president.

Some rejected candidates appealed to the Supreme Court to challenge the NEC's decisions, and the court ruled that several ineligible candidates should have been given an opportunity to correct deficiencies in their applications. Executing the Court's decision risked jeopardizing the electoral timetable provided in the CPA. The potential conflict between implementing the Court's decision and adhering to the timetable was avoided as the candidates agreed to withdraw from the elections following mediation efforts by international groups supporting the peace process. Nonetheless, these developments raised tensions and highlighted potential inconsistencies within the legal framework, especially concerning the timeline for addressing electoral disputes.

Campaign Period

The campaign period for the first round of elections commenced on August 15, after the NEC posted the final candidate lists. Parties and candidates waged an active

campaign, although the bulk of political party campaign activities were centered in the capital city of Monrovia and the surrounding Montserrado County, which had the highest concentration of registered voters. Parties and candidates reported that the political playing field was generally level, and they were free of state interference in campaigning.

The campaign period was peaceful for the most part, and observers reported isolated incidences of violence only on the first day of the campaign. The NEC criticized early infractions and threatened to revoke accreditation of contestants involved in election violence, intimidation or harassment of voters or other candidates, which may have deterred future violence. The Ministry of Justice, the NEC, and political parties engaged in dialogue to coordinate rallies and other campaign events to minimize confrontations. Despite heated rhetoric in the final days of the campaign period, political party supporters demonstrated restraint at mass rallies, and the campaign ended peacefully.

Campaign Finance

The NEC's Campaign Finance Guidelines were comprehensive and wide reaching, although they proved difficult to enforce given in-country conditions at the time of the election. Campaign finance regulations set restrictions on the source of campaign funds, prohibited the use of bribes to entice voters, and imposed disclosure requirements to make all campaign finance information public.



Unity Party supporters rally in support of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for president.

Some political parties and civil society watchdog groups complained that state resources were misused to shore up parties represented in the NTGL. Allegations were also made that foreign funds were illegally channeled into campaigns, that political contestants "purchased" voter identification cards to prevent votes from being cast for their opponents, and that some candidates tried to influence voters through in-kind donations of rice and other goods. The Campaign Monitoring Coalition, a Liberian civil society group, claimed widespread abuse of state resources and vote buying by some candidates and submitted a report to that effect to the NEC for further investigation. There were also reports of parties exceeding the US\$2 million ceiling for campaign expenditures. Although accusations of the use of state resources were quite widespread, it was recognized by most observers that the fact that there was no single incumbent party lessened this problem.

At the writing of this report, the NEC had not yet taken action against parties accused of these offenses. Also, not all registered parties have submitted financial statements in accordance with campaign finance regulations. The NEC is developing a report on compliance with campaign finance regulations, but has yet to penalize those parties that failed to submit financial reports.

Media Coverage and Public Pronouncements

The news media operate freely in Liberia. Under voluntary guidelines issued by the NEC and the Ministry of Information, which oversees public media, political contestants were provided access to state-controlled media to disseminate messages in the districts in which they were on the ballot. In addition, a number of debates organized around the country were open to the public and aired on the radio, which raised citizen awareness and provided information about contestants. These public events also served the larger purpose of demonstrating that competitive political events could take place without fear of violence. The Press Union of Liberia (PUL) developed a code of conduct for elections that was largely respected by Liberia's print and electronic media through the first round of voting.

While most media outlets appeared non-partisan and seemed eager to maintain a level playing field for all parties and candidates during the first round, parties did not have equal access to the media. For example, because he owned media outlets, presidential aspirant George Weah had a significant advantage in garnering coverage.

The Liberian media played an important role in informing and educating the Liberian public about the electoral process. Radio stations were particularly useful in disseminating information in English and local languages. The effectiveness of newspaper coverage was limited, as the illiteracy rate for the country is estimated at 80 percent. Distribution of print media is also limited to the parts of the country that are accessible by road.



Former President Nicéphore Soglo of Benin and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter brief the media on the NDI/Carter Center international observation delegation for the first round election.

