



**National  
Election  
Watch**

# SIERRA LEONE 2023 PRE – ELECTIONS SUMMARY REPORT ON LONG TERM OBSERVATIONS

MAY 2023



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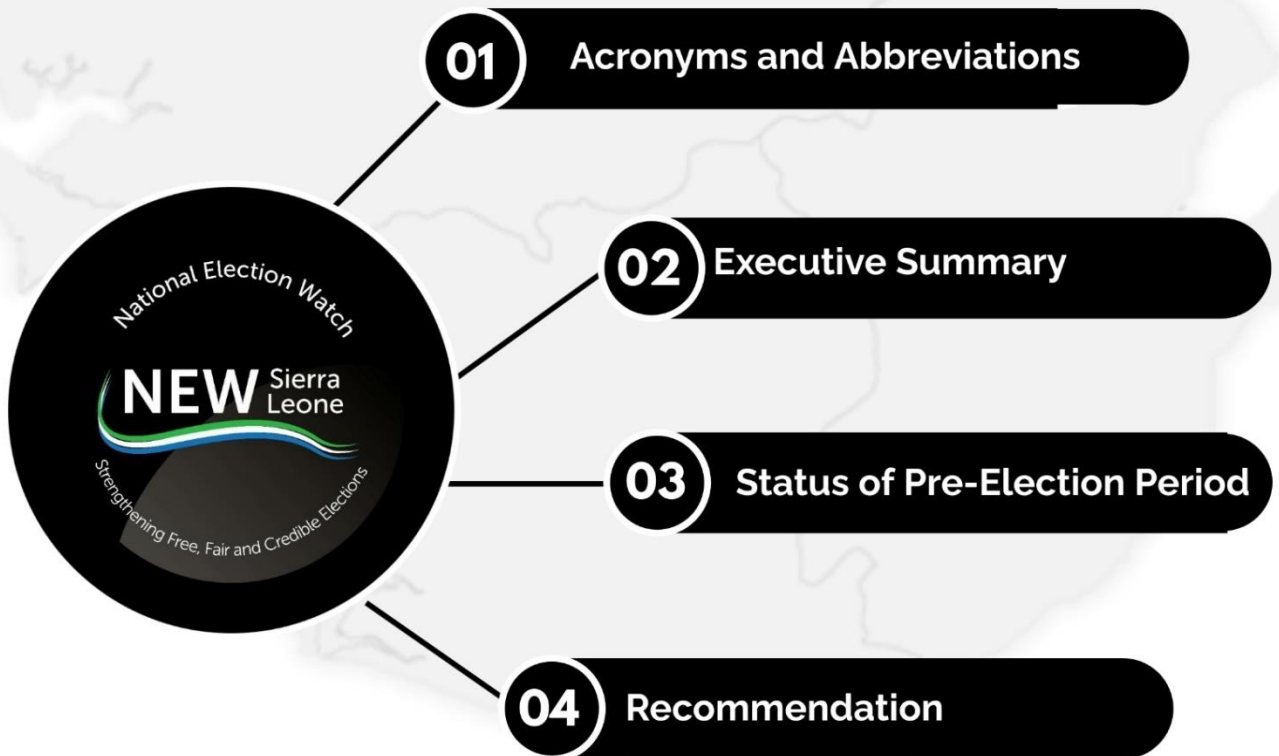
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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

