

Carter Center

The Carter Center is conducting a comprehensive long-term international election observation mission for Liberia's 2017 election. The current phase of the mission includes six long-term observers who have been deployed across the country since August, and a core team of electoral experts in Monrovia.

In the coming week, they will be joined by about 30 short-term observers who will help observe the voting, counting, and tabulation processes. The delegation will be led by H. E. Catherine Samba-Panza, former president of the Central African Republic; Jason Carter, chairman of the Carter Center Board of Trustees; and Jordan Ryan, vice president of the Carter Center's peace programs.

This pre-election statement summarizes observations to date from the Carter Center's long-term observers and offers several recommendations on steps to increase public confidence in the election. The Carter Center uses this opportunity to flag a few issues, including several that could be addressed prior to election day.

Voter Registration

International standards say that voter lists should be prepared in a transparent manner and that voters should be provided free access to review and correct their registration data as the need arises.¹

On Sept. 12, the National Election Commission announced the release of the final voter register. Following extensive efforts to address deficiencies identified during the exhibition period and manually verify entries in the register, the total number of registered voters is 2,183,629. Partially addressing recommendations to inform the public about their efforts, the NEC announced that 4,567 duplicate entries were identified and corrected. While even more information could have been provided about how the NEC resolved issues concerning missing names, misallocated voters, and mismatched photos, the Center acknowledges the NEC's positive efforts to provide information to the public and explanations to the contesting political parties.

For this election the NEC has established a new way for voters to check their registration data and their polling place allocation via SMS. While a valuable tool for voters that could alleviate some confusion on election day, the Center's observers have not witnessed widespread voter information efforts by the NEC and its civic and voter education partners to make voters aware of the tool. The NEC has asked their civic and voter education partners to spread the message but has not launched a national campaign

¹ "The voters' lists shall be prepared in a transparent and reliable manner, with the collaboration of the political parties and voters who may have access to them whenever the need arises." Article 5. ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001). United Nations Human Rights Committee. 1996. *General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right to Equal Access to Public Service)*.

to inform voters about the system. *The Carter Center urges the NEC to consider using all media and telecommunication options to communicate the availability of this tool to voters, which would contribute to the public's confidence in the quality of the list and help familiarize voters with the location of their polling places.*

In a meeting of the Inter-Party Consultative Committee (IPCC), the NEC began providing political parties with electronic copies of the roll, which also has been distributed to the magistrates' offices. In the IPCC, the NEC also took the opportunity to inform political parties about measures it will be taking to ensure that voters with valid voter registration cards who are in the voter register but do not appear on the printed voter lists will be able to vote. While the NEC has reiterated that they are confident all registered voters will appear on the printed voter list at the polls, it also has acknowledged that there can be situations where registered voters are not on the voter list on election day.

NEC's planned measures include procedures for double-checking voter's data in the list, and, if the voter is still not found, having polling staff use the SMS system to verify that the person is registered in the electronic register. In such cases, polling staff would then add the person to a supplementary voter list. A number of political parties voiced concern that this would weaken the integrity of the election and questioned how the NEC would verify the validity of a voter's registration. Following discussion, the majority of parties present at the IPCC appeared to acknowledge that it was within the NEC's purview to implement these procedures, and in accordance with previous practice. In the days following the IPCC, one party wrote to object to the process and request further explanation. The procedures remained an issue of discussion in the IPCC convened on Sept. 27.

Election Preparations

An independent and impartial election management body that functions transparently and professionally is recognized as an effective means of ensuring that citizens can participate in a genuinely democratic electoral process.²

In the beginning of September, the NEC conducted a mass recruitment and screening of nearly 29,000 staff to work in the polling stations on election day. Carter Center observers report that local interlocutors in the counties are generally satisfied with the transparency and fairness of the process. ***To further its commitment to transparency, the NEC should publicly post the lists of people selected as polling station staff so that the names may be scrutinized by the community.*** The polling staff will be trained through a cascade process that is well underway. In trainings observed by The Carter Center, observers reported that there were thorough explanations of procedures but that trainees would have benefited from a more interactive approach as well as from more specific content on tabulation procedures.