Legal Complaints and Appeals Process

Competing interpretations of the new electoral framework and inconsistencies between provisions of the CPA and the Liberian Constitution left electoral policies unresolved until the Supreme Court ruled on them. Due to a slow appeals process, some key decisions were not made by the Supreme Court until just weeks before election day. For example, questions concerning the eligibility of some candidates and the method to be used in voting for Senators were left unresolved until late in the election process, thereby generating considerable uncertainty. Later, ambiguities in the processing and resolution of challenges of election results created concerns. For example, some of the 41 complainants that submitted allegations of irregularities and fraud following the first round of voting expressed frustration that the NEC did not hear and resolve their disputes fully.

FIRST ROUND ELECTION DAY

Liberians went to the polls in massive numbers on October 11, 2005, and demonstrated their strong desire for peace and democratic governance. Following a remarkably peaceful and highly competitive electoral campaign, voting across the country was virtually violence-free, orderly, and well-administered. Polling agents worked diligently for long hours into the night. They appeared to be well-trained and, in the majority of cases, acted effectively, though there was a difference in administrative quality at some voting places. Whenever problems arose at polling sites, many polling officials sought to build consensus around corrective measures. Political party pollwatchers were present in impressive numbers around the country and worked cooperatively with polling agents to complete the process peacefully. Domestic election monitors also were present in significant numbers and played a constructive role.

The NEC faced several challenges organizing elections in a post-conflict environment. Roads damaged by war, neglect, and the rainy season, as well as a lack of electricity in many polling sites, created significant logistical difficulties. Long lines, complex balloting procedures, and a high rate of illiteracy created problems on election day. Nonetheless, most Liberians viewed the electoral process as positive. While several minor instances were noted in which procedures were not completely followed, NDI and Carter Center observers did not witness evidence of systematic fraud or problems that would materially affect the election results.

Voter Turnout

Election administrators, political parties, and voters faced extraordinarily difficult logistical conditions on election day. In rural areas, some voters complained of having to travel long distances to polling places. Roads were in disrepair because of years of war and therefore presented transport problems, which were compounded by heavy downpours during the rainy season. Approximately 10 percent of the electorate voted in polling places that were not accessible by road, requiring polling agents to trek for four days in some cases to deliver polling materials to points where they could not be transported by vehicle. Some of these were in areas difficult to reach even with the assistance of UNMIL helicopters. The NEC and UNMIL made extraordinary efforts to ensure delivery and collection of polling materials to and from these locations.



Voters wait in line for hours to vote on October 11.

Voter turnout on October 11, 2005, was impressive at 74.9 percent. Many voters arrived at the polls near midnight in advance of the scheduled 8:00 am opening time, and many others showed up at least three hours in advance. Thousands waited to vote in the sun in some places and in heavy rain in others, demonstrating their personal

commitment to peaceful elections. Young people and especially women participated in vast numbers as voters and election officials, political party pollwatchers, and nonpartisan election monitors.

Security

In a coordinated effort, UNMIL, UN Civilian Police, Liberian National Police (LNP), and the relevant ministries of the Government of Liberia developed a security plan for election day. Two security agents of a coordinated force were posted at each voting precinct to maintain order, with mobile UNMIL troops and approximately 600 Civilian Police on duty throughout the country. These provided security during the polling and counting, and helped to maintain order over the course of election day and election night, even when severe crowding in some places led to tension requiring actions by security forces.

Voting Process

The voting process for the presidential and legislative elections proceeded relatively smoothly. Both the NEC and UNMIL made efforts to correct procedural errors as soon as they were noticed and to maintain orderly conduct throughout the process. The NEC put in place procedures to facilitate communication and safeguards to enhance the credibility of the vote. For example, to prevent individuals from voting more than once, voter cards were punched and voters' right thumbnails were marked with indelible ink. To track the number of ballots issued, polling officials were required to stamp the back of each ballot at the time of issue and to reconcile the number of ballots at the closing of the polls.



Voters receive presidential, senatorial, and representative ballots on October 11.

Upon entering the polling precinct, voters displayed their voter registration cards, which polling officials verified against a precinct registry with photographs of all registered voters. Voters with replacement registration cards were also verified against addendums to the voter lists.