APC – All People’s Congress

CE- Campaign Events

CI – Critical Incidents

DC – District Coordinators

PE – Pre – Elections

ECSL - Electoral Commission Sierra Leone

LTO - Long Term Observers

NEW - National Elections Watch

PRVT - Process and Results Verification for  
Transparency

SLPP - Sierra Leone Peoples Party

ZC - Zonal Coordinator

# Executive Summary

The **National Election Watch (NEW)** recruited, trained and deployed **Zonal Coordinators** and **Long Term Observers (LTOs)** to observe the pre and post-election environment surrounding the 2023 Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections. **NEW** seeks to continue to strengthen free, fair, transparent and credible elections in Sierra Leone. The use of checklist forms in various electoral events simplifies the work of the LTOs in systematically reporting findings on the electoral environment, including election preparations, citizen engagement in the process, campaigns, and critical incidents. LTOs use structured checklists through a formatted SMS texting code that is transmitted through the use of Apollo, a data management system. The transmitted data is verified in NEW's Citizen Situation Room by one Zonal Coordinator assigned to each of the 5 regions. The data is later processed and used for reports, press statements and engagement with EMBs and key election stakeholders.

This maiden report is a summary of findings by NEW's 34 LTOs across all NEW's 17 administrative districts, focused mainly on pre-election events in May 2023. Prior to the start of the campaigns on 22nd May, NEW observers reported on the overall pre-election environment and incidents observed. During the first week of the campaigns, the LTOs monitored campaign events of political parties in their respective districts.

For the purposes of NEW's national structure, Bonthe is divided into two separate districts, Island and Mainland. However, data in this report is analysed by political district, combining results from LTOs on both the Island and the Mainland when discussing Bonthe.

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NEW observers collected information on civic and voter education efforts, election preparations, and incidents, noting the use of hate speech and other forms of violence. LTOs observed voter education efforts during the month of May, most commonly led by ECSL, CSOs and political parties.

14 LTOs in 9 districts noted the use of hate speech by political party candidates, stalwarts and their supporters during the month of May. While 27 LTOs in 10 of 16 districts reported that election preparations and the campaign proceeded peacefully, observers reported isolated and serious incidents of physical violence, intimidation, and destruction of campaign materials or property. For example there was an incident in Peri Foindu Chieftdom in Pujehun district where a fight ensued between supporters of Massa Kpakra, an APC parliamentary candidate, and the town chief that led to acid being sprayed on Massa Kpakra and her supporters. In another incident on 28th May in Mongo Chieftdom, Falaba District, an SLPP supporter in an unmarked vehicle allegedly accused an APC supporter of taking a picture of him that resulted to violence between supporters of both parties, leading to the destruction of the APC candidate's campaign materials and property.

NEW LTOs reported that political parties respected the established campaign calendar during the first week of the campaigns. At campaign events, the most common topics covered in speeches included youth unemployment, education, and the economy. 89% of the campaign events observed took place at specified locations, while 11% were street rallies. At 56% of campaign events, political parties distributed items to their supporters, most commonly including foodstuffs, clothing, and cash. 87% of events did not feature any hate messages. 13% of events included hate speech, mainly focused on ethnic identity/tribalism or regionalism.

NEW LTOs will continue to monitor and report on the pre-election environment and campaigns leading up to Election Day, and NEW will issue regular reports as the campaign proceeds.



**Comprehensive  
Report on Pre-Election  
Environment,  
Campaign Event, and  
Critical Incident  
Reports from  
Long-Term Observers  
May 2023**