² United Nations Human Rights Committee. 1996. *General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right to Equal Access to Public Service)*. African Union. 2007. *African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance*. Addis Ababa: African Union.

The NEC has not yet published regulations on tabulation procedures at the magisterial offices or announced how and when provisional results will be released. The NEC has responded to queries by emphasizing that each stage of the tabulation process will have a clear paper trail and will be open to observation. ***The Carter Center commends the NEC's commitment to transparency and urges the NEC to continue efforts to explain the tabulation process and the provisions for ensuring adequate access for party agents and observers, and any other safeguards it is implementing. Further, a clear outline of the planned timetable for releasing results would help prepare political parties and the general public for the days following election day.***

The first ballot papers arrived in country on Sept. 23. The NEC has announced that over 3 million ballots for both the presidential and legislative race have been printed. The difference in the number of ballots printed and the number of registered voters is due to the fact that each polling station will be given 550 ballots, regardless of the number of its registered voters. In addition, contingency ballots were printed equal to three percent of the total for the presidential race and five percent for the legislative races. A number of political parties, including the ruling party, have expressed concern about the number of extra ballots that will be in circulation. However, The Carter Center notes the protections in place against multiple voting, including the use of indelible ink and the punching of voter cards.

Ballots are being delivered primarily by road, but in some areas, the commission will need to use porters and canoes. Alleviating concerns shared by election stakeholders and the international community, the NEC announced that UNMIL has agreed to provide air support for the delivery of election materials. Still, NEC acknowledges there will be challenges with the delivery of materials in remote locations, given the rainy season conditions.

Campaign

Under international law, genuine, democratic elections require that candidates and political parties be able to campaign free from interference or undue restrictions.³

As election day draws closer, campaign activity has increased, with a number of large rallies in Monrovia and smaller-scale events in the city and its environs. The tensions felt in the city during past campaigns have been noticeably absent, with partisans conducting themselves peacefully and respectfully. Although the presence of the Liberian National Police (LNP) seems to have varied from rally to rally, this may reflect efforts to take into account inter-party dynamics and police-party relations. To date, the LNP has acted with prudence and restraint. ***The Center commends the police and the parties for the conduct of the campaign to date and urges continuing cooperation going forward.***

³ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 21. ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Governance, Article 1(i).

The Center's mission has observed campaign events for both legislative and presidential races staged by nine parties and two independent candidates in six counties: Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Margibi, Maryland, and Montserrado. Reports from the Center's observers indicate campaign activity outside Monrovia has been less intense than in the capital. Large events are organized mainly around visits of parties' presidential candidates. Both firsthand observation and secondhand reports from the Center's interlocutors confirm that the campaign to date has been largely peaceful and that parties and candidates have freely exercised their democratic rights.

The one serious exception occurred on Sept. 20, when the peaceful tenor of the campaign was marred by a violent clash between partisans of the Liberty Party (LP) and the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) in Nimba. The incident occurred when CDC's presidential campaign convoy was passing an LP gathering, for which LP reportedly had received prior permission. Multiple people were injured. The Liberian National Police are investigating the matter along with another reported confrontation between CDC and UP in Montserrado. In a meeting with the Center's mission shortly after the event, the CDC's presidential candidate stated that despite the incident, his party continued to subscribe to the Farmington Declaration and was committed to running a peaceful campaign. In the pre-election period, political parties committed themselves to a peaceful process and transfer of power. These commitments were made in the framework of the Ganta Resolution and the Farmington Declaration. ***Recalling both Farmington and Ganta, the Center calls on all parties and candidates to reiterate their commitment to a peaceful process and respect one another's right to campaign.***

Parties and candidates show a growing level of ideological sophistication in this campaign. Some parties have relatively detailed platforms and programs that they have made available to the Center. However, the extent of the availability of party platforms and programs to voters is unclear. In debates, candidates for both president and – a welcome first for Liberia – vice-president have submitted to questions, articulated visions for the country, and been compelled to take stands on issues. Liberian democracy has been enriched by this exercise. Unfortunately, both the ruling party candidate Vice President Joseph Boakai and two leading opposition candidates did not attend the most recent debate on Sept. 26, 2017.