After checking in, voters were issued ballots and given instructions on how to vote. Voters cast three ballots in the first round of the elections--one for president and vice-president, one for each of two Senate seats, and one for a Member of the House of Representatives. For many, the ballots proved cumbersome and difficult to comprehend. Many voters were unfamiliar with the many candidates, and some complained that the pictures of the candidates included on the ballots were too small. The presidential/vice-presidential ballots listed 44 candidates and most House and

Senate ballots averaged 10 candidates per county. Sample ballots were prepared by the NEC to assist in voter education efforts; however, they were only delivered to the counties several weeks in advance of the election.



A voter casts her ballots on October 11.

Some voters asserted that they had been confused by a Supreme Court decision shortly before the elections regarding the procedure for voting for Senators. While NEC guidelines and the printed instructions on the Senate ballots instructed individuals to vote for a single candidate, the Court ruled a few days before election day that voters could mark two choices on their Senate ballot papers. This decision was announced belatedly by the Court, leaving little time for the NEC to do anything more than modify each ballot with a sticker explaining the revised instructions.

The NEC divided the 1,422 voting precincts across the country into multiple polling places in order to manage the high numbers of registered voters. Nonetheless, long lines formed in many polling stations due to high turnout and a slow voting process, particularly in the morning hours. Some polling sites opened late and numerous procedural safeguards put in place by the NEC, as well as a meticulous approach by many polling officials, further slowed the process. As voting proceeded, the NEC issued new instructions that sped up the process, and few such problems were observed by late afternoon.

Political party representatives were present in the majority of polling places and worked cooperatively to ensure a peaceful process, though many representatives seemed uninformed of the voting procedures and their specific responsibilities. Domestic election monitors were also present at a number of polling stations. Several international organizations also fielded international election observation missions. International observers were welcomed throughout the country, and there were no reports of interference with international or domestic election observers.

Voter Assistance

A major problem identified in the October 11 poll was the widespread need for voter assistance for elderly voters or persons with disabilities. Many voters requested further assistance in selecting a candidate and marking the ballots appropriately, and in many cases, confused voters were assisted in the ballot booth by presiding officers, some of whom were later accused of providing partisan assistance. Although presiding officers were permitted to assist voters under election guidelines, in some polling places they appeared to be in positions of considerable influence over the voters they were called upon to assist. This also raised concerns about the secrecy of the ballot.

Vote Counting

After polls closed, polling agents counted the ballots at each polling site and posted provisional results for the public to witness. The counting process proceeded without major incidents in places observed by the joint NDI/Carter Center delegation, although observers noted that some polling agents failed to fill out all required forms correctly. Due to the high voter turnout and large number of candidates in each race, the count was slow in many places; polling officials counted the ballots by lantern light well into the night. Accredited observers and political party representatives watched the counting process, the posting of preliminary results at the precinct, and the subsequent transfer of voting materials to secure storage facilities. Transparency in the procedures helped to establish confidence in the provisional results.

Tabulation and Announcement of Results

The presiding officer for each polling site was responsible for communicating the results to the county tabulation center, where the County Magistrate tabulated provisional results from the county's polling precincts. The tabulation process began slowly due to the late finish of counting and logistical difficulties that delayed the arrival of results at county tabulation centers in many cases. With the assistance of UNMIL, tabulation results were relayed to Monrovia via the Internet on a rolling basis. The cumulative provisional results were announced by the NEC in Monrovia on a rolling basis, as they were compiled.



Polling officials count presidential ballots by lantern light on October 11.

Accredited political party representatives, domestic and international observers, and journalists witnessed the tallying at the county level. The NEC made the results from each individual polling place available to the public, allowing parties and candidates at the national level to compare copies of results from polling places to the tabulation. Openness in the tabulation process was an important confidence-building measure. The NEC announced the official results of the presidential, House, and Senate elections on October 26, 2005.

Complaints Process

The NEC required that complaints regarding polling or counting irregularities be filed at the polling place and then with the county magistrate within 24 hours of the event. Other types of complaints had to be submitted to the NEC within 72 hours of the event. Following the first round, 41 electoral complaints and letters were submitted to the NEC. Thirty consolidated hearings were held from October 24 to 31, 2005.

