



# Building on an Electoral Reform Agenda

**National Election Watch (NEW)  
2023 Electoral Cycle Report**

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## ACRONYMS

<b>AfEONet)</b>	<b>Africa Election Observers Network</b>
<b>APC</b>	<b>All Peoples' Congress</b>
<b>APPA</b>	<b>All political Parties Association</b>
<b>APPWA</b>	<b>All Political Parties Women Association</b>
<b>AU</b>	<b>African Union</b>
<b>BD</b>	<b>Boundary Delimitation</b>
<b>CEC</b>	<b>Chief Electoral Commissioner</b>
<b>CCYA</b>	<b>Centre for the Coordination of Youth Activities</b>
<b>CODEO</b>	<b>Coalition of Domestic Elections Observers (CODEO)</b>
<b>C4C</b>	<b>Coalition for Change</b>
<b>COG</b>	<b>Commonwealth Observer Group</b>
<b>COPP</b>	<b>Consortium of Progressive Political Parties</b>
<b>CSO</b>	<b>Civil Society Organization</b>
<b>CSR</b>	<b>Citizens Situation Room</b>
<b>CCSL</b>	<b>Council of Churches in Sierra Leone</b>
<b>CR</b>	<b>Civil Registration</b>
<b>COVID-19</b>	<b>Corona Virus Disease 2019</b>
<b>DEM</b>	<b>District Election Manager</b>
<b>DEMMOs</b>	<b>District Elections Materials Movement Observers</b>
<b>DVRC</b>	<b>Distribution of Voter Registration Card</b>
<b>ECC</b>	<b>Elections Coordinating Committee</b>
<b>ECOWAS</b>	<b>Economic Community of West African States</b>
<b>ECSL</b>	<b>Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone</b>
<b>E-Day</b>	<b>Election Day</b>
<b>E-HORN</b>	<b>East and Horn of Africa</b>
<b>ELOG</b>	<b>Election Observer Group</b>
<b>EOM</b>	<b>Elections Observer Mission</b>
<b>EON</b>	<b>Election Observer Network</b>
<b>EPSAO</b>	<b>ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture and Operations</b>
<b>EMB</b>	<b>Election Management Bodies</b>
<b>ESN-SA</b>	<b>Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa</b>
<b>EU</b>	<b>European Union</b>
<b>EUEOM,</b>	<b>European Union Elections Observation Mission</b>
<b>FPTP</b>	<b>First Past The Post</b>
<b>FTV</b>	<b>First Time Voter</b>
<b>GENDEM</b>	<b>Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors</b>
<b>GEWE</b>	<b>Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment</b>
<b>GIZ</b>	<b>Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit</b>
<b>ICPNC</b>	<b>Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion</b>
<b>IESPC</b>	<b>Integrated Election Security Planning Committee</b>
<b>IMC</b>	<b>Independent Media Commission</b>
<b>International IDEA</b>	<b>International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance</b>
<b>IRI</b>	<b>International Republican Institute</b>
<b>IRN</b>	<b>Independent Radio Network</b>
<b>JLSC</b>	<b>Judicial and Legal Service Commission</b>
<b>LTOs</b>	<b>Long Term Observers</b>
<b>MLGRD</b>	<b>Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development</b>
<b>MoU</b>	<b>Memorandum of Understanding</b>
<b>MP</b>	<b>Member of Parliament</b>
<b>MTND</b>	<b>Medium Term National Development Plan</b>

<b>NCD</b>	<b>National Commission for Democracy</b>
<b>NDA</b>	<b>National Democratic Alliance</b>
<b>NDI</b>	<b>National Democratic Institute</b>
<b>NCRA</b>	<b>National Civil Registration Authority</b>
<b>NEC</b>	<b>National Electoral Commission</b>
<b>NEW</b>	<b>National Election Watch</b>
<b>NIN</b>	<b>National Identification Number</b>
<b>NGC</b>	<b>National Grand Coalition</b>
<b>NSR</b>	<b>National Situation Room</b>
<b>NTF</b>	<b>National Task Force</b>
<b>NURP</b>	<b>National Unity and Reconciliation Party</b>
<b>NPD</b>	<b>National Progressive Democrat</b>
<b>ONS</b>	<b>Office of National Security</b>
<b>PC</b>	<b>Paramount Chief</b>
<b>PCMP</b>	<b>Paramount Chief Member of Parliament</b>
<b>PEA</b>	<b>Public Elections Act</b>
<b>PPA</b>	<b>Political parties' Act</b>
<b>PPLC</b>	<b>Political Parties Liaison Committee</b>
<b>POA</b>	<b>Public Order Act</b>
<b>PPRC</b>	<b>Political Parties Regulation Commission</b>
<b>PR</b>	<b>Proportional Representation</b>
<b>PRVT</b>	<b>Public Sector Reform Unit</b>
<b>PSRU</b>	<b>Process and Results Verification for Transparency</b>
<b>PVR</b>	<b>Provisional Voter Register</b>
<b>PVL</b>	<b>Provisional Voter List</b>
<b>PVT</b>	<b>Parallel Vote Tabulation</b>
<b>PWD</b>	<b>Person With Disability</b>
<b>RRF</b>	<b>Result Reconciliation Form</b>
<b>RSLAF</b>	<b>Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces</b>
<b>SLAJ</b>	<b>Sierra Leone Association of Journalists</b>
<b>SLBA</b>	<b>Sierra Leone Bar Association</b>
<b>SLLC</b>	<b>Sierra Leone Labour Congress</b>
<b>SLP</b>	<b>Sierra Leone Police</b>
<b>SLPP</b>	<b>Sierra Leone's Peoples Party</b>
<b>SMC</b>	<b>Strategic Management Committee</b>
<b>TCC</b>	<b>The Carter Center</b>
<b>UP</b>	<b>Unity Party</b>
<b>USAID</b>	<b>United States Agency for International Development</b>
<b>VIU</b>	<b>Voter Identification Unit</b>
<b>VRA</b>	<b>Voter Registration Assessment</b>
<b>VRC</b>	<b>Voter Registration Card</b>
<b>VR</b>	<b>Voter Registration</b>
<b>VVK</b>	<b>Voter Verification Kit</b>
<b>WADEMOS</b>	<b>West African Democracy Solidarity Network</b>
<b>WAEON</b>	<b>West Africa Election Observers Network</b>
<b>WEMMOs</b>	<b>Ward Elections Materials Movement Observers</b>

This report is a comprehensive account of NEW's findings of its engagements and observations for the 2023 electoral cycle in Sierra Leone. Building on our 23-year-long experience of post-conflict democracy building and election observation, NEW has moved from just keeping eyes on the ballots to ensuring free and transparent electoral activities and processes. After every general election, we publish our findings and encourage all stakeholders to commit to seeing democracy, politics, and elections as a work in progress through an agenda for peace and national unity. This report, therefore, presents the successes and shortcomings that characterized the 2018-2023 electoral landscape. The journey towards truly representative governance is not without challenges. As NEW reports on past trends, NEW notes that we have a unique opportunity as a nation to develop a collective approach for inclusive and transparent elections in the future.

The NEW team is encouraged by the positive strides made in repealing Part V of the Public Order Act, the passing of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Law, and changes in the electoral laws and institutional mechanisms by the ECSL to promote an inclusive electoral process.

NEW recognizes the collaborative efforts by all stakeholders to make this happen. Such learnings must be sustained and integrated for future democratic processes. NEW values our partnership and collaboration with the ECSL, PPRC and all domestic and international democracy institutions and promoters in Sierra Leone; let us all continue to channel our collective energies to building the foundations of free and credible elections. NEW also wants to express our sincere thanks to the international community, our donor partners, technical support institutions and other Election observation Groups in the region and globally. Together, we are building a world of citizens' rights and voices.

I want to specifically recognize all the 450 organizations registered member organizations of NEW and the over 6000 Sierra Leoneans who, against all odds, kept their eyes on the votes on polling day; we have once more made history. In the cause of our work, NEW came under tremendous attacks at various stages in the 2023 electoral cycle. As I reflect, I am encouraged that civil society has always been pivotal in the history of peace and democratic renewal in our beloved country. The journey towards fair and transparent elections is not without challenges; overcoming these obstacles determines the growth of a genuinely representative democracy. I call on all NEW member organizations to see this as a turning point to muster our collective drive towards democratic progress and, as a nation, institute tenets of openness and safeguards for electoral integrity.

As you read through these pages, let us keep sight of the broader purpose that unites us: pursuing a more just, equitable and progressive society. Special efforts must be made to absolve the Sierra Leone police from sectional policing, continuing its post-conflict reform agenda as 'a force for good', position the judiciary as a beacon of hope in our democracy and allow political parties and all actors to play by the rules of the game with decency and integrity. Democratic elections go beyond counting and winning votes; it is the responsibility of all of us to secure peace and promote unity, opening our nation to limitless opportunities through respect for the rule of law and nation-building.

I therefore urged all Sierra Leoneans to say 'YES To Electoral Reforms' and channel our collective energies to strengthening the foundations of democracy through elections. I encourage all stakeholders to sustain the momentum on the Independent Cross-Party Committee on Electoral Systems and Management Bodies Review. Let us embrace electoral reform activities beyond its life span. Together, we are responsible for strengthening collaborative Electoral Reform processes and designing constitutional safeguards for transparent and inclusive elections.

We must safeguard the individual and collective freedoms that democracies seek to protect.

**Marcella Samba-Sesay**

Chairperson

# ABOUT NATIONAL ELECTION WATCH (NEW)

National Election Watch (NEW) is a coalition of over 450 national and international civil society and non-governmental organizations established in 2002. It was established primarily to observe and monitor the fairness, transparency and credibility of public elections in Sierra Leone. It works towards increased public confidence in the legitimacy of the election results. In the spirit of volunteerism and neutrality, NEW has observed polling since 2002. In 2007 and 2012, NEW monitored the entire electoral cycle process and introduced the Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT). In 2018, NEW fielded more than 12,190 observers in various categories. In 2023, NEW observed the entire electoral cycle, filled 5,000 stationed observers and reintroduced the Processes and Result Verification for Transparency (PRVT) with the deployment of 750 PRVT observers.

