

**Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC)
Campaign and Media Monitoring
2023 General Elections**

**ECC Campaign and Media Monitoring – Update One
(August 25, 2023)**

Released September 4, 2023

“Early campaign marred by inflammatory actions and electoral violence”

Summary

The ECC's electoral campaign update contains comprehensive information on the observation of campaign events/rallies held by political parties or candidates in the counties and districts over a two-week period (August 5–19, 2023). It also includes media engagement and activities observed. For the first two weeks of the campaign, ECC received 72 reports about events and rallies related to the campaign. The ECC deployed its 92 LTOs- 19 county coordinators and 73 electoral district observers across the 15 counties for the campaign period.

Observers witnessed 58 events/rallies hosted by political parties and candidates, during this period. These events and rallies were hosted by a variety of political parties and independent candidates, with the CDC and UP candidates reportedly organizing the most political gatherings. Additionally, observers noticed that parties and candidates had constructed billboards and posted campaign flyers or stickers across the counties and electoral districts. 29 of the 58 campaign events that were observed had national security forces present, while 20 of the 58 reports show a significant use of unofficial security.

The ECC observed that during the first week of official political campaign, the process was marred by inflammatory actions and electoral violence. The perpetrators of the inflammatory actions were supporters of the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) who paraded the streets of Monrovia toting caskets depicting the pictures of the standard bearer of the opposition Unity Party (UP). In separate statements, the ECC, campaign team of CDC and international development partners condemned the action.

On August 10, 2023, in Montserrado County electoral district 09 supporters of (CDC) and (UP) engaged in a clash that resulted to the injury of four supporters from both parties. The ECC called on the Liberia National Police (LNP) to conduct a prompt and objective investigation into the incident and hold the perpetrators to account in keeping law. There has been no report release to the public on the action of the LNP on this matter.

Other incidents observed by the ECC included:

Influence of Traditional and Religious Leaders on Campaign: According to ECC observers, there were instances where traditional and religious leaders used their influence to support a particular candidate or political party. ECC received nine reports from counties including Bomi, Grand Gedeh, Nimba, Margibi, Maryland, and Sinoe during the course of the first two weeks of the campaign regarding the influence of traditional and religious authorities. Additionally, the ECC received one incident from Sinoe County electoral district 02, where the district superintendent allegedly threatened local government leaders informing them that they would lose their jobs if they did not support the CDC.

Use or Spread of Hate Speech: 5 of 73 ECC observers reported hearing the use of profane, inflammatory, and hateful remarks by supporters of political parties with two of those remarks reportedly directed at women candidates in Grand Cape Mount and Grand Kru. Observers reported that the use of intimidating and threatening language occurred at political rallies as well as on radio and social media. These cases of hate speech were mainly spread by candidates' supporters.

Destruction of campaigns Flyers or banners: There has been widespread destruction and defacing of campaign materials including posters and billboards. These acts were carried out irrespective of political parties and candidates. 3 of 16 reports, show that such incidents targeted women candidates. Overall, the perpetrators are unknown. However, two persons were arrested and detained by the police in Bopolu, Gbarpolu County after they were seen pulling down a female independent candidate's campaign banners. A female senatorial candidate in Grand Bassa County accused Janjay Baikpeh's supporters of removing her campaign banners and replaced them with his.

Purchase of voter identification cards and cash distribution: ECC observers witnessed the distribution of cash or gift items by candidates at political events, some of which specifically targeted first-time voters. Observers from Bong, electoral district 01, and Grand Kru, electoral district 01, also witnessed two instances of voter card buying. According to observers' account, supporters of Senator Albert Chie was seen purchasing voter registration cards in the town of Wadabo Gbanken in Grand Kru, electoral district 01 for 2,500 Liberian Dollars, and supporters of Candidate Gblah Williams in the town of Tukata, electoral district 1, Bong County where voters' cards were bought. According to reports, both candidates are contesting on the ticket of the (CDC).

Training of Militants/Unofficial Security: An ECC observer from Margibi County electoral district 05 reported the alleged training of both male and female youth by Nathaniel McGill as militants or unofficial security. According to the observer, the training took place at the Weala Public School Campus for three days in the first week of August. However, the observer could not establish whether the training was conducted by state security personnel because he was not in close proximity to the training site.

Incumbent Abuse: Only 2 out of 72 reports revealed that CDC candidates in Grand Kru and Nimba Counties used official government vehicles to facilitate their campaigns. At the same time, there have been no reports that candidates from the opposition were refused access to a public facility to hold campaign rallies or events. The ECC received incidents in the following categories:

Media Observation

All 19 ECC's County Coordinators were requested to observe the conduct of the media including social media during the campaign period. 10 of 19 reports showed that candidates and their supporters propagated hate speech or used profanity during their campaign. These took place primarily in Sinoe, Nimba, and Bong Counties, and were targeted at both male and female candidates. Hate speech was also read on social media blogs and disseminated by private radio stations. According to reports from observers, these obscene statements were made by radio hosts, candidates, political party supporters, or social media influencers. Observers reported that generally voters and members of political parties continue to doubt the NEC's ability to hold a fair and legitimate election. According to observers, citizens think that the president's influence in the appointment of the NEC Board of Commissioners places them in a compromised situation.

The ECC observers also reported witnessing and hearing Civic and Voter Education (CVE) activities being conducted in various counties. According to observers, the media, political parties, civil society organizations, and NEC CVE cells were all reportedly involved in providing CVE through community events and jingles played on radios.

Conclusion:

Other than the provocative act of toting caskets, destruction of campaign materials, and the violence that took place in District Number 09 the campaign has been largely peaceful across the country. Political parties are not holding public rallies and events at the same time in a given location and this has contributed to the reduction of the risks of electoral violence.

Recommendations

The ECC proposes the following recommendations:

- ▶ That candidates and their supporters refrain from the act of buying of voters' card and distribution of cash during the campaign.
- ▶ The LNP is urged to inform the public on the outcome of its investigation of the August 10, 2023 electoral violence in District Number 09.
- ▶ That political parties and candidates publicly condemn the destruction and defacing of campaign posters and billboards and call on their supporters to refrain from this act.
- ▶ That parties and candidates encourage their supporters to remain calm and peaceful during the campaign period.
- ▶ That parties and candidates should refrain from training of militants as private security and rely on the LNP to provide protection during these elections.

Observation & Deployment Methodology:

ECC deployed 92 trained long-term observers for the campaign period. District observers are monitoring campaign events and rallies conducted by political parties and candidates throughout the 73 electoral districts, while county coordinators are closely watch the conduct of the media during the campaign period. Observers were asked to observe campaign and media activities and send in bi-weekly reports as well as critical incidents as they occur. ECC observation of media and campaign events are guided by a thorough checklist and all observation reports are submitted through coded text messages to the ECC's reporting system for verification and analysis.

About ECC

The Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) is Liberia's largest domestic election observation network with diverse competencies, experiences, and expertise in democracy, elections, and governance established since 2010. ECC's members include the Center for Democratic Governance (CDG); Center for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP); Center for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (CECPAP); Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD); Naymote Partners for Democratic Development (NAYMOTE-PADD); West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP), and the Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL). The ECC election observation effort is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). "The contents of this update are the responsibility of the ECC and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government."

CONTACT

For More Information Contact:

Cllr. Oscar Bloh, ECC Chairperson @ 0886554109; ECC Secretariat @ 0775186929 or jbwatchie@gmail.com

Email: eccsecretariat2011@gmail.com; Website: eccliberiacom.org