Hearings on complaints were open to accredited observers, but information about them was not widely disseminated in advance; and lax procedures for notifying candidates of hearing dates and times caused some parties to miss their appointments. Many of the complaints were based on misinterpretations of election procedures or law, and the NEC adjudicator ruled that some would be more appropriately handled by the criminal justice system. Overall, the adjudication procedures left some complainants feeling that their cases were not resolved satisfactorily. Regrettably, public statements by some political leaders and their supporters that called into question the declared results of the first round contributed to an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion during the runoff campaign.



Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter watches as election officials record the results in a polling precinct in Montserrado County.

PRE-RUNOFF PERIOD

None of the 22 candidates in the presidential race garnered the absolute majority of “50 percent plus one” of valid votes required to win the first round, resulting in a runoff election on November 8. The top two finishers from the first round presidential race were George Weah of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), with 28.3 percent of the vote, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Unity Party (UP), with 19.8 percent. The CDC won 15 seats in the House of Representatives and three in the Senate, while the UP won three seats in the House of Representatives and eight in the Senate.

Voter Education

In advance of the second round, the NEC and UNMIL initiated an extensive, nationwide voter education campaign aimed at providing voters with the basic information needed to participate effectively in the election, including notification of the date, locations of polling sites, voter registration card requirements, and how to mark the ballot. The NEC and UNMIL distributed sample ballots and other educational materials to NEC county offices, played jingles in local dialects on the radio, and distributed flyers and stickers.

Many observers were told that some Liberians did not understand the rationale for a runoff election. Liberian civic and community-based organizations used radio, town meetings, and group discussions to explain the importance of the runoff. Voter education efforts also sought to encourage voters to participate in the second round election even if their first round candidate of choice was no longer in the race.



Voter education banners hang on a fence.

Campaign Period

The campaign period for the presidential runoff officially began on October 27, 2005, in accordance with the electoral timetable. During the runoff period, the campaigns of both candidates were largely peaceful. Political intimidation was not apparent, though a number of isolated incidents were reported. The campaign period seemed much more active than the first round, however, and voters noted an increasingly tense environment.

The two candidates campaigned widely, focusing on the more contested and populous counties of Montserrado, Nimba, Lofa, Grand Bassa, and Bong. Issues raised during the runoff campaign included the need to address the marginalization of many young Liberians; improving education; and building government competency, integrity, and capacity to deliver services to the Liberian population. Both candidates called on

their supporters to campaign peaceably, avoid divisive politics, and accept the outcome of the election.

Weah and Sirleaf sought the endorsements of former presidential hopefuls, other political parties, civic groups, and opinion leaders. Six of the first round presidential candidates endorsed Weah, while four others endorsed Sirleaf. Many Liberian voters, however, expressed frustration with the endorsements of their party leaders and did not necessarily follow those endorsements in choosing their preferred candidate in the runoff election.



Campaign posters for Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and George Weah, the two runoff candidates.

As the campaign drew to a close, more incidents were reported of civic and community-based organizations, government figures, and media outlets engaging in partisan activities. Political rhetoric became increasingly inflammatory in the final days of the campaign period, raising concerns of election-related violence. However, the campaign period for the second round of election ended on November 6 without any major incidences.

Media Coverage and Public Pronouncements

While only a few media outlets appeared biased in the first round, media coverage during the runoff was partisan, divisive, and in a few cases inflammatory, in violation of the provisions of the PUL code of conduct. To curb these excesses, the PUL suspended one newspaper editor and reprimanded several radio outlets. Representatives of the international community, including the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General, cautioned the media to continue to provide responsible and impartial coverage of the election. Meanwhile, some journalists reported being threatened by supporters of a candidate.

As was the case during the first campaign period, UNMIL radio played a significant role in disseminating country-wide civic and voter education messages. The two contestants recorded radio messages that called on their supporters to campaign peacefully and accept the outcome of the election. Several of the candidates that lost in the first round also recorded messages encouraging their supporters to turn out and vote.