The coalition operates through a decentralized structure, at the head of which is the Chairperson and Strategic Management Committee (SMC). The rest of the structure consists of the Regional Coordinators, District Coordinators, District Teams, and Chiefdom Focal Persons. Coordination and programmatic activities are channelled through the National Secretariat. Since its establishment, NEW's work has led to increased civil society visibility, enhanced participation in electoral processes, and increased transparency and accountability in the electoral process.

In its professional operations, NEW is affiliated with several regional and global election observation networks including the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GENDEM), Africa Election Observers Network (AfeONeT), West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON), West Africa Democracy Solidarity (WADEMOS) Network and partners with sister organizations and networks in the Africa sub-region observing elections such as the East and Horn of Africa (E-Horn), YIAGA Africa, Coalition of Domestic Elections Observers (CODEO) Ghana, Election Observer Group (ELOG) Kenya and the Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC) in Liberia. As a coalition over the years, NEW has prided itself on eight core values, guiding its work since the coalition was established.

In the discharge of its function, NEW is guided by the following Principles and Core Values:





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Election Watch (NEW) has been observing elections in Sierra Leone since 2002. After the 2018 elections, cumulatively, the four international and one national observation missions made a total of one hundred and eleven (111) recommendations, bordering on a wide range of electoral issues, including the electoral legal framework, election campaign environment and financing, security, electoral offences, petitions, and electoral processes, among others. The ECSL and other electoral stakeholders organized a conference on the 18th and 19th of October 2018 to discuss the different EOM recommendations, aiming to consolidate them into thematic areas and identify priorities for reform.

The EMBs and other stakeholders accepted 103 of the 111 EOM recommendations and established a National Task Force (NTF)—with a secretariat at ECSL—to implement them. NEW not only observed the process but was also the main civil society representative in some of the structures created to implement the accepted recommendations.

With funding from the International Republican Institute (IRI), NEW commissioned a legal review

to assess the status of the post-2018 legal reform agenda in line with the accepted recommendations. The review concluded that about 70% of the 103 recommendations were either fully or partly implemented, while 30% of the recommendations were not implemented. Notable areas of democratic progress before the 2023 electoral cycle included the repeal of Part V of the 1965 Public Order Act which once criminalized free speech and freedom of expression in Sierra Leone; the release of the White Paper on the Constitutional Review Process in 2022, and the adoption of progressive electoral and gender laws. Institutional reforms were also recorded by Elections Management Bodies (EMB), with the Gender Unit of the ECSL transformed into a Gender Directorate and the PPRC's staffing expanded.

Some of the other priority recommendations from the review that were implemented included an additional reduction in the nomination fees of candidates, provision of powers to the PPRC to regulate campaign financing, effectively regulate the activities of political parties, and intervention in intra-party dispute resolution. Among those not implemented include the publication of



disaggregated election results by polling stations by the ECSL; the appointment of ECSL commissioners and other critical leaders of state institutions; instituting mechanisms to address discrepancies between the share of inhabitants and registered voters within electoral units; enhancing the independence of the state broadcaster; and several other recommendations bordering on constitutional review, including changing the law that prohibits naturalized and dual citizens from contesting for parliamentary and presidential elections. NEW noted that while significant and bold progress was made with the adoption of the POA, IMC, PEA, PPRC and the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Acts to implement the 103 EOM recommendations, the division between the two leading political parties, the lack of a dedicated programme of support to mobilize political parties to be actively involved in the legal reform process, the lack of political will to review the 1991 Constitution, and delays in the legal reform processes, limited the scope and extent of the implementation of the EOMs recommendations.

### **Approach to Observing and Monitoring the 2023 Elections and Key Preparatory Activities**

For the 2023 election, NEW adopted an 'Electoral Cycle Approach to Election Observation, as espoused in its 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. The plan sets out the coalition's overarching elections observation in line with NEW's vision, which states that the ***'outcome of all public elections and electoral processes should be reflective of the true will and aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone'***. Furthermore, to effectively engage with the 2023 electoral cycle activities and draw from the NEW strategic plan, NEW undertook preparatory actions to position itself for robust and professional interaction to deliver on the set-out goals across the electoral cycle.

Through a project titled "Enhancing Domestic Electoral Observer Organizations and Citizens' Participation in Democratic Governance Reforms Leading to the 2022 and 2023 Electoral Cycle", which was implemented from 8th May 2020 to 31st March 2022, NEW was able to undertake key activities. The project allowed

NEW to strengthen its internal democracy and management systems and processes. Additionally, through the project, the coalition supported, created awareness, advocated and lobbied for the decentralization policy and the Mid-Term Population and Housing Census. NEW also undertook civic education programmes on electoral legal reforms and increased citizens' knowledge of the work of EMBs and electoral processes to make informed choices and participate positively. The coalition's positions on the above policy and governance reform processes were presented to key stakeholders from a citizens' perspective through position papers and stakeholder engagements. Learning and adapting from several years of experience and engagement with regional and global partners, NEW was inspired to develop new observation approaches and methodologies to enhance its work and effectively deliver on its mandate. Drawing from this learning and adaptation, NEW adopted a 100% election-day polling centre deployment and 50% deployment in polling stations. A polling centre is a cluster of polling stations, while a polling station is one voting unit. In addition to the 100% polling centre and 50% polling station deployment, NEW also deployed the Process and Result Verification for Transparency (PRVT) methodology, previously known as the Parallel Voter Tabulation (PVT). Together with NEW's Long-Term Observers (LTOs) and roving incident reporters and supervisors, the two approaches provided vital information that fed into NEW's Citizen Situation Room hosted at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown. These various observation processes informed NEW observation findings, which are detailed below.

### **The 2023 Elections- Findings on Electoral Cycle Activities**

The 2023 electoral cycle, while peaceful relative to other elections, was fraught with many challenges that unavoidably undermined key stakeholders' confidence and trust in the process. There were questionable actions taken by both the government and the ECSL, which, from the onset, indicated that the outcome of the 2023 elections would be contested. Among some of these actions were the lack of consensus on the appointment of Commissioners of ECSL and the Chair of the PPRC, the unprecedented 2021 midterm census,

the late introduction of the PR system, and the general sense of secrecy and lack of clarity in the processes of the ECSL ahead of the elections. We note that these challenges were not unique to the Government and EMBs. Within the civic space, for instance, NEW observed the deterioration in the effectiveness of some civil society organizations in the electoral process, with some becoming outrightly partisan, an action that furthermore undermined the trust of the public in groups that they previously looked up to, to defend their voices and freedoms. Coupled with this, NEW and other well-meaning organizations and citizens were denied access to information at several stages in the electoral process. There were also critical aspects of the elections, both administrative and programmatic, that were shrouded in secrecy. This was of concern to NEW, but repeated requests for information were not granted. In addition, the early voting process for the Hajj Pilgrims was shrouded in secrecy, with the information provided very late and not well communicated to the public, limited clarity on the early voter's list, and the lack of transparency around the procurement and printing of ballot papers for early voters.

NEW observed 45 bye and re-run elections between 2018 and the 2023 elections, and they were mainly clouded with violence, political interference, vote buying and other irregularities. The Mid-Term Census further exacerbated the situation, the Boundary Delimitation Process, and the shift to the District Block Proportional Representation System – all actions questioned by the main opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) and even some development partners, especially on their relevance and timeliness. The APC even contested the PR system in court and asked their supporters to boycott the mid-term census.

NEW observed the voter registration, exhibition of the provisional voter register, and Voter Identification card distribution. While NCRA and the ECSL did the best they could to have a smooth voter registration process, there were technical challenges with the electronic equipment for data capture; there was a lack of uniformity in the application of the rules in some voter registration centres, where ECSL staff insisted on citizens having the NCRA

registration slip, while in others, the focus was on other forms of identification such as a passport or birth certificate. NEW also observed an indiscriminate application of the provision of citizens' certification by local authorities in the absence of documentary proof of identification. The campaign period was also fraught with some violence and intimidation and the use of hate speeches, especially by supporters of the two main political parties. For instance, an opposition member was killed during an attack on the headquarters of the APC by security forces. These incidents further heightened the tension and divide in the country.

On election day, there were challenges in some areas of the country, with the transportation of polling materials, opening of some polling stations on time, inadequate voting materials, and malfunctioning equipment. The post-voting period, especially the tallying of the results, was problematic, as is detailed in this report, which led to an outcome that did not reflect the votes cast.

### **Key PRVT Findings**

Based on the official results recorded on the RRF for the presidential election (RRF#1) at a statistically representative valid sample of 750 polling stations from across the five regions and 16 districts of Sierra Leone, NEW observed and recorded that the official final presidential results announced by the ECSL are inconsistent with PRVT data. The PRVT data clearly shows that no candidate met the threshold in the first round and that there should be a runoff election between the candidate of the SLPP and that of the APC. For the June 2023 Presidential election, NEW's PRVT data indicates that the official results announced by ECSL are statistically incorrect, mathematically inaccurate and do not reflect the votes cast.

### **The PRVT concludes that:**

1. Voter turnout was 77.3% with a margin of error of +/- 1.7% (between 75.6% and 79%) while ECSL's official turnout is four percentage points higher than the upper limit of the margin of error at 83.0%.
2. Rejected or invalid ballots were 5.1% with a margin of error of +/- 0.6% (between 4.5% and 5.7%).

- A. The PRVT's estimate is consistent with past elections. In 2018, rejected ballots for the first round were 5.2%, 4.7% in 2012, and 7.3% in 2007.
  - B. ECSL's rejected ballot rate of 0.4% represents a significant departure from the trend in Sierra Leonean elections over time.
1. The results announced for the top two candidates are statistically impossible and no candidate should have met the constitutional threshold of 55% to avoid a runoff.
    - A. NEW's PRVY data indicates that the candidate of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) should have received 50.4 % of the vote with a margin of error of +/-2.7% (between 47.7% and 53.1%) of the vote, while:
      - ECSL's official result is 56.1%, which is three percentage points higher than the upper limit of the PRVT range.
      - The candidate of the APC has received 46.5% of the vote with a margin of error of +/- 2.7% (between 43.8% and 49.2%), while ECSL's official result is 41.2%, 2.6 percentage points lower than the lower limit of the PRVT range.

The following findings were derived from an analysis of official election results for the parliamentary and presidential elections as published by the ECSL:

There are a total of 3,374,258 registered voters across 16 districts in Sierra Leone. Official results show roughly 83% turnout rates for the presidential and parliamentary elections (2,800,691 ballots cast for the presidential and 2,789,939 for the parliamentary).