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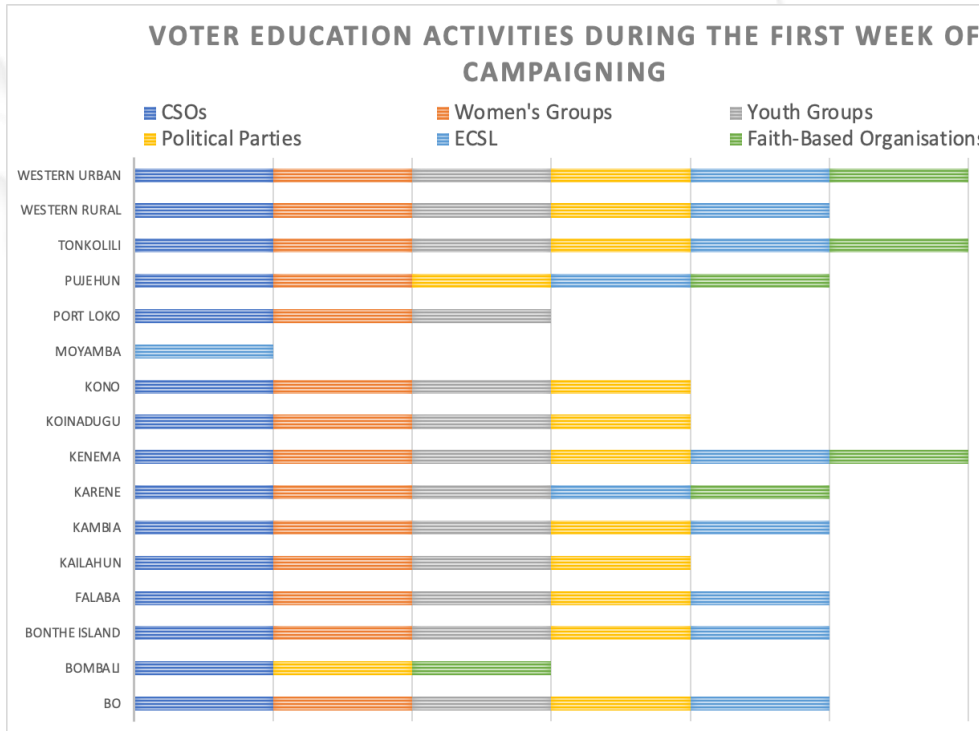
# Key Issues in the Pre-Election Environment 2023

## Observation of the overall pre-election environment

### *Civic and voter education*

Prior to the start of the campaign, NEW LTOs reported that civic and voter education efforts were underway in 14 districts except for Koinadugu and Moyamba districts. These civic and voter education initiatives were most often led by ECSL, CSOs and political parties, followed by women’s and youth groups, and to a lesser extent, faith-based organisations.

In the first week of the campaign, LTOs observed voter and civic education efforts in all districts except Moyamba, with an increase in the number of LTOs reporting activities led by women’s and youth groups, CSOs, and political parties. 16 observers in 11 districts reported that the ECSL led voter education activities in their area during the first week of campaigning, while 20 observers in 13 districts noted that political parties were also organising such activities.



In the first week of the campaign, 22 LTOs observed voter education activities specifically targeting women, 20 LTOs observed education efforts targeting youth, while 17 observed education efforts targeting voters with disabilities.

### *Use of Hate speech*

During the month of May, 14 LTOs across 9 districts reported the use of hate speech by parties, candidates, and/or their supporters

This was mainly concentrated in the North and Southern regions. Of these, 5 observers reported instances of hate speech focused on regionalism, while 10 observers reported the use of hate speech focused on ethnic identity or tribalism.

## ***Physical violence, intimidation, or harassment***

Prior to the campaigns, **27 LTOs in 10 districts** reported that there were **no incidents of physical violence, intimidation, or harassment**. This trend continued during the **first week of the campaign**.

However, 7 LTOs in 6 districts reported 9 isolated incidents of violence, including:

- In Peri Foindu Chiefdom, Pujehun district, a fight allegedly ensued between supporters of Massa Kpakra, a parliamentary candidate from the APC, the town chief and other residents. The town chief, Lahai Kallon, and Massa Kpakra were reportedly sprayed with acid in the course of the fight by an unknown individual. The police intervened to calm the situation and further investigate the incident, and several supporters of Massa Kpakra were arrested.
- On 9 May in Mongo chiefdom, Falaba district, an intra-party disagreement resulted in violence when SLPP supporters objected to the fact that a female parliamentarian candidate from outside the constituency was proposed for the party's list. The police intervened to calm the situation, but no arrests were made.
- On 28 in the same chiefdom, violence ensued when an SLPP supporter in an unmarked vehicle accused an APC supporter of taking a picture of him. There was then a scuffle between supporters of the two parties, and the APC candidate's campaign materials and property were vandalised. Senior members of the SLPP arrived on the scene with armed police.