RUNOFF ELECTION DAY

Liberian voters returned to the polls on November 8, 2005, for the runoff election. Overall, election day was calm and peaceful with few reported incidents of violence. The balloting was well-administered, and procedural changes implemented by the NEC addressed many of the concerns raised during the first round election. While there were a few problems and irregularities on election day, the NDI-Carter Center observers did not come across any systematic irregularities or fraud that would have impacted the outcome of the runoff election.

Voter Turnout

Voter turnout for the runoff was lower than that of the first round, although it remained impressive at 60 percent. Some voters chose not to participate in the runoff as their preferred parties or candidates were not on the ballot. During the second round, voters did not queue as early as during the first round, and a simpler ballot with only two candidates meant that voting proceeded more rapidly, reducing congestion in the polling stations.

Security

Security for the runoff election was enhanced by the deployment of larger numbers of LNP, UNMIL civilian police, and peacekeeping elements. During the runoff election, security forces paid particular attention to precincts that had experienced crowd control problems or other security incidents during the first election round.

Voting Process

The voting process for the runoff election was well-administered, with no major hitches. Election day proceeded peacefully and smoothly, with shorter lines at most polling places and no overcrowding. Efforts were made to improve queue control, and to resolve confusion in certain polling precincts with multiple polling places, which had delayed polling on October 11.

During the runoff, presiding officers were instructed not to assist voters; voters needing assistance were advised to bring a family member or friend to the polls to help them cast their ballot. These instructions appeared to have been routinely followed, and the simpler ballot meant that far fewer voters required assistance.



An election official puts indelible ink on a voter's fingernail after she cast her ballot.

The NEC also provided more training to presiding officers on record-keeping at the polling stations, as well as counting and tabulation procedures. At polling precincts and tabulation centers, most NEC staff appeared to understand procedures more fully than was the case during the first round. The improved level of professionalism and increased competence of polling agents contributed to a much smoother and more efficient voting process.

In a few cases, the delegation noted inconsistencies in polling place administration. For example, some polling agents voted before the polls opened rather than at the end of the day as stipulated in the revised election procedures; the procedure for reconciling ballots at the end of the day was not followed in a few instances; the numbers of ballots received were not always registered on the presiding officer's worksheet; and the number of party representatives allowed in polling places varied from site to site. Observers were informed that in a number of polling sites, larger sample ballots posted in ballot booths bore marks indicating the choice of a candidate, though in all cases these ballots were immediately removed as soon as the attention of the polling officer was drawn to them.



Polling officials count runoff ballots in Tapita, Nimba County.

The delegation reported several instances in which polling agents complained about not receiving the five dollar daily allowance for their work on election day. In several cases, polling workers delayed the opening of the polls in protest or threatened to delay the count until they were paid. In one instance, observers were told that the disappearance of allocated funds led to the arrest of a Liberian UNMIL staff member later charged with misappropriation of funds. The NDI/Carter Center delegation highlighted the obligation to pay the pollworkers in its statement.

Both CDC and UP representatives were present in nearly all polling places visited by the NDI/Carter Center delegation and actively monitored all election day activities. In some cases, observers met representatives from parties that had lost in the first round. Commendable efforts were made to recruit and train hundreds of new domestic observers, including a significant number of physically disabled individuals, although their presence at polling sites was less visible during the runoff compared to the first round election.

A feud between NEC Chair Frances Johnson-Morris and presidential aspirant George Weah on election day garnered much media attention. The NEC Chair called Weah "reckless" after he claimed that he had actually won more than 50 percent of the vote in the first round; and he responded by accusing the NEC of bias. Regrettably, the

NEC's intemperate response was unhelpful, and the dispute contributed to an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion as the results began rolling in.

Vote Counting

Counting of ballots proceeded quickly following the runoff election, as there was only one race with two candidates to choose from. The reconciliation and counting process was simplified by the consolidation of the presiding officer's worksheet and record of the count into one form.

Tabulation and Announcement of Results

At many tabulation centers observed by delegation members, the process was smoother and quicker than in the first round. While there were a few cases in which tabulation procedures did not appear to be followed appropriately, the posting of results at the polling stations, as well as at the tabulation centers, contributed to enhancing public confidence in the results.