### **Attacks on NEW**

Following the release of findings from NEW, the coalition received death threats and threats of physical violence over the phone from unknown numbers starting on 28th June 2023. Additionally, the leadership of NEW was also subject to attacks on WhatsApp and Facebook by party operatives. As a result of these threats, members of the NEW leadership fled Sierra Leone. On their way out, they were temporarily prevented from leaving by immigration

authorities and the SLP at the Freetown International Airport.

### **Recommendations**

This section of the report proffers a set of recommendations targeting specific actors. NEW also identified a few recommendations as 'Priority' (P) recommendations for which the coalition will immediately engage the relevant stakeholders for implementation. The recommendations include specific calls for the protection of citizen observers of electoral processes; adopting a definitive position on the type of electoral system to be used for future elections; conduct of credible Population and Housing Census in 2025, with the results published to the benchmarks and guidelines for the census to correct the anomalies of previous censuses; establish (by law) a cross party governance board to act as an inclusive platform for dialogue between the government and the opposition; Setting up of an apolitical technical committee of experts to lead the vetting and assessment of appointees as heads of key state institutions, especially EMBs; Revisiting of the PR system, with an alternative that works best for Sierra Leone; Create a publicly available digital version of the voter register and make provisions for citizens to request for amendment to their personal details with relevant supporting documents; ECSL should efficiently and accurately disaggregate and publish voter registration and voting data for analysis across different categories of voters from women, to fist time voter, and PWDs; PPRC should ensure that political parties have guidelines in their constitutions that provide the election of 30% of women; the security sector should ensure the safety of all electoral staff, observers and journalists during the voting and tallying processes; Political parties should review their constitutions and policies to allow for the meaningful implementation of the provisions of GEWE and PPA Acts on the nomination of women in parliament. The aim is for political parties to prioritize the nomination of women at the top of the list. The full details of the recommendation for each actor are provided in the main body of the report below.



## INTRODUCTION

For the 2023 electoral cycle, National Election Watch (NEW) undertook a comprehensive electoral cycle approach, observing and or monitoring all stages and activities of the electoral process in Sierra Leone. The work of NEW was aided by a collaborative partnership with the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) through a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), guaranteeing NEW assurance of unfettered access to the electioneering processes. However, NEW's experience, though holistic, reform-minded and integrity-driven, was seriously challenged by external factors and financial and logistical constraints. However, learning and adapting from several years of experience and engagement with regional and global partners, NEW was inspired to develop new observation approaches and methodologies to deal with the contextual challenges, enhance its work and effectively deliver on its mandate. Drawing from this learning and adaption, NEW adopted a 100% election-day polling centre deployment and 50% deployment in polling stations. A polling centre is a cluster of polling stations, while a polling station is one voting unit. In addition to the 100% polling centre and 50% polling station deployment, NEW also deployed the Process and Result Verification for Transparency (PRVT) methodology, previously known as the Parallel Voter Tabulation (PVT). Together with NEW's

Long-Term Observers (LTOs) and roving incident reporters and supervisors, the two approaches provided vital information that fed into NEW's Citizen Satiation Room hosted at the New Brookfield Hotel in Freetown. These various observation processes, informed NEW observation findings detailed below.

Efforts to suppress NEW's independent monitoring of various stages of the electoral process, notably through a precipitous decline in access to information, demonstrated that critical players in the democratic space were avoidant of independent, fair and genuine perspectives. This stifled the country's progressive democratic culture and inclusive and credible electoral engagements. As such, NEW encountered multiple threats and intimidation from different quarters while doing its work. This instilled fear in its observers and staff, which resulted in the evacuation of the network's leadership from the country after the elections.

These challenging circumstances by no means limited NEW's aspiration to achieve its goals of observing, monitoring and strengthening the electoral process in partnership with Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) and other stakeholders for free, fair and credible elections in Sierra Leone. The coalition was determined to

continue its tradition of independent, non-partisan domestic election observation, to contribute to the promotion of democracy and the strengthening of peace-building efforts in the country. Acting in the public eye ensured that the outcome of all elections and electoral processes reflected the true will of the people of Sierra Leone. Thus, NEW engaged the electoral process from the beginning with its post-2018 election activities through an electoral cycle-wide observation of elections and the electoral process from 2018 to 2023.

In its functions, NEW collaborated and interrogated governance and electoral reform processes, undertook advocacy actions to promote Electoral Legal Reforms and made recommendations to EMBs to improve electoral systems and processes. The coalition also issued statements, released publications and made advocacy visits to state institutions to discuss the 2018 Elections Observer Missions' (EOM) recommendations and other electoral and governance matters. Additionally, the coalition observed all 45 bye and re-run elections from 2018 to 2013. Despite its shortcomings, it also released an independent position on the Mid-Term Population and Housing Census.

While not opposed to the midterm census as a national development strategy, NEW was concerned that the data from the census could form the basis for the allocation of parliamentary and local council seats outside the tradition of each boundary delimitation serving two electoral cycles. Considering the criticisms on the approach of the midterm census, both from political parties and development partners, NEW took a clear and consistent position that the census was not an immediate development priority and that the circumstance under which it was designed (with limited stakeholder consultation), had the potential to inflame ethno-regional and political divisions. Furthermore, NEW observed and made recommendations on the Civil Registration and Confirmation Process (C&R) from which data for the Voter Registration was extracted. The coalition also shared an analysis paper on the Decentralization Policy with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), parliament and other stakeholders as part of its wider governance

reform advocacy work.

Coupled with the above, NEW undertook a systematic observation and assessment of the 2022 Voter Registration processes, including data capture, Exhibition of the Provisional Voter Register, adjudication of objection on the Voter Register, and the distribution of the Voter Identification Cards. However, it is worth noting that the lack of timely access to the voter list limited NEW's ability to comprehensively evaluate the accuracy, timeliness, and completeness of the register. Despite this, NEW embarked on civic and voter education on the registration process targeting corporate institutions and the working class and also observed the nomination of candidates and the campaign period through our Long-Term Observation (LTO) Strategy that enhanced the mapping of conflict flashpoints.

Furthermore, NEW observed the Early Voting process of Muslim pilgrims and deployed 5000 observers on Election Day (E-Day) through a strategic observation model prioritizing mega polling centres, hot spots, hard-to-reach areas, and centres in border-crossing communities. A robust incident reporting strategy with a well-coordinated "Citizens' Situation Room" (CSR) was also set up at the NEW Brookfields Hotel in Freetown.

Critically, a PRVT process with 750 observers was deployed to statistically random sample polling stations, with an outcome recording a 99.9% success delivery rate. The findings of the PRVT were published, and NEW continued to observe the post-election activities, including the contested outcome of the election results announced by ECSL. Like in previous elections, NEW used technology to capture data and analyze results, deploying the PRVT tool to assess the electoral processes of voting impartially, counting and tallying results as part of its approach to promoting integrity in the electoral process. The tool was also used to evaluate the accuracy and integrity of the results as announced by the ECSL. The PRVT methodology has been employed in election observation in various countries worldwide. Most recently, it was used by civil society observer groups in Nigeria, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe and Liberia. It has always proved an accurate and valuable tool in Election Day

(E-Day) data capture and results analysis.<sup>1</sup>

Through detailed analysis of the electoral process and the results, NEW concluded that a run-off election was required to formally declare the winner of the elections, drawing from data from the PRVT tool, which indicated that no candidate secured the 55% constitutional threshold to be declared the winner on the first ballot. However, the ECSL declared the incumbent SLPP candidate as the winner of the 2023 elections, with over 56% of the valid votes cast. International Elections Observation Missions (EOMs) such as the EU Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) and the Carter Center (TCC) also raised similar concerns regarding the transparency and statistical inaccuracies in the tallying and declaration of the final votes by the ECSL.

During the 2023 electoral cycle, NEW was a member of the EOM Taskforce represented in all six thematic areas (Electoral Legal Reform and Processes, Electoral Offences, Electoral and Political Processes, Election Security, the Role of the Media in Elections and Electoral Funding) that the EOM recommendations were divided into. It was also part of the Elections Steering Committee and Political Parties Liaison Committee (PPLC) and attended meetings both at national and district levels; and is a member of the ECSL Stakeholders Forum and a member of the Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee (IESPC). NEW's strategic objective for E-Day was to ensure accurate observation of the polling process and to report all findings transparently and accountable. Below is a categorization of the coalition's 2023 observation strategy:

<b>Electoral Activity</b>	<b>No of Observers Deployed</b>	<b>No of Supervisors Deployed</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Voter Registration (VR) Exercise</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>44</b>	NEW observed 10% (363) of the 3,630 Registration Centres of the ECSL's Voter Registration (VR) Exercise, held from the 3rd of September -to the 4th of October 2022.
<b>Adjudication</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>N/A</b>	The observers deployed changed shifts, with the first person observing from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm and the other from 3:00 pm to 10:00 pm daily right through the process
<b>Exhibition (Voter Registration Assessment)</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>36</b>	The VRA exercise was conducted three days out of the five days slated for the Voter Register Exhibition by the ECSL.
<b>Distribution of Voter Identity Cards</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>44</b>	NEW recruited 10% observers of the 3,630 centres - (363 centres for NEW) to observe the Distribution of Voter Registration Cards (DVRC). Observers were deployed to observe the 1st and 5th day of the DVRC.

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/prvt-methodology/> (Accessed on 20 December, 2023).

<b>Electoral Activity</b>	<b>No of Observers Deployed</b>	<b>No of Supervisors Deployed</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>District Election Material Movement Observers (DEMМОs)</b>	<b>17</b>	-	
<b>WARD Election Material Movement Observers (DEMМОs)</b>	<b>448</b>	-	
<b>Election Day/Polling Day</b>	<b>5,750</b>	<b>321</b>	NEW deployed 5,000 station observers in 50% of total polling stations established and 750 PRVT observers.
<b>Data Entry Clerks in the Citizen Situation Room (CSR)</b>	<b>20</b>	-	
<b>Incident Reporters</b>	<b>23</b>	-	NEW moved reports on incidents from polling stations to relevant authorities for timely intervention and for this purpose NEW deployed one observer per district, five deployed at the national secretariat representing each region and one national incident coordinator.
<b>Regional Tally Center Observers</b>	<b>10</b>	-	Two Tally Centre Observers were deployed to each centre in the five Regions.
<b>Paramount Chieftaincy Elections</b>	<b>21</b>	-	

NEW wishes to acknowledge the MoU signed with the ECSL but notes the challenges faced by the Commission as the electoral cycle activities unfolded primarily during the voter registration process when NEW could not access data needed for the Voter Registration Assessment (VRA). Despite these challenges, the ECSL remains a critical partner of NEW and, until recently, has exhibited openness to engagement and discussion on findings from observation of the various electoral activities and emerging issues led by NEW.