Ethnicity and Heritage in the Campaign

The Carter Center has observed candidates emphasizing their indigenous background in presenting themselves to the Liberian people. The distinction between “Americo-Liberians” and indigenous peoples – however much it may be the product of cultural practice and politics – is as old as the republic itself, and its prevalence in the campaign indicates that it remains relevant today.

The 2008 Liberian census identifies 17 different ethnic groups that compose the population of the country.⁴ As of 2008, the two largest groups were the Kpelle (20 percent) and the Bassa (13.4 percent). These two groups both call the center part of the country home. The so-called “Kpelle belt” runs from the north of modern-day Bong County through Margibi into Grand Bassa. The Bassa can be found primarily in Bong, Grand Bassa, and Rivercess counties. Bong, Grand Bassa, and Margibi are three of the six largest counties in the country in terms of registered voters.

Liberian politics have frequently been marked by ethnic rivalries, but this campaign has seen them injected into the presidential contest to a greater degree than in the recent past. In the counties, local populations use language that borders on divisive and speak about electing “one of their own” or putting “one of their men in office.” Candidates seemingly have selected running mates based on their appeal to different counties and ethnic groups.⁵ While this can be seen as part of the normal political process of building support, at the same time, it runs the risk of aggravating historic tensions. Interlocutors in Bong County in particular have expressed concern to the Center’s observers about post-election reconciliation as well as the importance of ensuring that all Liberians accept the results of a credible process. ***The Center calls on candidates to exercise caution in their rhetoric and remind their supporters that no matter their ethnic group or heritage, they and their opponents are all Liberians.***

Campaign Concerns

States must take effective measures to ensure that all persons entitled to vote are able to exercise that right free from intimidation or fear of retribution.⁶

The Carter Center has observed that a number of parties are engaging in large-scale recruitment campaigns in which party activists gather voter registration information from potential supporters.⁷ This practice is not illegal, if done in a manner that doesn’t compromise the secrecy of the ballot or leave voters with a fear of retribution. The Center’s observers have received reports of such voter registration information being gathered while distributing food or announcing future scholarships. Further, some parties

⁴ In addition to these 17, the census categories also include “other Liberian ethnic group,” which presumably includes people of Americo-Liberian descent, as well as “other African tribe” and “non African tribe.”

⁵ No less than four presidential/vice-presidential tickets include candidates seemingly chosen for their appeal to the people of Bong County. Similarly, at least four different presidential/vice-presidential tickets feature candidates from Nimba. Margibi has two of its current representatives vying for office - independent presidential candidate Senator Oscar Cooper and Unity Party vice-presidential candidate Speaker of the House Emmanuel Nuquay.

⁶ United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC), General Comment No. 25, para. 11.

⁷ Liberty Party activists in Nimba confirmed to the Center’s observers that as part of their recruitment efforts they have been instructed to record the voter identification numbers of prospective party members. The Unity Party in the county has raised concerns about this practice, though no formal complaint was made. Other interlocutors in both Nimba and Margibi allege that Unity Party activists in those counties have also been soliciting voter identification numbers. The Center’s observers have received a report that the Movement for Democracy & Reconstruction is engaged in a similar practice, which is said to be rife in the southeast as well.