Liberians review the tabulated results as they are posted at the NEC county office in Saniquellie, Nimba County.

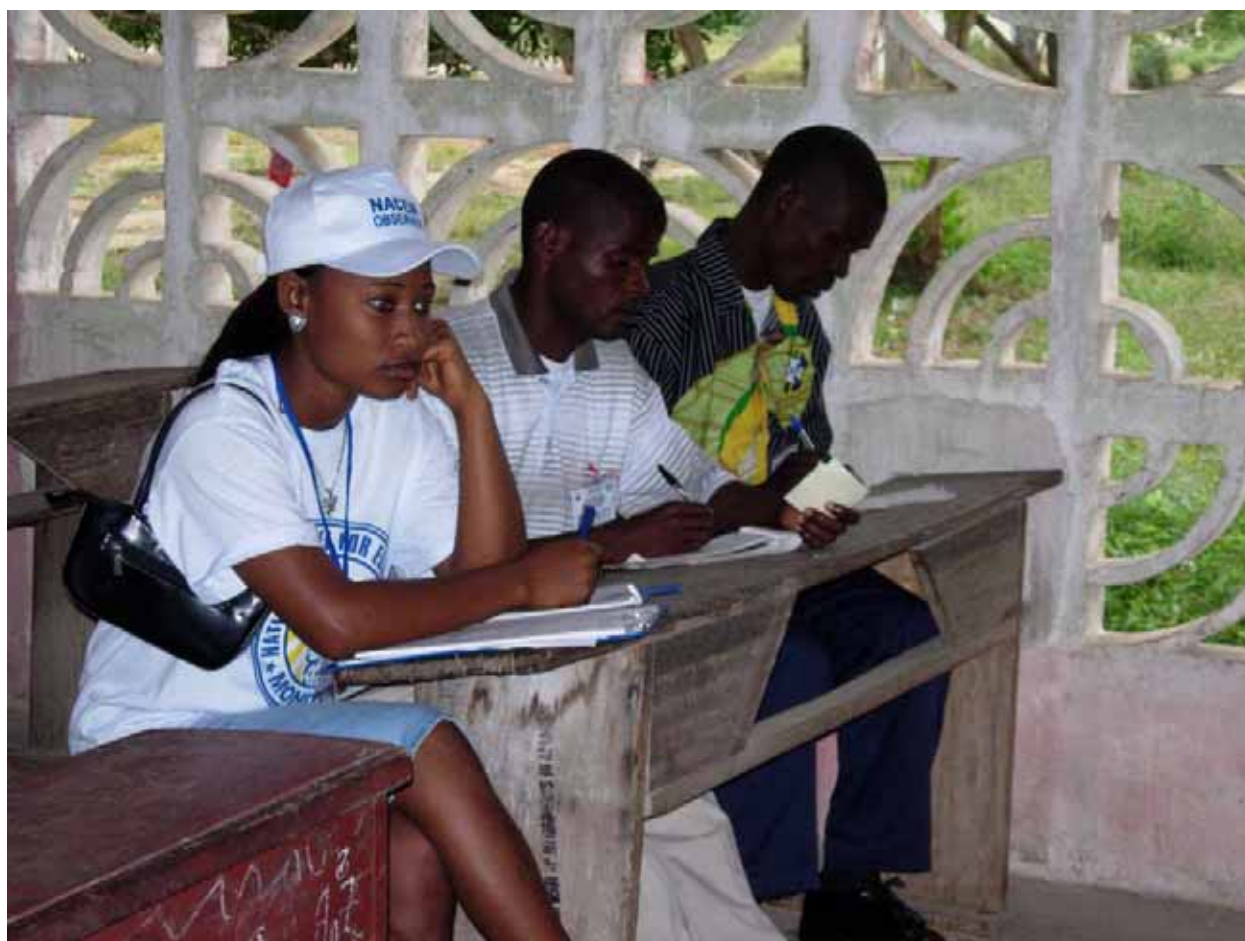
On November 23, 2005, the NEC announced official election results and declared Ellen Johnson Sirleaf president-elect, with 59.4 percent of the vote in the presidential runoff.