NEW congratulates all Sierra Leonean citizens who turned out in their numbers to vote on Polling Day and ensured a peaceful E-Day process despite the odds of the late opening of polls and delays in the deployment of electoral

materials, especially in the Western Area.

This report (developed through technical support from International IDEA) is a detailed analysis of the 2023 electoral cycle based on NEW's activities since the end of the 2018 elections. NEW also engaged its district team members and national structure for post-election reflection sessions that fostered a nuanced examination of the 2023 electoral processes and the observations of the staff and those deployed by the organization. The report provides policy recommendations for future elections, focusing on the increased participation of youth, women, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).



## 2. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: POST-2018 ELECTIONS

Before the 2023 elections, Sierra Leone successfully conducted four presidential and general elections that saw political power change from a governing political party to the opposition on two occasions, in 2007 and 2018. By 2015, the country was considered a developing nation, with significant investment made by succeeding governments and their development partners in the post-war reformation process that ensued in 2002. Notable areas of democratic progress before the 2023 electoral cycle included the repeal of Part V of the 1965 Public Order Act, which once criminalized free speech and freedom of expression in Sierra Leone; the release of the White Paper on the Constitutional Review Process in 2022, and the adoption of laws, some of which are examined in the section legal framework section below.

Internal institutional reforms were also recorded, with the Gender Unit of the ECSL transformed into a Gender Directorate and the PPRC's staffing expanded. While notable democratic progress has been made, several challenges pointing to democratic backsliding have emerged. The country experienced critical issues concerning the lack of trust in key public

institutions, especially the ECSL, the SLP, and the Judiciary. Political intolerance, growing elections-related violence leading to the destruction and burning of election materials, impunity relating to election malpractices during bye-elections, the rise in fake news, hate-speech and hate crime resulting in burning of public properties, extreme violence including deaths of civilians and security officers (especially in Makeni, Lunsar, Tombo and Freetown). These undermined the rule of law and social cohesion in the country and threatened the conduct of peaceful, credible and accountable elections in 2023.

Furthermore, the post-2018 and the 2023 electoral context nurtured a divisive society, with clear apprehensions by citizens for a meaningful engagement and a peaceful electoral outcome. Incidents such as the forceful installation of a speaker of Parliament devoid of due process; the removal of 10 opposition Members of Parliament (MP) with the presiding judge replacing most of them without a re-run election denying the electorates the opportunity to choose their representatives; and the arbitrary removal of public officials with the security of tenure from their duties, gravely undermined trust not just



between the two major political parties, but it further eroded the confidence of the public in state institutions. Within such circumstances, the Government of Sierra Leone, has not been able to mobilize the key stakeholders for political governance and progress. Even when the government wanted to introduce an infrastructure for peace during the Bintumani III conference in 2019, the main opposition, the All Peoples Congress Party (APC), did not participate.

During the observation of bye and re-run elections, NEW's findings indicated incidents of violence, political intolerance, gross indiscipline by political party stalwarts and public officials, carting away of election materials and burning of ballot boxes, and the deliberate change of election figures by ECSL staff. In some instances, the violence perpetrated resulted in the death of innocent persons, as was in Tonko Limba, ward 196 in Kambia district and Constituency 010 Kailahun district. These were worrying trends for elections and politics in a post-conflict context.

Noting these challenges, NEW designed a civil society election observation strategy to support free, fair, credible and accountable general elections in 2023. The strategy plan was intended acting providing for the deployment of observers in 100% of the polling stations established by the ECSL; employing of the use of the PRVT to capture and transmit data on E-Day in real-time, undertaking a problem-solving mechanism by moving information about incidents from polling stations to relevant election stakeholders with the authority for intervention to ensure that such incidences did not adversely affect the outcome of the elections. As indicated above, this strategy was adjusted due to the limited available funds. Instead of 100% coverage, NEW limited its observation to 50%, focusing on hard-to-reach communities, potential hotspots, mega polling centres and communities around the borders of Liberia and Guinea.

## **2.1. Reform Agenda Post 2018 Elections**

Ahead of the March 2018 local, parliamentary, and presidential elections, the ECSL accredited national and international EOMs to observe the polls in fulfilment of the Commission's

commitment to international best practices for transparent and credible elections. Some of the accredited missions included The Carter Center (TCC), the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the EUEOM and NEW. Cumulatively, the four international and one national observation missions made a total of one hundred and eleven (111) recommendations, bordering on a wide range of electoral issues, including the electoral legal framework, election campaign environment and financing, security, electoral offences, petitions, and electoral processes, among others. The ECSL and other electoral stakeholders organized a conference on the 18th and 19th of October 2018 to discuss the different EOM recommendations, aiming to consolidate them into thematic areas and identify priorities for reform.

The EMBs and other stakeholders accepted 103 of the 111 EOM recommendations and established a National Task Force (NTF)—with a secretariat at ECSL—to implement them. NEW not only observed the process but was also the main civil society representative in some of the structures created to implement the accepted recommendations.

With funding from the International Republican Institute (IRI), NEW commissioned a legal review to assess the status of the post-2018 legal reform agenda in line with the accepted recommendations. The review concluded that about 70% of the 103 recommendations were either fully or partly implemented, while 30% were not implemented. Some of the fully implemented recommendations included the repeal of the POA and the development and adoption of laws that strengthen the democratization process that the country has embarked on in the last two decades.

Some of the other priority recommendations from the review that were implemented included, the provision for the registration of eligible voters in the diaspora, reduction in the nomination fees of candidates, provision of powers to the PPRC to regulate campaign financing, effectively regulate the activities of political parties, and intervene in intra-party dispute resolution. Among those not implemented include the publication of

disaggregated election results by polling stations by the ECSL; the appointment of ECSL commissioners and other critical leaders of state institutions; instituting mechanisms to address discrepancies between the share of inhabitants and registered voters within electoral units; enhancing the independence of the state broadcaster; and several other recommendations bordering on constitutional review, including changing the law that prohibits naturalized and dual citizens from contesting for parliamentary and presidential elections. NEW noted that while significant and bold progress was made with the adoption of the POA, IMC, PEA, PPRC and the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Acts to implement the 103 EOM recommendations, the division between the two leading political parties, the lack of a dedicated programme of support to mobilize political parties to be actively involved in the legal reform process, the lack of political will to review the 1991 Constitution, and delays in the legal reform processes, limited the scope and extent of the implementation of the EOMs recommendations.

## **2.2. The Legal Framework that Governed the Electioneering Process**

The provision of the 1991 Constitution governed Sierra Leone's 2023 elections, the 2022 PEA and the PPA of 2023. These principal legal instruments were complimented by a host of new legal provisions including the Public Order Act of 2020 (which repealed the infamous part five of the Public Order Act of 1965), the Cybersecurity and Cyber Crimes Act of 2021 which introduced significant new restrictions on freedom of expression online, and the 2022 GEWE Act, which advances protections for women's rights, including a 30% affirmative quota for women's participation in politics for appointed positions (including cabinet, ministry, and ambassador roles) and elected positions

(including parliamentary and local council seats).

Foremost among the new electoral laws is the enactment of the PEA 2022, which paved the way for adopting the District Block Proportional Representation System under the Constitution of Sierra Leone (Amendment) Act, 2001. With the re-introduction of the district block proportional representation system, amendments to some provisions in the PEA of 2012 were inevitable. The PPA of 2023 transformed the previous PPRC into a regulatory commission with powers and mandate to regulate and sanction political parties and independent candidates for violations of the election code of conduct. Notable new provisions in both the PEA and PPA were the numerical increase of the Electoral Commission; the possibility of voting outside Sierra Leone; usage of National Identification Number (NIN) as proof of eligibility to be registered as a voter; the introduction of a polling centre manager who is to be responsible for supervising the conduct of the polling process at a polling centre; certification of results from centre to district returning officer; the mandatory provision for every political party to nominate a woman in every three nominations; cancellation of votes due to over-voting in a polling station; cancellation of votes due to violence in a polling station; provision for the election of village or town head; establishment of a National Elections Trust Fund; the introduction of a Code of Conduct for Political Parties; and the creation of an Elections Offences and Petitions Division of the High Court.

NEW observed that while the legal reform was apt and far-reaching, the reform process took place too close to the elections. This left little or no time for political parties and civil society actors to properly digest and understand the provision and their effective popularization and implementation before the elections.



### 3. APPROACH TO OBSERVING AND MONITORING THE 2023 ELECTIONS AND KEY PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES

This section presents the approaches used by NEW to prepare for the 2023 elections, and also to observe and monitor the process.

#### 3.1. The Guiding Framework for NEW's Elections Observation Work

For the 2023 election, NEW adopted an 'Electoral Cycle Approach to Election Observation, as espoused in its 2022-2026 Strategic Plan.<sup>2</sup> The plan sets out the coalition's overarching elections observation framework as espoused in its vision: the 'outcome of all public elections and electoral processes should be reflective of the true will and aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone'. Therefore, NEW's role is to promote integrity in elections and electoral processes through independent observation and reporting of observation findings. This approach suggests that NEW would observe all significant activities and processes in the electoral cycle, including re-runs and bye-elections. It also included other significant activities such as Mid-Term Population and Housing Census, Boundary Delimitation, Voter Registration and its associated components, Nominations and Campaigns, PCMP Elections, Early voting, Election-day and the immediate

post-election activities. This strategy was informed by an electoral cycle approach which uses a set of observation models including LTOs, District Elections Materials Movement Observers (DEMМОs) and Ward Elections Materials Movement Observers (WEMМОs), PRVT, stationed observers at polling centres and engagements with stakeholders around the electoral cycle.

#### 3.2. NEW's Preparedness for Elections Observation Work in 2023

To effectively engage with the 2023 electoral cycle activities and draw from the NEW strategic plan, NEW undertook preparatory actions to position itself for robust and professional interaction to deliver on the set-out goals across the electoral cycle.

