



June 25, 2022

Situational Statement on the Pre-election Environment in Lofa County's

June 28, 2022 By-Election

Overview

Over the last two months, the Liberia Elections Observation Network (LEON) has observed the pre-elections environment in Lofa County, Liberia. LEON trained and assigned 1 Long-term Observer (LTO) in each of the 5 electoral districts to observe processes such as the replacement of lost and damaged voters' card, candidate nomination, and campaigning. Our observers visited registration centers, followed candidate nomination through political party processes and monitored campaigning through attendance at political rallies, and assemblies. LTOs also followed radio appearances of candidates and their supporters. We are confident that this report represents the general pre-election environment in the county leading up to E-Day, June 28, 2022.

Brief Background

The by-election is called to fill a longstanding vacancy in senatorial representation in Lofa county caused by a court's finding of guilt against the December 8, 2020 special senatorial election winner Mr. Brownie Samukai who was found guilty of theft of property, misuse of public money and criminal conspiracy in the use of monies belonging to officers and members of the Armed Forces of Liberia. The verdict meant Mr. Samukai could not take up the county's seat in the Senate. Therefore, this by-election.

Observations

LEON observers found that the National Elections Commission (NEC) opened voter replacement card centers at magistrate offices in 2 of the 5 districts only (Voinjama and Kolahun). Registration centers opened and closed on time. LEON observers noted that the opening of only two replacement centers in a county covering a land mass area of 9, 982 square kilometers and 187,774 registered voters is a disproportionate allocation of centers relative to distance a voter and voting population.

LEON observed that the candidate publication was published according to the timeline by NEC. The candidate nomination process at the political party level was particularly tense. Tense, as a result of reservations to the candidacy of the Unity Party's nominee and suspect because only one political party (Unity Party) is fielding a candidate in these by-elections. Five other candidates are independents although the ruling Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) has announced that she is supporting the candidacy of Mr. Joseph Jallah, one of the independents.

The Unity Party's own candidate nomination process was fraught with legal challenges by its one-time coalition allies, the Liberty Party (LP) and the Alternative National Congress (ANC). This caused the postponement of the by-election which previously had been scheduled for May 8, 2022. The legal challenges arose from the administrative agency level (NEC) to the Supreme Court of Liberia, who finally ruled that a provision of the coalition's framework document barring party dissociation from the coalition

was unconstitutional. The Court's ruling allowed UP's Galakpai W. Kortimai to be placed on the ballot as a candidate. LEON is concerned that 1. Candidate nomination largely took place at NEC's headquarters in Monrovia thus likely making it difficult for aspirants' resident in the county to inexpensively register their candidature and, 2. That keeping NEC as referee in interparty disputes may brew distrust between political parties and the Commission who should be seen as an impartial player in electoral processes.

During the campaign period, our observers found that all candidates were allowed access to public buildings for campaigning. Campaigns /rallies held by UP and independent candidates were accessible to persons with disabilities. It was observed that no political party or individual candidate use inflammatory language against women and the disabled or other candidates. There was no threat of violence occurring during the campaign process. Police and securities were present at all campaigns and rallies. LEON observed there was 100% freedom of assembly.

In addition, all six candidates in the by-election ran campaigns outside the campaign period. LEON did not observe or heard of "trucking" people. LEON observed the improper use of state resources during the campaign period.

LEON observers report that voter education was carried out in all districts. NEC was largely responsible for all voter education conducted in the county reported (76.5%) and civil society organizations were responsible for 23.5% of voter education according to observers. Voter education included the use of posters / flyers (70.6%) and radio, 29.4%.

Critical incidents surrounding the pre-election period centered mostly on the Brownie Samukai legal case with traditional people and youth-led groups staging several protests to bring public attention to their claims of "disenfranchisement" and "political witch-hunt." These incidences have since ceased after interventions from county officials and the Minister of Internal Affairs.

Overall, public participation in pre-election activities were satisfactory.

LEON will be releasing a situational statement on the opening of polls at midday on June 28, 2022 and a preliminary statement the day after. The public can continue to follow all our reports including our monthly newsletters on socio-economic trends in all 73 electoral districts on through these media: Website: www.leonobservation.org Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LEONLiberia/> Twitter: [@network_liberia](https://twitter.com/network_liberia).

About LEON: LEON is a network of the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY); the National Union of Organizations of the Disable; the Liberia Crusaders for Peace (LCP); and the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC). Since 2017, LEON has developed into one of Liberia's primary and most respected organizations operating in the democracy and governance space and has successfully conducted a range of activity including legislative monitoring, monitoring, and reporting on violence against women in politics, and advocating for election reform.

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