require activists to obtain information from a certain number of voters in order to be paid. Given low levels of literacy and civic education amongst the population, multiple interlocutors are worried about the potential for those interactions to become a source of intimidation. Prospective voters could form the impression that sharing their identification number with a party makes it possible for that party to determine how they cast their ballot. Furthermore, as voter identification numbers are not necessary for “Get Out The Vote” efforts, there is no compelling reason to collect this information. ***In order to assure voters that they can cast their ballots free from intimidation and that the secrecy of the vote is fully protected, The Carter Center calls on all parties to refrain from gathering voter identification numbers in the time before election day. In addition, the political parties and the NEC should assure voters that it is not possible to determine how a voter cast his or her ballot based on an identification number.***

Use of State Resources. To ensure a level playing field in the campaign, unfair incumbency advantages should be addressed and the use of state resources in favor of specific candidates should be prohibited.⁸ The Center’s mission continues to receive complaints about the misuse of state resources by the ruling party and incumbents. In the context of elections, state resources include not only government vehicles and fuel, as well as public space, but also public office. According to good international practice, administrative officials should not use their office to support or show favor to a particular political party.⁹

Carter Center observers have received allegations of superintendents and other local administration officials openly supporting the ruling party (Margibi, Nimba, and Lofa).¹⁰ Two local administration officials for Margibi County told the Center’s observers that they felt pressure to do so as well. Chiefs in Grand Bassa and Grand Cape Mount candidly informed the Center’s observers that they are supporting the vice president and urging their communities to do the same.

Opposition parties continue to allege nearly unanimously that the ruling party has used government vehicles and fuel in its campaign (Margibi, Montserrado, Lofa, Sinoe). The Center’s observers in the counties have received six reports of political parties being denied the use of public space (Grand Cape Mount, Maryland, and Lofa). In Grand Gedeh, the vice president is reported to have chosen not to use the city hall in Zwedru so as to avoid the perception that he was enjoying privileged access to public space.

Allegations of the misuse of state resources are often difficult to substantiate, particularly in the absence of a formal complaint. Parties have consistently shied away from filing

⁸ “The fairness of a campaign will be undermined where state resources are unreasonably used to favour the campaign of one candidate or political party. State resources— such as the use of public buildings for campaign events – should be available on an equitable basis to all contestants.” European Union. 2008. *Handbook for European Union Election Observation, Second Edition*. European Commission. The Carter Center. *Statement of the Council of Presidents and Prime Ministers of the Americas - Financing Democracy: Political Parties, Campaigns, and Elections*. Atlanta: The Carter Center, 2003.

⁹ Venice Commission’s Code of Good Practice in the Field of Political Parties, para. 41.

¹⁰ Superintendents are political appointees, nominated by the president and confirmed by the legislature. The chiefs are part of the Ministry of Interior structure and receive government stipends.

formal complaints, limiting the authorities' ability to properly address them. *Where parties have concerns about the misuse of state resources, the Center encourages them to document possible violations and file formal complaints with the relevant authorities.*

Campaign Finance. International best practice requires that financing of political parties be fully transparent. To this end, accounts of all income and expenditures should be kept. Reasonable limitations on campaign expenditures may be justified to ensure that the free choice of voters is not undermined or the democratic process distorted by the disproportionate expenditure on behalf of a candidate or party.¹¹ According to the NEC, seven out of the 26 registered parties have submitted their statements on assets and liabilities and reported on campaign expenditures, in accordance with the provisions of the law. These parties are UP, CDC, ALP, ANC, MPC, UPP and VFRC, although not all met the legal deadlines.¹² Four more parties have submitted the statements of assets and liabilities, but not their campaign expenditures (LP, TWP, MPR, LDC). In order to “strike a balance between peaceful elections and the legal requirements,” the NEC has said that it is considering several options, including proceedings to disband parties that have not complied either in part or in full with the law. The legal grounds for de-registering political parties for this reason remain unclear, as specific regulations on the matter have not been developed. Failure to submit statements of campaign expenses is considered an infraction and subject to penalties.