Through the project "Enhancing Domestic Electoral Observer Organizations and Citizens' Participation in Democratic Governance Reforms Leading to the 2022 and 2023 Electoral Cycle", which was implemented from 8th May 2020 to 31st March 2022, NEW could undertake key activities. The project strengthened NEW's internal democracy and management systems

<sup>2</sup> See NEW 2022-2026 Strategic Plan.

and processes. This included the establishment of a media and communications department for advocacy and engagement, the development of a five-year Strategic Plan and Communications Strategy, the provision of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) support to NEW's district offices to allow activity implementation and compliance with COVID-19 prevention guidelines. The project supported the strengthening of the Strategic Management Committee (SMC) and the Regional and District teams to contribute to the work of the coalition through training effectively, provision of gadgets (computers, modem and accessories) to aid their work and the development of systems and processes for decision making.

In addition to the above, the coalition supported, created awareness, advocated and lobbied for the decentralization policy and the Mid-Term Population and Housing Census through the project. NEW also undertook civic education programmes on electoral legal reforms and increased citizens' knowledge of the work of EMBs and electoral processes to make informed choices and participate positively. The coalition's positions on the above policy and governance reform processes were presented to key stakeholders from a citizens' perspective through position papers and stakeholder engagements.

### **3.3. Ownership of the NEW Observation Strategy by Members of the Coalition**

NEW engaged the heads of its 450-member organization, represented mainly by their staff in NEW activities, to understand and own the election observation strategy, the NEW Code of Conduct, and the revised electoral laws. This engagement revitalized civil society's role in observing the elections with a reasonable spread of representation across Sierra Leone's 17 administrative and political districts. NEW established engagement platforms between CSOs and government institutions on election peace and security.

### **3.4. Training for Specific Electoral Cycle Activities**

Observing and monitoring electoral cycle activities requires critical skills and competence to avert costly mistakes. Against this background, in the 2023 elections, NEW provided targeted training for specific electoral cycle activities for observers, local community members and other stakeholders. These training sessions preceded every activity to be observed. The details of these trainings are mentioned in the relevant sections of this report.

### **3.5. NEW's Observation Strategy for the 2023 Elections**

The NEW Observation Strategy for the 2023 elections was consistent with its mission, vision, and priorities in its five-year strategic plan. NEW's vision is to see a governance and electoral context in which the outcome of all elections reflects the actual will of the voters. The observation strategy delineated a clear roadmap that was committed to observing various stages and processes of the elections. The most crucial element of NEW's election observation strategy was that it built on NEW's experience of observing previous elections in Sierra Leone since 2002 but with particular reference to the 2007, 2012 and 2018 elections. The PVT was deployed in those elections through a statistically representative random sampling of polling stations to ensure independent verification of the election results. NEW ensured the effective use of technology to enhance the electoral process's transparency and integrity.

**Phase I: Pre-election Observation:** This included the observation of all electoral activities and processes before E-Day and was divided into two sub-components:

- **Short Term Activity-Based Observers:** This set of observers observed voter registration, exhibition of the voter register (using the voter registration assessment methodology)<sup>3</sup> And the distribution of voter ID cards. Like all its recruitment processes, these observers were recruited from NEW member organizations that subscribe to the

<sup>3</sup> SA process through which NEW assesses the quality of the voter register using the List-People and People-List framework. The aim was verifying the existence of registrants and omission of would-be registrants on the provisional register.

- NEW code of conduct and core values.
- Deployment of Long-Term Observers: This category of observers was deployed to observe the nominations, campaigns and the general pre- and immediate post-election environment. The long-term observation primarily focused on documenting electoral violence, warning signs, mediation efforts and response actions, voter education, and EMB preparation. 34 observers were deployed in all 17 districts across the country as LTOs. NDI supported the technical and infrastructural delivery of the LTO activities through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funding.
- Deployment of Election Materials Movement Observers: In addition to categories one and two above, there was a third stratum of observers whose observation role straddles pre- and post-election day observation. Their role was to follow the movement of sensitive election materials and observe that the deployment and retrieval were done according to the prescribed ECSL guidelines.

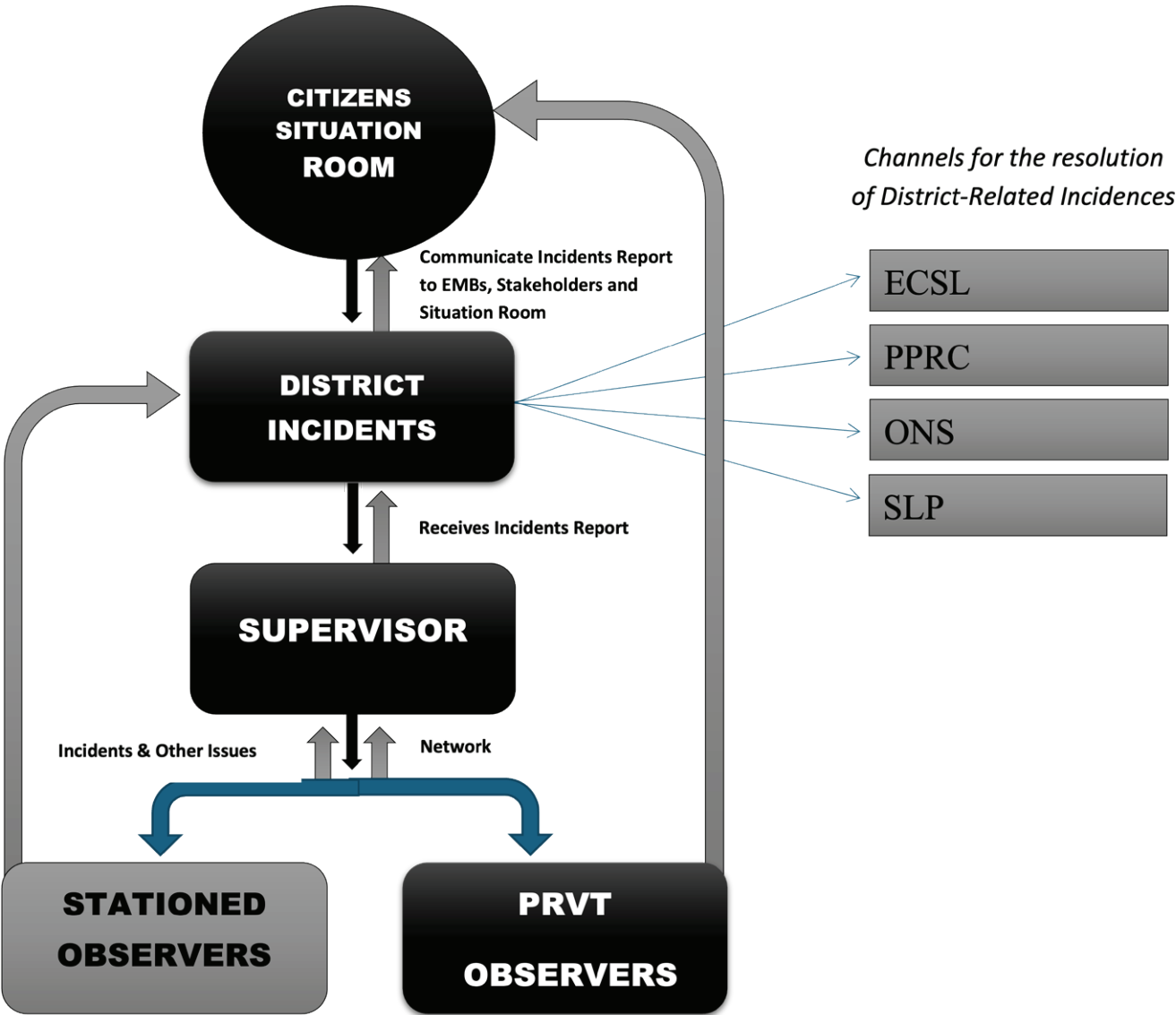
Phase II: This included the observation of all electoral activities and processes before E-Day and was divided into two sub-components:

- Election Day Observation: The most visible part of NEW's election observation work was done in this segment. On E-Day, NEW deployed 100% in all polling centres nationwide. Relative to the previous elections, in which NEW had a 100% deployment to every polling station, in the 2023 election, NEW observers were deployed 100% in all polling centres and 50% across the 11,832 polling stations nationwide. However, NEW deployed more than one observer in mega centres, hard-to-reach locations, election violence hot spots, and centres close to the Guinean and Liberian borders. NEW deployed senior category of observers, including the supervisors, incident reporters and roving teams, comprising members of the SMC, NEW Secretariat staff and heads of member organizations.
  - Supervisors: This category of observers

played a supervisory role in the stationed observers while also observing the general environment outside the polling centre. They consisted of members of the SMC of NEW and heads of member organizations.

- Incident Reporters: NEW recruited, trained, and deployed 17 district-level incident reporters (one in each district) across five national-level incident reports. Their job was to receive and collate incidents reported from the districts through a regional approach. A national incident reporter also served as the liaison to several EMBs and stakeholders and escalated incidents reported for action.
- Roving Teams: This category of observers provides oversight on the work of the supervisors and is critical in the problem-solving mechanism of the observation strategy.
- Tally Centre Observers: These were deployed across the country's five regions where ECSL established collation points to tally the results. A total of 10 tally centre observers (two per regional collation centre) were deployed across the county. This category of observers was responsible for observing the collation process to ascertain whether the tallying was done in compliance with the stipulated guidelines and best practices.
- The Citizens' Situation Room (CSR): The CSR was hosted at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown and was the most prominent citizens' hub with a high international presence during the elections. It was a coordination hub for synthesizing data from the field and escalating incidents for action. It asserted itself as a decision-making platform for NEW's communication to the Sierra Leonean public and the international community. The functionality of the CSR was enhanced by several supportive sub-units such as data entry clerks, technical support teams, and analysts (international and national), including political, gender, legal, media and communication, to support the command and decision-making centre.

# NEWs Election Day Operational Flow of Communication





## 4. Findings on Electoral Cycle Activities

This section of the report summarizes the findings across the different electoral activities and processes observed by NEW. A total of ten thematic activities, including post-2018 Bye Elections, Mid-Term Housing and Population Census, Boundary Delimitation, Voter Registration, Electoral Systems, Nomination and Campaigns, PCMP Elections, Early Voting, Election, Tallying and the Immediate Post-Election Context. In each category, NEW analyses the legal framework, the observation approach, activities and strategies, adherence to legal provisions and established practices, and the observed incidents, obstructions and deviation.