Complaints Process

A number of electoral challenges were filed following the runoff, including complaints of massive fraud submitted by the CDC. The NEC held hearings on all complaints, which appeared to afford due process to all parties involved. The proceedings were generally conducted with transparency, despite minor problems relating to the personal conduct and rhetoric of some of the petitioners and their representatives. Observers witnessed extended arguments about procedural matters at times and occasional personal insults among the attorneys. Members of the public interjected themselves in the proceedings and disrupted the hearings at times.

According to the NEC Regulations on Complaints and Appeals, for a post-election contestation complaint to be accepted, "the NEC must find that the errors alleged...were proved to have affected the result of the election." After several weeks of investigation and hearings into the CDC party's charges, the NEC concluded that the CDC had failed to provide adequate evidence of widespread fraud to call into question the results of the election. While CDC supporters protested for several days during the adjudication process and threatened to halt the inauguration proceedings, the CDC flagbearer George Weah eventually declared that in the interest of peace, he would accept the results of the runoff election and suspend the party's complaints.

In contrast to the relatively peaceful electoral period, incidents of intimidation and violence increased following the announcement of runoff results. In one instance, members and supporters of the CDC marched from the party's headquarters in Congo Town to the American embassy in Mamba Point in what was seen by many observers and analysts as a threat to public safety when newly elected leaders had not yet been sworn in. After several days of protests and disrupted traffic in Monrovia, the Ministry of Justice banned public demonstrations. Allegedly, threats of violence were made against some political figures and journalists, and looting and violence occurred in the wake of a public statement by Weah. Concerns were also expressed that slanted media coverage of the election complaint hearings--contrary to the PUL code of conduct--was raising tensions. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of Liberians remained calm during this period, thereby reaffirming their desire and determination to establish sustainable peace in the country.



Domestic election observers and political party representatives observe the voting at a polling precinct.

RIVERCESS BY-ELECTION

In response to complaints launched by one of the contesting candidates in the legislative election, the NEC declared null and void the election for the House of Representatives seat for District 1 of Rivercess County after determining that the winning candidate had registered fraudulently. To fill the resulting vacancy, the NEC held a by-election on May 13, 2006. A runoff election was held on May 30, 2006, as none of the candidates received an absolute majority of “50 percent plus one” in the first round. (The 2004 electoral reform law suspended the requirement that legislative candidates must receive an absolute majority of the vote, implementing a simple majoritarian system for the 2005 legislative elections. However, a runoff election was required for the by-election, as the 2004 reform law’s provisions had expired and the legal framework for elections reverted to article 83(b) of Liberia’s Constitution.)

NDI staff observed preparations for the election and the first and second round voting, which served as the final step in the 2005 electoral process. The by-election process was peaceful, orderly, and smooth.

Voter Education

The NEC, UNMIL, IFES, and other organizations conducted intensive voter education efforts, concentrated in the by-election electoral district. Town hall meetings, town criers, posters, and sample ballots were used to explain the rationale for the by-election and share other relevant information about the election. As a result of the voter education efforts and the simple ballot procedures, most voters seemed to understand the voting procedures and how to cast a valid ballot.

Campaign Period

The campaign period progressed peacefully. Five candidates registered to contest the by-election and agreed to schedule campaign events at different times to avoid conflicting rallies. Some of the candidates limited their campaigning to Cestos City, while others extended their campaigns to include more rural areas of the district. All five candidates participated in a debate organized by IRI and UNMIL.

Voter Turnout

In the first round of voting, approximately a quarter of eligible voters turned out to vote. Voter turnout was impacted by the timing of the elections, as many farmers were said to be more interested in completing agricultural activities before the rainy season than in voting. In addition, some voters were discouraged by the long distances between their homes and the nearest polling stations. Turnout for the runoff election was slightly higher than that of the first round, reaching approximately 38 percent. In contrast to the first round, some voters lined up before the polls opened on the day of the runoff. In both rounds of voting, turnout of women exceeded that of men.