Alternative Dispute Resolution. The Carter Center has noted several incidents in which mediation was used to resolve disputes before they could escalate, relieving the necessity for official complaints.¹³ The Center welcomes the use of alternative methods of dispute resolution and the NEC's efforts in some localities to prevent problems before they threaten the integrity of the process.

In this spirit, the Center notes that allocation of campaign space in the final days of the campaign period may be an issue. The NEC convened an IPCC meeting to discuss a request by the LNP that political parties refrain from having large campaign events in Monrovia after Oct. 4, four days prior to the official end of the campaign period. The LNP made the request because of an expected depletion of the police force in Monrovia as officers redeploy around the country for election security purposes. While UP supported the request, ANC and CDC have said they have the right to campaign and intend to go ahead with their campaign plans to have large “closing rallies in those days.”

Furthermore, given the large number of parties and the scarcity of available space to accommodate rallies, there is the possibility that multiple parties may request access to

¹¹ ICCPR General Comment 25, para. 19.

¹² Article 83.d, 1986 Constitution.

¹³ In August 2017, the campaign office of a UP House candidate in Kanweaken, River Gee, was allegedly stoned. The county NEC intervened and resolved the issue without needing to involve the police. In Grand Gedeh the following month, a female candidate complained to the NEC office after a male candidate disrupted her rally. The NEC resolved the matter. The Grand Gedeh NEC also successfully intervened in another dispute between two candidates, bringing the reciprocal defacement of campaign posters to a halt. The Grand Bassa NEC, when faced with a conflict between the campaign schedules of CDC and CLP, spoke with both parties and resolved the situation.

the stadium, sports complex, or the main thoroughfares on the same day. *The Center recommends that the authorities allocate time and space for campaigning in the final days in a manner that provides all parties with equal opportunities and assures that events are organized in a manner to avoid confrontation between supporters.*

Religious Communities, Women, and Marginalized Groups

In order to meet the principle of universal suffrage, international standards say that countries must ensure that all people entitled to vote are able to exercise that right. Further, states should consider “taking appropriate measures to encourage publicly and promote the importance of participation of all citizens in political and public affairs, in particular women, persons belonging to marginalized groups or to minorities, and persons in vulnerable situations, including by engaging them in designing, evaluating and reviewing policies on participation in political and public affairs”.¹⁴ The full participation of women, LGBTI, religious and ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities in the political life of Liberia continues to face several challenges.

Muslim and Mandingo communities. Muslims in Liberia represent 12 or more percent of the population.¹⁵ According to the National Muslim Council (NMC), out of the 73 members of the House of Representatives, six are Muslims, while there are no Muslims in the Senate. There are several Muslim candidates for the House, but only one Muslim among the 40 registered vice presidential candidates.¹⁶ According to the NMC, the limited presence of Muslims as candidates stems from a long-term alienation from the country’s political and social life. This limited participation could be further compromised if a proposition of the Constitutional Review Committee to make Liberia a Christian nation materializes.¹⁷

In recent meetings with the Center, community representatives reiterated concerns about the obstacles their communities faced during the registration period (See The Carter Center’s Assessment of the Voter Registration Process from March, 2017). While these issues were mostly addressed by the NEC, the community representatives remain concerned that these experiences might impact election day participation. Further, the Mandingo community said their participation might be compromised by insufficient voter education and information, as the organizations working with the NEC may not have sufficient access to their communities to conduct outreach.

¹⁴ Para. 4.d of the UNHRC Resolution 27/24 (2014). United Nations Human Rights Committee. 1996. *General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right to Equal Access to Public Service)*.

¹⁵ Source: 2008 Population and Housing Census. Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS). Other sources estimate that Muslims in Liberia account for 20 percent of the population.

¹⁶ William Knowlden, vice presidential candidate for the Movement for Progressive Change (MPC).

¹⁷ In March 2015, the CRC approved 25 recommendations to set an agenda for amending the current 1986 Constitution. One of the recommendations was to include in the text a reference to make Liberia a Christian nation. President Johnson-Sirleaf expressed opposition to such an amendment.