### 4.1 Bye and Re-Run Elections

The First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system and the contested nature of some of the 2018 parliamentary elections meant that post-2018, there were bound to be bye-elections across various categories to fill in vacancies. NEW observed 45 Bye and Re-run elections per NEW's electoral cycle-observation methodology. Among these were the re-run elections in Constituency 110 in the Western Area, Constituency 010 in Kailahun District, Ward 196

in Tonko Limba in the Kambia District, Ward 308 in Bonthe District, and District Council Chairperson elections in Koinadugu.

- a. **Legal Framework:** The legal basis for conducting bye elections in Sierra Leone is provided for by section 33 of the constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991 (Act No.6 of 1991), pursuant to section 39(1) of the said section, Sections 69(1), 70(1) of the PEA of 2012 (Act No. 4 of 2012), and section 10(1) of the Local Government Act of 2004 (Act No. 1 of 2004).

**Observation Approach, Activities and Strategies:** The approach used by NEW for all bye and re-run elections followed the same recruitment, training and deployment patterns of stationed observers and supervisors. Unlike bye-elections before 2018, mostly observed by NEW members' residents in their communities, post-2018 bye-elections required additional support from the NEW secretariat and the SMC. This was because most of the bye-elections were highly contested and, in some cases, with controversial outcomes. On this basis, NEW undertook a pre-election observation assessment to gauge citizens' perceptions in the electoral context, identify early warning

signs, and share findings with EMBs and the security sector to help reduce tension before and after polling day. Of the 45 bye and re-run elections observed, NEW deployed station observers in each polling station in 13 elections considered to be highly contested. Five of these 13 elections were the post-2018 re-run elections, following an error made by ECSL on the correct number of candidates to be nominated for the elections. They include Wards 235 and 232 in Port Loko City Council, Wards 121 and 123 in Makeni City Council, and Ward 308 in Bonthe City Council. NEW only deployed observers at the polling centre level for the other bye and re-run elections.

**c. Conduct of the exercise, adherence to the law, good practice and principles:** Of the 45 post-2018 elections observed by NEW, 37 were bye-elections (parliamentary and local council inclusive), and eight were re-run elections. NEW observed that, of the eight re-run elections, three were consistent with the provision of the law for the conduct of elections, and five lacked clarity on the legal basis for their conduct. For instance, in Wards 235 and 232 in Port Loko City Council, Wards 121 and 123 in Makeni City Council, and Ward 308 in Bonthe City Council, there was under and over-subscription of candidates in these wards, resulting in a re-run of these elections without a clear legal basis for doing so. In other areas (such as Koindu New Sembehun City Council) where over-subscription of candidates occurred, NEW's observers were informed that the affected candidate was compensated.

**d. Incidents, Obstructions and Deviations:** As already noted in the analysis above, NEW observed a total of 45 bye and re-run elections between 2018 and the 2023 elections. In almost all these elections observed by NEW, there were significant incidents, obstructions and deviations that affected the quality and credibility of the results. These incidents, obstructions and deviations are categorized into the following themes:

i. Violence: This was a common trait observed by NEW in most elections. The

nature of the violence in the re-run and bye-elections ranged from thuggery, fighting and destruction of electoral materials, private property and burning of sensitive election materials. Some of the prominent elections with violence were Ward 196 in Tonko Limba, Kambia district, where a 14-year-old boy was shot and killed by unknown persons, Constituency 010 in Kailahun District, where a boy between ages 18 to 20 years, who happened to be the nephew of the independent candidate was killed in Gbahama Village, on Tuesday 17th February 2021<sup>4</sup>. In Constituency 110 in the Western Area, there was physical destruction of ballot boxes by political party thugs, with a known government minister seen in the possession of a ballot box, against ECSL's regulations. All of these incidents of violence occurred in the full view of state security officers, with no arrest made by the police. The desperation to win and the heightened tension that comes with it led to a cancellation of the first re-run elections in Ward 196 and Constituency 110, warranting a second re-run and, in the process, a waste of valuable state resources.

A group from the Jalloh clan, including aspirants and candidates for the PC election 2021 in Sambaia Chiefdom, declared their support for the APC candidate on 7th June 2022 in a meeting at the Bendugu Court Barray. The APC supporters then went around the town, jubilating the event with a declaration of support for their candidate. In the course of their jubilation, supporters of the APC apprehended a young man, accusing him of spying on them and then beating him mercilessly. The supporters of APC, as alleged, then went on the rampage and vandalized the house of the candidate of the SLPP and the house of the uncle of the SLPP candidate. It was further alleged that the supporters of the APC carted away a generator and destroyed other properties, burnt two new motorbikes and also burnt the

<sup>4</sup> See NEW's website on <https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/press/>



billboard of the SLPP candidate. On their side, the APC alleged that one of their supporters was wounded on the head with a machete, and some houses of their supporters were burnt during the violence.

- ii. Irregularities and vote buying: The nature of irregularities and violation of electoral procedures were especially brazen and pervasive in two re-runs and bye-elections. For instance, in Ward 196 in Tonko Limba, NEW observed ballot stuffing and voting with pre-marked and unreconciled ballot papers during the counting process and using two different ballot papers for the same elections. In addition, NEW observed that the computer at the tally centre for the Tonko Limba re-run election rejected several Results Reconciliation Forms (RRFs), which led to an incomplete reconciliation process. However, NEW further observed that the results were announced with heavy security presence the following morning.

In the district council elections in Koinadugu district on the 2nd October 2021, NEW observed that the election was marred by widespread political intimidation, thuggery and suspension of the tally process. It was suspended due to discrepancies in result entry into the tally sheet. Representatives of the APC party detected discrepancies from centre code 6096, in which the actual results in the RRF were APC -101 and SLPP 69 votes. However, the figures entered into the Tally Sheet were APC-101 and SLPP 169. This was verified by ECSL, and the actual figures were inputted. NEW observed that the ECSL staff who inputted the wrong results was replaced, but NEW is not aware of any further action taken against him. A second wrong result input was also observed by NEW in Sewaia, also detected by APC party agents; the ECSL was trying to resolve the second discrepancy when an argument ensued between the APC and SLPP party agents at the tally centre, leading to the suspension of the tallying process. In

addition to the irregularities, NEW observed that in polling centre 08056, Station 3, Kagbonkoh, two voters were caught with pre-marked and stamped ballot papers in favour of the SLPP. When interrogated by the police, they admitted that the ballot papers were given to them on the eve of the elections, with the sum of SLL 20,000 (old Leones) per ballot to cast them on polling day illicitly.

- iii. Political Interference and Intimidation: In addition to violence and vote buying, NEW observed that the post-2018 bye and re-run elections were characterized by the unwarranted presence of high-profile state authorities and executive members of political parties who are not ordinarily resident in the ward or constituencies the elections were conducted. This led to subtle influence, political intimidation, and chaos in the polling centres. In particular, NEW noted the clash between the SLP and the convoy of the APC presidential candidate, who was making his way into Sambaia Bendugu for an APC rally while the Vice President was coming out of the exact location. Such standoffs were not only a recipe for violence; they were emblematic of state and political interference of high-profile individuals in electoral processes. NEW observed a similar incident in Port Loko during a bye-election in Ward 076, Centre Code 10190, where a sitting MP representing constituency 114 in Calaba Town in the Western Area was arrested and manhandled by the police when he refused to vacate the polling environment, considering that the ECSL did not accredit him.

Interference in the electoral process was also prevalent among traditional rulers. For instance, in the bye-election in Constituency 010 in Kailahun district, NEW observed that the Paramount Chief (PC) of Peje Bongre Chiefdom publicly associated with the SLPP campaign activities. The SLPP held a public gathering in Mamboma Village Court Barray, where the PC resides. The PC was

seen at the high table of dignitaries during the meeting on the date scheduled for the independent candidate to campaign. The ECSL intervened by asking the leadership of the SLPP to respect the campaign calendar, and the police were alerted to take action.

## 4.2 Mid-Term Population and Housing Census

### a. Legal Framework

NEW notes the provision of Part II, Section 2 of the Census Act of 2002, that the President may, from time to time, on the advice of the minister, by order to make statutory instruments, direct a census be taken of the population of Sierra Leone. Pursuant to this provision, a statutory instrument titled “The Census Order 2021, The Census Act No.14 of 2002, Statutory Instrument No.4 of 2021” was laid on the table of the well of Parliament on 19th April 2021 by the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice. Following the 21-day maturation period, the instrument was presented to the President, who proclaimed a midterm census in July 2020. The legal basis for the mid-term census was drawn from these legal instruments.

### b. Observation Approach, Activities and Strategies

The activities of the 2021 midterm census (and, indeed, censuses generally) fall slightly outside NEW's traditional elections' observation work. However, NEW understands the significance of a credible housing and population census for voter registration, boundary delimitation and public service delivery, and as such, deems the process critical. The coalition also noted the concerns the SLPP and civil society raised about the credibility of the 2015 census and the need to address the anomalies that plagued the process. Thus, the coalition took a proactive step to engage with the processes of the midterm census through assessment, stakeholder engagements, position papers and media outreach. The gap analysis focused on assessing the legal basis, contextual readiness (especially the timeliness of the census amid a global health pandemic), foundational documents and

previous practices regarding the census. Among the issues raised in the assessment were the 10-year practice of population and housing censuses (a census in 2015 and, therefore, 2025 for the next round), the implication of conducting a census over the fight against COVID-19, the lack of inclusivity (both civil society and political groups) befitting democratic governance process, the timeliness of the data and impact in the delivery of the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MT-NDP).

Based on this analysis, NEW published a set of press statements in the form of position papers, urging the government, among other things, to provide clarity over the process with justification on the relevance of the midterm census while enabling the space for broader conversation and value addition. In a more targeted manner, NEW engaged with the leadership of Statistics- Sierra Leone on the implications of the proposed midterm census on elections and governance processes broadly and the need for inclusivity of all shades of opinion. Through the PPLC platform, NEW updated ECSL, political parties and other stakeholders on NEW's assessment and position on the proposed mid-term census, highlighting its potential consequences on the 2023 elections. At the citizenry level, NEW used the data from its assessment and position papers to inform its engagement with the media and the public on the census.