## ***Destruction of election campaign materials and property***

While NEW acknowledges that destruction of campaign materials has been widespread throughout the country, during the month of May, LTOs reported 8 incidents of destruction of campaign materials in 7 districts. For example, in Blama Town, Kenema district, both SLPP and APC campaign materials were destroyed on 13th May. A similar incident occurred on 22nd May in Mile 91 Yoni Chiefdom, Tonkolili District, when an SLPP presidential candidate's banner was torn by unknown people, and their supporters retaliated by destroying the banners for the APC presidential candidate.

Sierra Leone police and RSLAF intervened, used tear gas and made arrests of perpetrators to cool down the situation. Curfew was passed later in the day till morning of 24th May 2023. On 30th May in Kono district, Sandamanda area, Koidu City, unknown persons set the house of an APC supporter, Diana Konomani, ablaze. In Western Area Urban, one of the vehicles of the former Mayor, Yvonne Aki Sawyer was forcefully taken away and allegedly vandalised by a man called "Arata." The vehicle was later released to Aki-Sawyer and the perpetrator was allegedly released.



# Campaign Events

NEW LTOs observed a total of 91 campaign events across all districts between the start of the campaign on May 22 and the end of the month of May, including 31 events hosted by the SLPP, 29 events hosted by the APC, and 31 events hosted by other parties. 78% of these events promoted presidential candidates, 67% promoted parliamentary candidates, and 76% promoted candidates for local council.

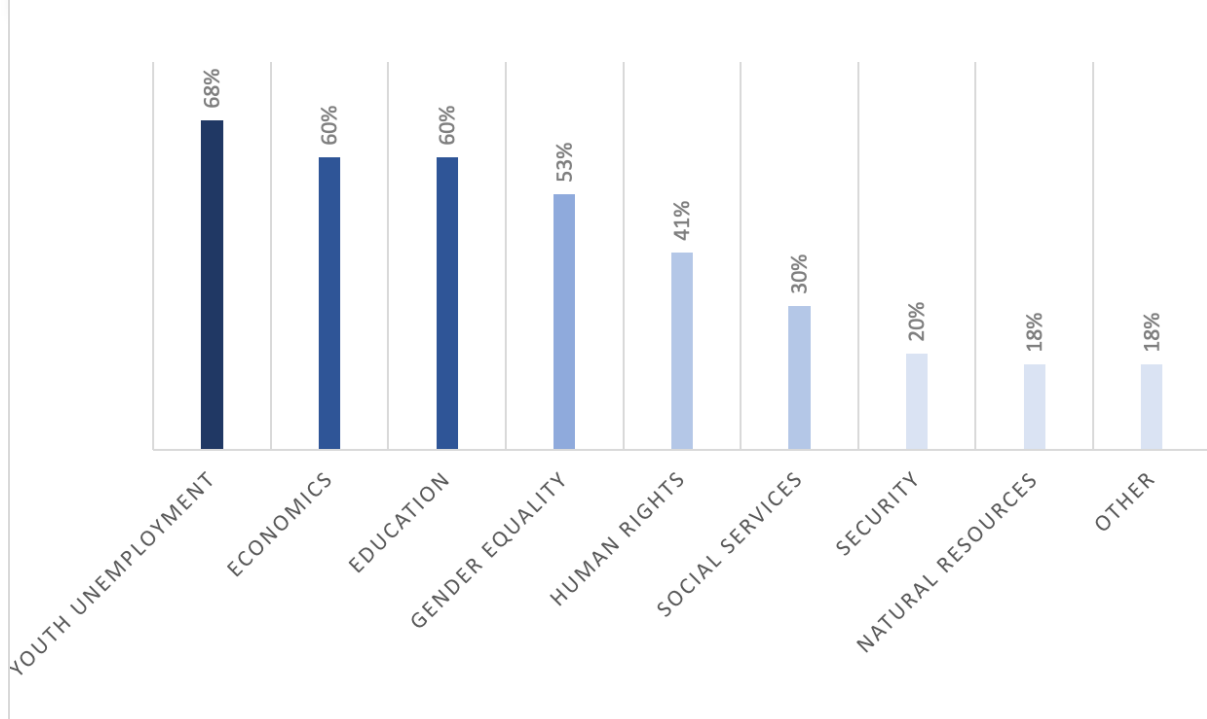
## ***Respect for the campaign calendar***