Women. Liberia has committed to ensuring women have the opportunity to participate in political life on equal terms with men through its ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).¹⁸ However, attempts at legislation to promote women’s political participation have languished in the legislature, and while the 2008 census found the population evenly divided between the sexes, only 48 percent of registered voters are women. Women account for a mere 15 percent of the candidates for the House of Representatives, due in part to the absence of quotas or other positive measures in the election law that would guarantee the representation of women in elected office.

The election law requires parties “to endeavor to ensure” that 30 percent of their candidates are women, and the NEC requested documentation from the parties that they had done so. Ultimately, however, the NEC determined that this was not compulsory. Advocates for women, female candidates, and other interlocutors have consistently cited the high cost of candidate registration and campaigning as prohibitive for most women interested in running for office. Although the NEC urged parties to reduce party fees by 50 percent for women, this was not compulsory either, and the vast majority of parties did not do so. The NEC did not waive its own registration fees for female candidates.

This pattern is not limited to women running as candidates. Political party officials consistently state that they encourage women’s participation, but the Center’s observers have found that party leadership at the county and national levels is frequently entirely male. Apart from candidates, the Center’s observers have noted that women do not feature in campaign events, and candidates do not target women in their messaging.

Participation in the NEC. The NEC’s Gender Department aims to increase the participation of women and other disadvantaged groups in political life and has developed a set of Guidelines for Disability-Inclusive Elections in Liberia.

Three out of the seven members of the NEC Board of Commissioners are women, including the co-chairperson. At the executive level, the presence of women is limited: Eight out of the 11 NEC departments are headed by men, with female directors in the gender, field coordination, and operations departments. Women are more visible in clerical and administrative positions of the NEC. Similarly, there are few women among the NEC’s permanent staff at the county level. Just one out of 19 magistrates are women. While many county NEC officials communicated their intent to hire women as polling staff, initial observation suggests that these efforts still have not achieved gender parity.

Groups representing the Mandingo and Muslim communities have expressed concerns regarding the limited representation of their members among election workers. Similar

¹⁸ “States’ Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure women, on equal terms with men, the right (...) to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies.” Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

concerns have been reported to the Center's observers by advocates for persons with disabilities.

The NEC has made an effort to reach women, persons with disabilities, and religious communities in their civic and voter education programs and has mainstreamed these activities. Still, some organizations representing persons with disabilities and the Mandingo community expressed regret that they were not selected to assist the NEC in these efforts and have called on the NEC to intensify their efforts.

LGBTI community. Liberia's legal framework criminalizes homosexuality.¹⁹ In addition to the legal restrictions, the participation of LGBTI groups in the election is minimal. The LGBTI community has been the target of inflammatory and homophobic speech by several politicians. According to several LGBTI organizations, the campaign has raised the level of anti-gay language in the political discourse, with no party having incorporated gay-related issues in their agenda or included proposals to amend or repeal the existing legislation against homosexuality. To the contrary, in debates, candidates have been pushed to take stances against LGBTI rights. The Carter Center regrets that the existing anti-gay legislation and homophobic speech prevents members of the LGBTI community from a meaningful and open participation in the political life of the country. The Center urges repeal of all discriminatory legislation and encourages the promotion of tolerance.

Election Day Concerns

With less than two weeks until the election, the Center's mission uses this opportunity to note with concern a few issues that have arisen in recent weeks that may create problems on election day.

Supplementary Voter Lists. NEC regulations establish that registered voters who present a valid registration card may vote in the precinct marked on the card even if they are not found on the printed list.²⁰ As discussed above, these voters will be added to the supplementary voter list on election day. However, procedures do not ask the presiding officer to record the number of additions made in a manner that can be easily aggregated at the county and national level. ***Given that there are already concerns about the procedures for accommodating these voters by adding them to the supplementary list, the NEC should prepare itself to respond to questions about the number of voters added on election day.*** The accurate recording of this information by polling stations and magistrates would put the NEC in a better position to address potential claims of irregularities during the post-election period. Further, the tracking of these figures on election day would help election supervisors intervene if the procedure is being misused.