### c. Assessment, Engagement Position Papers (Public Statement and Media Engagement)

The ECSL allocated seats per district following a compromise between the 2015 census data and the 2021 midterm census data. A mean between the two-census data per district determined the number of seats per district. The formula for allocating seats to each district is provided in the 2022 Regulations.<sup>5</sup> This was due to the long-standing disagreement between the two leading political parties on the two-census data and the delineation of constituency boundaries. During the delineation of the boundaries for the 2018 election, the SLPP rejected the data of the 2015 census, arguing that the data was falsified with artificially increased populations in the districts and regions in the then-ruling APC party strongholds to boost seat allocation, while

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://sierralii.gov.sl/akn/si/act/si/2022/14/eng@2022-11-16/source.pdf> (Accessed on 22 December, 2023).

the population in districts known to be traditionally supportive of the SLPP were reduced. When the SLPP won the 2018 elections, it announced an unprecedented midterm census, despite criticisms by civil society, withdrawal of donor funding,<sup>6</sup> There was also an outright boycott of the process by the opposition, who argued that the SLPP wanted to gerrymander through population reallocation.<sup>7</sup> When the data from the midterm census indicated, for instance, that the population of Freetown had reduced by over half from its 2015 population, it was not difficult for the opposition and civil society observers to affirm the claim that the midterm census intended to redraw the electoral boundaries of Sierra Leone in favour of the ruling SLPP. NEW was among the few voices opposed to the midterm census but also called on the Government of Sierra Leone and the ECSL not to use the data generated from the midterm census for boundary delimitation.<sup>8</sup>

#### d. Conduct of the Exercise, Adherence to the Law, Good Practice and Principles

Despite the concerns raised by citizens and political and international development partners, the government conducted the census after the process was postponed twice: the first was from 4th December 2020 to 19th April 2021 and later to 4th May 2021. NEW observed that the disagreement associated with the declaration and the processes leading to the midterm census led to a physical standoff among MPs when the instruments were laid in parliament and a subsequent boycott of the main opposition, the APC party. NEW observed that while the census had a legal basis in the Census Act of 2002, mobilizing diverse interests for national ownership and consensus building was lacking. In the final analysis, NEW noted that the outcome of the midterm census did not reflect the actual population dynamics of the country. For instance, the Western Area Urban, which had a population of 1,055,964 in the 2015 census, dropped to 606,701, representing a 43%

drop. This is especially striking, given the accepted fact that Freetown continues to see an influx of new settlements almost daily. When the figures of the midterm census (606,701) are compared to the voter registration of the western area – urban for both 2017 (606,939) and 2022 (598,022), it is still inconceivable that the population of the western area is almost the same as the number of registrants (18 and above) in the region for both 2017 and 2022.

#### e. Incidents, Obstructions and Deviations

For the Mid-term Population and Housing census, civil society groups such as NEW, political parties and international organizations questioned the timeliness of the implementation. They noted that a Mid-term Population census was unprecedented in Sierra Leone. In addition, opposition political parties called on their supporters to boycott the census, which led to the arrest of prominent opposition figures. Also, the World Bank in a letter to the Sierra Leone Ministry of Finance, the World Bank informed the government of Sierra Leone about its withdrawal of funding for the Mid-term Population and Housing Census, noting that “the government has failed to meet the necessary conditions for the funds to be disbursed.”<sup>9</sup> The World Bank had earlier communicated to the government that its funds could only be disbursed upon completing several critical actions, including evaluating the pilot census, the field operation plan for the enumeration, and ensuring enumerators are adequately trained. Among the significant deviations in the process was that the President had proclaimed the midterm census and announced a date for the census before the statutory instruments were laid before parliament. Although the instruments were later developed and laid to parliament, they were done retrospectively, leading to a fight among MPs in the well and the tearing of the said statutory instruments.

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/world-bank-backs-out-funding-sierra-leone-census-2021-12-09/> (Accessed on 2 January, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://sierraloadead.sl/news/apc-rejects-mid-term-census/> (Accessed on 2 January, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://politicosl.com/articles/new-calls-cancellation-sierra-leone-census-data> (Accessed on 2 January, 2024).

<sup>9</sup> See the letter provided to the ECSL by the World Bank on the census.

### 4.3. Boundary Delimitation

#### a. Legal Framework

In a press release dated 2nd August 2022, the ECSL announced that it will conduct a Boundary Delimitation for the 2023 elections, pursuant to section 38 of the 1991 constitution of Sierra Leone (Act No. 6 of 1991) and other provisions such as the Constitutional Instruments (Amendment No.2 of 2008); the Wards (Boundary Delimitation) Regulation 2008; the Public Elections Act 2012; the Local Government Act 2004; the provinces (Amendment) Act 2017 and the Eight Establishment Orders 2017. The ECSL established a Boundary Delimitation Technical Committee with defined Terms of Reference (ToRs). In the press release, ECSL committed to collaborating with Statistics-Sierra Leone for technical and operational assistance by providing population statistics data and expertise for the BD process. In addition to collaborating with Statistics- Sierra Leone, ECSL committed to organizing nation-wide engagement during the Boundary Delimitation (BD) process, leading to the development of a Ward Boundary Delimitation Report to parliament for approval, as provided for in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. Clearly, the ECSL drew the legal basis for the BD process from the 1991 constitution and other supportive legal statutes. While noting that ECSL's 2020-2024 Strategic Plan made no provision for BD, there were provisions for externalities and changes in the context of this nature.

#### b. Observation Approach, Activities and Strategies

Following a press release from the ECSL update provided at the PPCL meeting, NEW was informed that the Commission was planning a BD process and had undertaken initial activities, including setting up a BD committee. However, the planned BD process was halted by the Commission through a press statement dated 21st

October 2022, which stated that following the directive from the President that the 2023 election will be conducted using the District Block PR system. NEW could not ascertain the stage at which the BD was, before it was halted. NEW did not observe the initial stage of the BD process.

#### c. Conduct of the Exercise, Adherence to the Law, Good Practice and Principles

Unlike the 2017 BD exercise, the 2022 boundary delimitation lacked inclusive participation, transparency and accountability. The 2017 BD exercise had active citizens' engagements in the process, with setting up a boundary delimitation monitoring committee at the national and district level, with representation from election stakeholders, democratic institutions, and civil society, and with the public informed at each stage. Additionally, in 2017, NEW was allowed to undertake a parallel boundary delimitation exercise utilizing the expertise of Statistics- Sierra Leone and provided with the data sheets used by the Electoral Commission. The outcome of the Parallel BD undertaken by NEW and that done by the commission had similar results. Such participatory and collaborative processes enabled the public to accept the outcome. The decision to use the District Block PR system and subsequently halting the BD process in the 2023 elections was not inclusive, participatory, transparent, and consultative, making the entire process divisive, controversial and lacking national ownership.

#### d. Incidents, Obstructions and Deviations

NEW notes that while Section 38(4) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone provides that boundaries shall last for a minimum of five years and a maximum of seven, the practice since 2007 has been that boundaries serve two electoral cycles following the 10 years in the conduct of Population and Housing Census.<sup>10</sup> In addition, NEW also notes that while the Commission made

<sup>10</sup> For instance, the 2004 Housing and Population Census was used to determine the boundaries in 2007, which were used in the 2012 elections. Subsequently, the 2015 census was the basis for the 2017 boundaries used in the 2018 elections, with the expectation that the 2023 elections will be conducted using the BD of 2017.

provision to respond to contextual externalities (such as the outcomes of the midterm census), there was no activity related to boundary delimitation in the ECSL's strategic plan. Due to the contestation among political parties and the public on the 2015 and 2021 midterm population and housing censuses, the Electoral Commission unprecedentedly used the mean of both data to determine the allocation of seats per district and council.

#### **4.4 Voter Registration, Exhibition of Provisional Voters Register and Voter Cards Distribution Exhibition**

##### **a. The Legal Framework**

The ECSL, under Section 33 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone (Act No.6 of 1991) and Section 24 of the Public Election Act 2012 (Act No.4 of 2012), conducted Voter Registration for June 24 2023, general elections from 3rd September to 4th October 2022. In this same section, subsection 1 states that Voter Registration should span 15 days. The ECSL, in compliance with this section, conducted the Voter Registration in two phases, dividing the total number of 3,630 registration centres established and conducting the first phase of the registration in 1,815 centres from 3rd to 17th September 2022. The second phase of voter registration was conducted in the remaining 1,815 centres from 20th September to 4th October 2022. Due to challenges in the first phase of the registration of voters, the Commission under Section 169 (The Electoral Commission may, where the circumstances so require, by order, enlarge or reduce the time as specified in this act for the giving of notice or the doing of an act or thing) of the PEA 2022 (Act No.17 2022) extended Voter Registration exercise for two days from 7th to 8th October 2022, to address the challenges encountered in the first phase.

##### **b. Observation Approach, Activities and Strategies**

NEW observed the entire Voter Registration process undertaken by the ECSL, including data capture, adjudication, and exhibition of

Provisional Voter List (PVL) inquiry, in which NEW Conducted a Voter Register Assessment (VRA) and distributed voter cards. The following strategy informed NEW's observation approach:

##### **I. Voter Registration**

A credible voter register is a critical step in the conduct of transparent, inclusive, and credible elections. This can best be achieved when citizens observe the voter registration process to ensure all eligible voters are captured in the voter register, and those not supposed to be in the register are eliminated. NEW observed the voter registration process ahead of the June 2023 general elections. This was done through an observation methodology that ensures that observers are deployed in at least 10% (363) of the 3,630 Registration Centres of the ECSL's Voter Registration (VR) Exercise held from 3rd September to 4th October 2022. A total of 363 observers and 44 Supervisors were recruited, trained and deployed, and they observed the two (2) phases of the VR exercise. A total of 182 observers and 22 supervisors were deployed and observed the first and last days of the 1st phase of the VR, constituting 50% of the total 363 centres observed by NEW. The remaining 50% of 182 observers and 22 Supervisors were deployed and observed the first and last days of the 2nd phase of the VR. NEW released three (3) Press Statements on the Voter Registration Exercise. The first two statements consisting of findings were issued on the first and last days of the first phase of the exercise, and the third on the last day of the second phase, delivering on the outputs of the VR exercise.

