

National Democratic Institute

Sierra Leone Elections Dialogue Series (SLEDS)

On March 7, 2018, Sierra Leoneans went to the polls for the fourth presidential and parliamentary elections since the end of the civil war in 2002. Citizens returned to the polls on March 31 for a presidential run-off election between All Peoples' Congress (APC) candidate Samura Kamara and Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) candidate Julius Maada Bio, with Bio winning the election. Despite democratic gains since 2002, the new government faces significant challenges as a result of the economic crisis and the 2014 Ebola epidemic. In addition, the APC retained its majority in parliament, representing the first time in Sierra Leone's history that parliament is controlled by the opposition party.

The Sierra Leone Elections Dialogue Series promoted issue-based public discourse and supported a peaceful political transition during the 2018 electoral cycle. The program increased the participation of women, youth and other disadvantaged groups in debates and dialogue sessions relating to the elections cycle. As part of the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), NDI partnered with the International Republican Institute (IRI), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Search for Common Ground (Search) and Internews to implement a series of pre- and post-elections activities.

Issue-Based Candidate Debates

Ahead of the March 2018 elections, NDI provided technical assistance to the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the Sierra Leone Debate Organizing Committee (SLDOC) to organize three issue-based candidate debates during the campaign period to serve as a platform for candidates to discuss issues important to citizens, including those relating to disadvantaged groups. The debates included a youth debate, a women's debate and a presidential debate conducted in both English and Krio. All major political parties attended all three debates and each debate was broadcast nationally on two television stations and 44 radio stations. Prior to the women and youth debates, NDI held candidate orientations to prepare political party representatives to participate in the debates.

Establishment of the National Political Debates Committee (NPDC)

Following the elections, the groups involved with the candidate debates sought to sustain their success and institutionalize debates for future elections. NDI provided technical support to 11 organizations to establish the National Political Debates Committee (NPDC) with the aim of enhancing the growth of democratic processes in Sierra Leone through inclusive political and public policy debates. Members of the NPDC established a mission and vision for the organization, created an organizational structure, and identified key objectives of the committee. The committee will build on the success of the 2018 debates and continue to solidify and promote a culture of debates in Sierra Leone.

Funding

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Women candidates representing six major political parties at the debate for women candidates on March 1, 2018.

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