¹⁹ The Penal Code of Liberia criminalizes adult, consensual sexual conduct by same-sex couples. Under Section 14.74 of the Penal Code, entitled "Voluntary Sodomy," it is a first-degree misdemeanor to engage voluntarily in "deviate sexual intercourse." 11 Section 14.79 of the Penal Code defines "deviate sexual intercourse" to mean "sexual contact between human beings who are not husband and wife or living together as man and wife though not legally married." Penalties include more than a year's imprisonment and fines.

²⁰ Article 3.1 NEC regulations on polling and counting.

Unauthorized Persons in Polling Places. The Center's observers have met with interlocutors who have raised concerns about the possibility that chiefs may be present in the polling places on election day. If this were to happen, some fear their mere presence would be enough to intimidate voters. On a similar note, recent statements by the CDC suggest it has called on its supporters to remain at the polls after voting to "guard" the ballot boxes. Other than for the purpose of voting, only those persons appointed by the party as party agents are legally entitled to be present in the polling station. The presence of additional party supporters at the polls increases the odds of confusion and tension on election day, as well as the potential of intimidation. ***The NEC should instruct its staff to strictly enforce the law regarding who is authorized to be present in polling places.***

Political Party Parallel Vote Tabulation. The CDC has communicated to the public that it intends to conduct its own count of election results, and to release results as soon as they are available, even if it is before the NEC has released provisional results. It is the right of all parties to have party agents present at the polls to monitor the voting and counting and at the magistrates' offices to observe the tabulation. It is also their right to receive a copy of the record of the count at the polling station and to retain this record should issues arise during the tally process. Largely in response to CDC's plans, the NEC has repeatedly emphasized that it alone has the authority to announce official results and that the tabulation of the results is open to observation.

A number of stakeholders have raised concerns about the CDC's plans and the potential for tensions in the event that there are differences in the numbers released by the NEC and the CDC. It is likely that discrepancies will arise because of differences in the speed and location of unreported results, the additional checks the magistrates will be conducting during the NEC's official results tabulation process at the county level, and the different methods for gathering the information. Given this, any results released by a political party before the official results are finalized have the potential to greatly increase confusion and misunderstanding and could unnecessarily cast doubt on the legitimacy of the outcome. ***Although stakeholders may have the right to gather and disseminate such information, in an effort to limit confusion amongst the electorate and avoid inflaming tensions, the Carter Center strongly urges political parties to refrain from releasing parallel results prior to the publication of provisional results by the NEC. Further, both the political parties and the NEC should be clear in informing voters that only results reviewed and released by the NEC are official.***

Mission Background

At the invitation of the National Election Commission (NEC) and the government of Liberia, The Carter Center is conducting a comprehensive long-term international election observation mission of Liberia's 2017 presidential and legislative elections scheduled for Oct. 10. The Carter Center deployed three pre-election assessment delegations to Liberia, observed the voter registration period, and deployed a core team of experts and six long-term observers (LTOs) representing six countries in early August. Carter Center experts have followed the finalization of voter registration, the candidate registration process and the resolution of related disputes, and the election commission's

preparations for the elections. Carter Center LTO teams have visited all 15 of Liberia's counties, where they have observed the campaign and met with NEC officials and staff, political parties, and representatives of civil society.

The Center's assessment of the electoral process is based on Liberia's legal framework and on international standards for democratic elections. The Center conducts its observation missions in accordance with the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers.

The Carter Center's international election observation work is separate from ongoing Carter Center programming in Liberia that focuses on supporting access to justice, access to information, mental health, and technical and financial support to nonpartisan citizen observers.