All of the reported campaign events complied with the campaign calendar. LTOs reported that the campaign calendar was respected in their respective districts in the month of May.

## ***Topics covered in campaign messages***

All of the 91 campaign events observed included messages focused on multiple topics. Youth unemployment was the most common topic, and was discussed at 68% of events. Campaign messages focused on the economy and education were each featured at 60% of campaign events observed, and gender equality was covered at 53% of the events. 41% of campaign events included a focus on human rights, while 30% discussed social services. The least commonly discussed topics were security (20% of events) and natural resources (18% of events). 18% of events also included other topics.

**TOPICS COVERED AT CAMPAIGN EVENTS OBSERVED**



## ***Presence of security officials and event locations***

Security officials were present at 73% of campaign events observed, while 27% of events had no security presence. SLP officials were most commonly present, while RSLAF were present at 33% of events and other security officials were present at 8%. 89% of campaign events observed took place at designated locations, while 11% ended up as street rallies.

## ***Distribution of goods or money to supporters & presence of individuals who appeared to be under the influence of drugs***

At 44% of campaign events observed, LTOs reported that there was no distribution of goods or money to supporters. However, at 56% of events, multiple types of goods and/or cash were distributed. Foodstuffs were distributed at 40% of events, clothing was distributed at 38% of events, and cash was distributed at 16% of events, while other items were distributed at 3% of events. At 88% of events observed, LTOs reported that there was no presence of individuals who appeared to be under the influence of drugs.

## ***Use of hate messages in campaign speeches***

At 87% of events LTOs observed that there were no hate messages featured in campaign speeches. However, some events included multiple types of hate messages. At 12% of events messages had hate speech focused on ethnic identity or tribalism, while 9% of events had hate speech focused on regionalism, and 1 event had hate speech focused on religious identity.

## ***Use of state vehicles at campaign events***

At 86% of events, LTOs reported that no state vehicles were used, while 14% of events included the use of state vehicles.

# Recommendations

## ***To ECSL:***

- Reinforce voter education in the lead up to elections, particularly related to the proportional representation (PR) system for parliamentary and local council elections.

## ***To the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC):***

- Intensify the enforcement of guidelines related to campaign activities of political parties, including addressing non-adherence to policies related to street rallies;

## ***To security forces (Office of National Security (ONS) and Sierra Leone Police (SLP)):***

- Take swift action to address election violence while maintaining professionalism and political neutrality;
- Expeditiously address complaints or disputes to avoid the escalation of tensions;

## ***To the Government of Sierra Leone:***

- Refrain from using state resources for political campaigns, including the use of state vehicles at campaign events.

## ***To political parties and candidates:***

- Refrain from using hate speech in campaigning;
- Encourage political tolerance and desist from acts of violence and destruction of property, including campaign materials;
- Promote civic and voter education, and build citizens' confidence in the electoral process.

## ***To civil society:***

- Continue to engage in civic and voter education, and intensify messages of non-violence.

## ***To traditional leaders:***

- Maintain political neutrality and encourage peaceful activities by all political parties;
- Spread peace messages in their communities.

## ***To all Sierra Leoneans:***

- Encourage fellow citizens to peacefully and actively engage in the electoral process;
- Refrain from spreading hate messages and practise political tolerance;
- Abstain from engaging in violence, including acts of intimidation, harassment, or destruction of campaign materials or property.



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