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Elections in Sierra Leone

2018 General Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:
These FAQs reflect information made public as of March 2, 2018, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

Election Day in Sierra Leone is March 7, 2018. Polls will be open from 7:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. All voters who have joined the line before 5:00 p.m. will be allowed to vote, even if the polling center closes before they have received their ballots.

Why are the March 7 elections in Sierra Leone important?

The March 2018 general elections represent the fifth straight general elections since return to multi-party elections in 1996, and the third since the 2002 conclusion of the country's civil war. These elections are therefore a significant building block to the country's commitment to enduring peace. In addition, the 2018 elections will be the first elections to be conducted without the supervision of a United Nations (UN) mission approved by the UN Security Council and with significantly lower levels of donor funding.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

Sierra Leone's National Electoral Commission (NEC) is the sole authority with the constitutional mandate (per Section 33 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone) to prepare and conduct all public elections and referenda. Sierra Leone's president appoints all five members of the NEC to a five-year term, after consultation with all registered political parties, and subject to the Parliament's approval. In addition to being mandated to conduct all public elections and referenda, the NEC is responsible for registering all eligible voters, demarcating constituency boundaries, and making regulations for the efficient execution of its functions.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Registered Sierra Leonean voters will cast ballots for president, Parliament and local councils. Having served two terms, Sierra Leone's incumbent president, Ernest Bai Koroma, is ineligible for re-election. A total of 16 candidates will compete for the presidency, with 14 male candidates and two female candidates. There are also 16 candidates for vice president, with 11 male candidates and five female candidates. For Parliament, there are 792 candidates, including 43 independent candidates, running in the March 7 elections.

The ruling All People's Congress has chosen Dr. Samura Kamara as its presidential candidate, while the main opposition Sierra Leone People's Party has nominated Julius Maada Bio as its presidential candidate.

Who can vote in Sierra Leone's March 2018 elections?

Three legal documents govern voter registration in Sierra Leone: the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, the 2012 Public Elections Act and the 2016 National Civil Registration. Section 15(1) of the Public Elections Act states, in part, that every person who has attained the age of 18 years, or who will have attained the age of 18 years on the date of the holding of the next election, is eligible to register to vote.

To be eligible to vote, registrants must: a) be Sierra Leonean by law; b) be at least 17 years of age, c) be

of “sound mind” [sic]; d) not imprisoned for conviction of a crime or under death sentence; and e) be a resident in the area where he/she wishes to register.

How many registered voters are there?

There are 3,178,663 registered voters (52% women and 48% men) for the March 2018 elections; the voter roll update process was completed on April 30, 2017. Voters are distributed among Sierra Leone’s four administrative districts: Eastern (19.88%), Northern (32.48%), Southern (19.66%) and Western, including Freetown (27.98%).

What is Sierra Leone’s electoral system?

Sierra Leone’s president is elected using a modified [two-round system](#), whereby a candidate must receive more than 55 percent of the vote in the first round to be elected. If no candidate receives 55 percent plus one vote, then a run-off election will be held within 14 days of the first round’s final results announcement. The country’s 124-member Parliament consists of 112 single-member constituencies (elected through first-past-the-post voting) representing all 14 districts, and 12 paramount chiefs (one per administrative district), who are elected indirectly.

Sierra Leone’s electoral system is currently comprised of 132 electoral constituencies and 446 wards.

What is the structure of the government?

Sierra Leone is a multi-party democratic republic, with three branches: the executive, legislative and the judiciary. The seat of government is in the capital, Freetown. The president is both head of state and head of government. Executive power is exercised by the president, and legislative power is vested in the Parliament of Sierra Leone; the judiciary is independent of both the executive and the legislature.

Where will voters cast their ballots on Election Day?

There will be a total of 11,200 polling stations (distributed among 3,300 polling centers) in Sierra Leone. On Election Day, registered voters will return to the same polling center where they registered to vote to cast their ballots.

Will there be out-of-country voting?

Sierra Leone’s legal electoral framework allows for out-of-country voting, but the National Electoral Commission is not presently able to organize voting for citizens residing outside the country.

How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?

Wherever possible, polling centers will be accessible to wheelchairs and to those who face mobility challenges. Every polling station will have at least one voter screen that is lower to accommodate voters in wheelchairs. Some public service announcements are available in sign language so that they may be understood by deaf or hearing-impaired voters. Persons with disabilities and the elderly are permitted to be accompanied by their own appointed helpers. In addition, for the first time ever, Sierra Leone will

use tactile ballots in the March 2018 elections. Tactile ballots enable blind and visually-impaired persons to identify their preferred candidate by feeling the ballot paper, all though they may not see it.

Who is managing security on Election Day?

Sierra Leone has not experienced high levels of electoral violence in recent elections. However, there have been reports of violent incidents surrounding local by-elections in 2017, which has prompted some concerns about the risk of violence in 2018. Youth, unemployed young men in particular, are commonly viewed as the primary perpetrators of political violence.¹ In anticipation of possible violence, Sierra Leone's Office of National Security, the Sierra Leone Police, Sierra Leone's Armed Forces, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, have developed three precautionary electoral security protocols with support from United Nations Development Programme: 1) a threat assessment/district risk mapping exercise; 2) a security sector training manual for the 2018 elections, and; 3) an integrated elections security strategy.

The threat assessment/district risk mapping exercise guides the deployment of resources in the most efficient manner across the country ahead of, and during the elections. The security sector training manual for the 2018 elections ensures all security personnel involved in the elections share the same understanding on rules of engagement with respect to standard operating procedures. The integrated elections security strategy document provides a comprehensive strategy for manning the elections and highlights the roles and responsibilities of all security sector institutions that would be involved in the elections.

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

Domestic and international organizations can apply to the National Electoral Commission for accreditation, per the 2012 Public Elections Act. Among the accredited international observers are the European Union, the African Union, Economic Community Of West African States, and the Carter Center.

When will official results be announced?

Per section 52(2) of the 2012 Public Elections Act, "As soon as possible after receipt of the result of the counting of votes under subsection (1), the Returning Officer shall tally and compute the results certified to him by the various Presiding Officers and shall after that declare the result of the election."

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Electoral disputes will be adjudicated through the existing Electoral Offense Courts with dedicated judges appointed by the chief justice. This approach contrasts with the 2012 method, whereby local-level courts were established and used with inconsistent results. The High Court will also hear petitions filed within 21 days of final results being announced. An Appeals Court will also be available to petitioners.

¹ Africa Research Institute (2011), 'Old tricks, young guns: Elections and violence in Sierra Leone'
<http://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/publications/briefing-notes/old-tricks-young-guns-elections-and-violence-in-sierra-leone/>

Resources

- [National Electoral Commission](#)
- [National Electoral Commission: Disability Policy](#)
- [2012 Public Elections Act](#)