Voting Process

The voting process unfolded smoothly and peacefully in both rounds of the by-election. Before the first round, the NEC conducted refresher courses for polling agents on election day procedures. On May 13, voting started on time, with the presiding officers at each polling place unsealing the ballot boxes in the presence of international and domestic observers, as well as political party representatives. Party representatives interviewed by NDI staff indicated that the electoral process was open and satisfactory.

The runoff election between the top two candidates from the first round was held on May 30, 2006. Voting again started on time and proceeded smoothly. NDI staff heard rumors that voters had been promised rewards for turning out to vote, but saw no evidence to substantiate this claim.

Party representatives demonstrated their commitment to upholding a transparent election process by observing both rounds of the voting in many polling stations.

Tabulation of Results

The NEC announced the official results of the by-election runoff on June 1, 2006, declaring Elizabeth Pennoh Williams (UP) the winner with 56.5 percent of valid votes. Charles Zarkpah Barte, of the New Deal Movement (NDM), was the runner-up.

Complaints Process

Following the runoff election, the NDM filed a complaint with the NEC that county officials and Liberian Vice President Joseph Boakai used rice and money to “buy” votes for the UP candidate. Following an investigation into the claims, the NEC ruled that NDM complaints pertained to criminal violations that should be pursued through the criminal justice system.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the inauguration of the newly-elected president, vice president, and legislature in January 2006, Liberia is now poised to turn an historic corner toward sustainable peace and democratic governance. By their actions, Liberians sent a strong message that the country must turn its back on war and autocratic rule.



Liberian voters wait in line to vote on October 11.

The 2005 elections were the most competitive elections in Liberia's history, with a multiplicity of viable candidates vying for office. Following a remarkably peaceful and highly competitive electoral campaign, voting across the country was violence-free, orderly, and well-administered, despite the massive logistical difficulties associated with holding elections in Liberia's post-conflict environment. However, elections must be viewed as only one step in ensuring democratic governance.

Through election observer delegations, NDI and The Carter Center sought to demonstrate international support for Liberia's democratic process and to provide Liberians and the international community with an impartial and accurate assessment of the electoral process and the political environment surrounding it. Ultimately, however, it is the people of Liberia who, as citizens and voters, will determine the credibility of their elections and the legitimacy that its new leaders have derived from them.

In the spirit of international cooperation and in recognition of Liberians' asserted desire for peace and democratic rule, NDI and The Carter Center provide the following recommendations:

- Liberian youth and women are to be commended for their active participation in these transitional elections. They should be encouraged to remain engaged in the democratic process as an opportunity to make their voices heard. In particular, the delegations urge the NEC and Liberian political parties to continue including women as polling officers, candidates, and party representatives in future elections.
- UNMIL provided substantial technical, operational, and logistical support to the NEC, which increased the Commission's capacity to conduct these elections. The delegation hopes that steps will be taken to further transfer skills and technological infrastructure to Liberians in a sustainable manner to ensure that future elections can be conducted credibly by Liberians themselves.
- The NEC and civil society organizations should mount massive voter education campaigns well in advance of future elections.

- To build public confidence in the impartiality of the electoral complaint process, the NEC should outline and publicize its methodology for resolving election-related complaints. The NEC timeline should establish specific deadlines for the filing of complaints to ensure that electoral challenges are not used as a pretext to disrupt the electoral process. Sufficient resources should be dedicated to the NEC complaint process to ensure that all complaints are processed impartially, on an expedited basis, and with adequate transparency in accordance with due process requirements and equality before the law.
- The complaints and appeals process could be improved to provide for more transparency. For example, the times and locations of future hearings should be clearly communicated to all accredited parties and observers, with documentation readily available. Rulings should be announced as quickly as possible, with immediate redress and effective remedies provided as appropriate.
- Political leaders and candidates should refrain from inflammatory rhetoric that could undermine the country's nascent and thus fragile democratic institutions.
- The media should provide accurate and balanced reporting on the electoral process, and should refrain from biased reporting that could be inflammatory or that may provoke violence.
- The international community should increase its support to Liberia in the medium to longer term to help consolidate nascent democratic institutions and practices.



Polling officials count ballots by lantern light on October 11.