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Elections in Sierra Leone

November 17 Presidential, Parliamentary and Local 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 decisions made by the Sierra Leonean elections authorities as of November 15, 2012, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.*

Who will Sierra Leoneans elect on November 17?

On November 17, 2012, the people of Sierra Leone will cast their votes in presidential and parliamentary elections, as well as municipal elections for mayors or local council chairpersons and local councilors.

For the first time, voters will be asked to cast four ballots on the same day; in previous years, the municipal elections were not held at the same time as the presidential and parliamentary elections.

Which election management body is responsible for administering the elections?

The 2012 elections will be the first since the end of the civil war in 2002 that Sierra Leone's National Electoral Commission (NEC) has taken the primary role in organizing and executing. The NEC receives some support from the international community through the Election Basket Fund.

How are these elections structured?

Presidential Election

In this election, registered voters will vote for one presidential candidate and the associated vice presidential candidate. Only candidates who are members of registered political parties and are nominated by their respective parties during the official nomination period set by NEC can contest the presidency. There are no independent candidates for the presidential election.

According to the 1991 constitution of Sierra Leone, to win the election outright, a presidential candidate must receive 55 percent of total valid votes cast. If no single candidate receives 55 percent of the total valid vote, a runoff/second round, under a simple-majority/first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, will be conducted between the two candidates who obtained the most votes in the first round. The candidate who obtains a majority of valid votes in the second round will be declared the winner. The president is elected for a five-year term.

General Parliamentary Elections

Voters will also elect representatives to parliament from Sierra Leone's 112 constituencies. Members are elected on the basis of a simple-majority/FPTP system by which the candidate in each constituency who obtains the most valid votes cast is elected for a five-year term. Candidates may contest parliamentary seats as members of registered political parties or as independents.

Local Council Chairperson/Mayoral Elections

These elections will determine the local council chairpersons or mayors for each of the 19 local councils in Sierra Leone. Held every four years, the elections of mayors or local council chairpersons will be conducted using a simple-majority/FPTP system; the candidate who obtains the most valid votes cast in each locality wins. Party-affiliated and independent candidates may run in these elections.

Local Councilor Elections

A total of 456 local councilors will be elected to 19 local councils across 394 wards nationwide. One councilor will be elected for each ward, with the exception of 21 wards in which the number of councilors may vary from four to eight.

Elections for councilors are based on a simple-majority/FPTP system; the candidate who obtains the most valid votes cast in the locality wins. Both party-affiliated and independent candidates may run in these elections.

What are the main political parties?

There are 10 officially registered political parties in Sierra Leone; these parties received this certification from the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC). Any officially registered party can nominate candidates for the offices of president, member of parliament, mayor/local council chairperson and local councilor.

In addition to the All People's Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), other national political parties include the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), both of which elected members of parliament in 2007. All of the registered parties will field candidates for parliament, mayor/local council chairperson and local councilor, although they will not field candidates in all seats nationwide. The NDA will not field a presidential candidate in 2012.

Of interest is that one of the main combatants in Sierra Leone's 1992-2002 civil war, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), has since converted into a political party – the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUFPP).

Who are the candidates for the presidential election?

Nine of the 10 officially registered political parties in Sierra Leone nominated presidential candidates who will appear on the ballot for the 2012 elections. In local parlance, these candidates are often referred to as flag bearers.

The current ruling party, the All People's Congress (APC), has nominated incumbent President Ernest Bai Koroma to run for a second term. President Koroma was first elected in 2007.

The current leading opposition party is the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). The SLPP held the presidency from 2002 to 2007. The 2012 SLPP presidential candidate is Julius Maada Bio.

Who is eligible to vote?

All eligible registered Sierra Leoneans 18 and older can vote in the presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections. From January to March 2012, Sierra Leone held its first biometric voter registration (BVR) exercise, which resulted in the development of a final voter list (FVL) of 2.7 million eligible voters.

The BVR captured unique digitized fingerprint and facial data for each voter as part of an effort to reduce fraudulent multiple registrations.

When does voting take place?

Under the Public Election Act of 2012, voting will take place between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, November 17, 2012.

Who is allowed to enter polling centers?

Registered voters for a polling center who are voting or queuing to vote at that particular center may enter. Others who may enter a polling center include NEC polling officials with special duties relating to polling and counting; UN technical assistance team members; accredited agents of political parties and independent candidates; accredited national and international electoral observers; accredited members of the media; and Sierra Leone Police or other security officers assigned to polling centers.

Outside of the polling centers, NEC staff will serve as queue controllers and as voter information officers assisting with provisional voting in the event that a voter is missing his or her voter ID card.

What are the voting guidelines?

Each voter must vote in person using his or her voter ID card. Voting on behalf of another person (called personation) is illegal. Each voter must mark his or her ballot in secret behind the dedicated voting screen. No more than one voter is permitted behind the voting screen at a time, except when a voter with disabilities is being assisted by a person of his or her own choosing who is also a registered voter. All voters will be inked on their left index finger after casting their completed ballots and before leaving the polling station.

Who can be assisted to vote?

Persons with disabilities, the elderly, and nursing and pregnant women will be given preferential treatment to head to the front of the queues at polling centers.

Under NEC training guidelines for polling staff, persons with disabilities, including those with visual or hearing impairments or physical disabilities, will be automatically allowed to bring a trusted individual to assist them in marking their ballots. These assisting individuals must be registered voters, and each can only assist one person over the course of Election Day. Any other category of voter requiring assistance, such as the elderly, will be allowed to do so at the discretion of the presiding officer.

Where will vote counting take place?

Counting the ballots in the elections for the presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections will take place immediately upon the conclusion of voting at every polling center.

Who conducts the counting process?

The staff at each polling center will conduct the count. The presiding officer at the polling station is responsible for organizing and supervising the count at each polling center.

When will final election results be released?

The NEC has set up both district and regional tally centers in 2012 to facilitate the tally and results reporting processes, but there is no officially mandated date for releasing election results. The Public Elections Act of 2012 states that "as soon as possible after receipt of the result of the counting of votes under subsection 1, the Returning Officer [NEC Chief Electoral Commissioner Christiana Thorpe] shall tally and compute the results certified to him by the various Presiding Officers and shall after that declare the result of the election."

Resources

- Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) [website](#)
- National Electoral Commission (NEC) [website](#)
- [Public Elections Act of 2012](#) (abridged)