Following the completion of the registration process, the support provided by the EU enabled NEW to conduct a Voter Registration Assessment (VRA) across the country. NEW assessed the validity and authenticity of the published voter register. To do so, NEW held a training of trainers (ToT) workshop for ten persons drawn from the Strategic Management Committee on 21st November 2022 at the Coalition's Secretariat in Freetown. The trainers trained 180

surveyors/enumerators and 36 supervisors on 24th November 2022 at five regional clusters. The enumerators were deployed to the constituencies to undertake the Voter Registration Assessment during the Voter Register Exhibition for three days out of the five days slated for the exercise. In all, 7,200 eligible voters were interviewed in all 132 constituencies. The Kobo Collect tool captured data from the surveyors in real-time. The data collection tools were programmed into the Kobo collect platform, and surveyors had them uploaded to data-capturing devices for real-time reporting.

a. Conduct of the Exercise, Adherence to the Law, Good Practice and Principles

The Voter Registration Exercise

According to the PEA 2022, the VR period was slated for 15 days, and it started on schedule and was done in two phases; the first phase was from the 3rd to 17th September 2022, and the second phase was from 20th September to 4th October 2022. As a result of the challenges relating to equipment malfunctioning and the system not capturing first-time voters, the registration process was extended for two days for phase one, from the 7th to the 8th of October 2022.

On the first day of the exercise, NEW observed enthusiastic registrants who came out to the centres in their numbers. The VVK and VIU kits used for the registration and data capture were mostly functional in all Registration Centres observed. The exercise was mostly manned by young people and was gender-inclusive. Some Phase One Centres did not open on Day One of the Voter Registration Exercise, primarily due to late deployment of Registration Materials. In five districts (Karene, Kambia, Port Loko, Pujehun and Kenema), Registration Materials arrived at the district headquarters towns on the eve (2nd September) of the Registration exercise. They were required to be distributed further to the Registration Centres in the localities. This posed challenges for Registration Centres to open on time. In Karene, the vehicle distributing the materials to the

centres within the district got stuck in the mud, further delaying the distribution of materials to some centres. In six districts, materials arrived in the early hours of the first day of Registration (3rd September) when materials were supposed to have already been in the Centres. This was evident in Bo, Moyamba, Kono, Bombali, Falaba, and Bonthe Island. In Bonthe Mainland, the situation became compounded when the main bridge at Bumpeh linking the district got broken, and an alternative route had to be taken.

In Tonkolili, the first batch of materials was delivered on September 2nd 2022, and the second batch was delivered on September 3rd 2022. In Koinadugu, whilst materials arrived as early as September 1st, deployment to centres in far-off localities was delayed. Therefore, centres accounting for up to 70 miles from Kabala, i.e. St. Ballia and Mange, did not open on the first day due to distribution delays.

Of the 473 centres observed, 4 % of VVK and 3.4 % of VIU kits were faulty. In centres where the kits malfunctioned, registrants waited long hours in queues. The VIU 820 kit, which is to capture new registrants, was either not available or not functioning.

There were a few instances where the biometric features of registrants, especially the aged, farmers and fishermen, could not be captured by the device. Additionally, NEW observed that the registration staff did not follow a uniform procedure to address this challenge. NEW noted the high turnout of the aged to register and said that they were given preference to register.

NEW observed instances where First Time Voters (FTVs) data could not be captured on the initial days of the registration process until the system was re-programmed to enable their registration. Centres were not easily accessible by PWDs; others were relocated with no signage to show the new location of the Centre. This was the case for Registration Centre Code 4154, Kay Street Junction in Makeni; this Centre was relocated to Mansaray Street with no indication to show

where the relocated centre was. In other cases, centres were unsuitably located making it difficult for registrants to access. For example, Centre Code 6050, FAWE Vocational Institute Kabala, was located on top of a hill, making accessibility difficult for the aged and PWDs on wheelchairs. In addition, Centre Code 4055 Baptist Primary School, Makeni, was located in a narrow stairway, with limited space to accommodate the registration exercise. NEW noted that three Local Councils (Kenema, Bo and Port Loko) declared lockdowns in their localities, including school children, traders and office workers, to maximize voter registration turnout. Several registrants spotted errors in their details, especially their names, for which the procedures do not permit corrections by the ECSL. Some registrants in this category opted for fresh registration instead.

NEW also observed incidents where names of registrants carrying the NCRA Slip were not found in the VVK and, in some cases, were asked to re-register as new applicants. Electricity to charge the equipment was a challenge, and there were instances where the exercise had to be put on hold to recharge the devices. Solar-powered generators can only retain power for a limited period. In some instances, the ECSL staff had to pay to charge for the solar-powered generator at mobile company towers. NEW observed community intervention to salvage the power challenge with generators and extension cables from their homes. However, it steered undue tension among political party stalwarts who argued over whose fuel or generator should be accepted by the ECSL.

**In addition, NEW observed the following:**

Technical challenges with the electronic equipment for data capture; lack of uniformity in the application of the rules in some centres, ECSL staff insisting on citizens having the NCRA registration slip, while in others, the focus was on other forms of identification such as a passport or birth certificate. NEW also observed an indiscriminate application of the provision of citizens' certification by local authorities in the absence of documentary proof of

identification. For example, the ECSL staff sometimes countered the certification of traditional rulers and community elders. However, this was not the case in the Western Area, and it was difficult for citizens to access birth certificates. NEW equally observed that there were multiple forms of birth certificates that are legitimate in the country and falsified birth certificates were also presented by some people. ECSL staff, in some instances, were unable to decipher the authenticity of the documents, leading to the non-registration of specific individuals.

Campaigning within and in the immediate vicinities of registration centres by political party stalwarts in the guise of Voter Registration Education was experienced. There were instances where political party functionaries kept trooping into some Registration Centres and, in certain cases, usurped ECSL's role by giving instructions, directing and interrogating registrants. There were also situations whereby political party functionaries ferried registrants to the centres and demanded they should be given priority to register. All of these issues obstructed the registration process.

In Constituency 060 Ward 200 Centre 08091, Children's Welfare Primary School Fonkoya, and Ward 201 Centre 08100 Movement of Faith Primary School, Kaniya, three party agents from the APC were arrested by the security of the Ambassador of Sierra Leone to Guinea, who is also the SLPP District Chairman for Kambia, and handed over to the Kambia Police. These three-party agents have been released through the intervention of human rights activists in Kambia.

NEW also observed that some political party stalwarts are campaigning in the guise of Voter Registration Education. This is in breach of the Public Elections Act of 2012, which forbids campaigning before the ECSL officially declares the Campaign period. In addition, the warning of the PPRC chair re-echoed in the PPRC News brief of 30th August was being violated.

**II. Exhibition of Provisional Voter List**

a. Conduct of the Exercise, Adherence to the Law, Good Practice and Principles

The Exhibition of Provisional Voter List (PVL) was on 24th to 28th November 2022. As earlier mentioned, NEW deployed a VRA strategy to observe this exercise. The journal, which is a hard copy of the PVL, was available in all centres and helped registrants verify their details even where they could not find their names displayed.

b. Incidents, Obstructions and Deviations

Key observations from this exercise on the first and second days were as follows: The PVL was not displayed in every centre; registrants, however, verified their details through the journal on the first day; there were also no photos for new registrants; there were centres where NEW observed the registers displayed on the bare floor; in other centres, the register was not reflective of what was in the journal; and some centres had an incomplete list of registrants with ECSL promising to deliver the full PVL the following day.

It was also observed that data was missing in several centres visited across the country. For instance, In Port Loko, 365 data were missing in 11 centres; in Falaba, centre code 5033, out of 668 registrants captured, only 38 names were displayed; in Bo, Centre code 11084, out of 1,374 registrants, only 579 names on the PVL were displayed; in Moyamba, 1, 252 registrants in five centres were not found; in Kailahun 590 registrants' data were misplaced in 6 centres including the details of the NEW District Coordinator in Kailahun. In Tonkolili, there were missing data; in Pujehun, 282 data were missing in two centres; in Bonthe Island, 595 data were missing from seven centres; in Koinadugu, 629 data were missing in four centres, including the name of the Paramount Chief; and in this same centre, most surnames that start with M, S, and T on to Z were missing. Several centres visited reported the omission of registrants' details on the PVL. For example, middle name, father's or mother's name, and village name or address. NEW observers in Bonthe Mainland, Tonkolili,

Western Area reported this. Inclusion forms that were supposed to capture registrants' omitted details were unavailable in most centres visited on the first and second days. Inclusion forms were made available in some centres two days after the exercise. In other centres, even on the third day, no inclusion form was available; for instance, in Western Urban, there were 12 inclusion cases in five centres, but those centres were without inclusion forms. However, correction forms to rectify misspelt names and other details were available in all centres visited. Generally, the awareness level of the exercise was low, with low turnouts and no political party agents present in all centres observed by NEW.

NEW communicated the findings to ECSL and other key stakeholders, such as the NCRA, for remedial actions during this exercise.

### III. Distribution of Voter Cards

a. Conduct of the Exercise, Adherence to the Law, Good Practice and Principles

The ECSL distributed Voter Registration Cards (VRC) across the country from 7th to 16th April 2023, after an initial postponement from 17th March 2023. Despite the delay, the public welcomed the distribution with enthusiasm.

ECSL's staff were present in all centres, with a balance of male and female officials; the APC party deployed in 53.61% of the distribution centres, SLPP deployed in 52.67% of centres, and other political parties were deployed in 3.76% of centres observed. ECSL officials enforced the rules by not allowing party agents without accreditations to access the VRC distribution Centres. Citizens voluntarily assisted ECSL in maintaining order at distribution centres.

b. Incidents, Obstructions and Deviations

There were nationwide concerns over the poor quality of the cards, especially the quality and visibility of some photos on the voter cards, with concerns that it might affect voter identification. Key observations from



319 centres NEW visited are as follows: The SLP were deployed in 25% of the centres observed, and the centres with huge turnout had limited security presence.

NEW observed 0.04% mismatch cases of registrants' details, 0.12% of no Photo Cases and 0.11% of registrants whose details were completely missing on the register. There were nationwide concerns over the poor quality of the voter cards, and NEW noted that the procurement process for the voter cards was shrouded in secrecy.

## 4.5. The Electoral System

### a. Legal Framework

The President on the 21st October 2022, under Section 38(A) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone (Act No. 6 of 1991) as amended in 2001, referencing Sub-Section 3 of Section 38 "The President may, after consultation with the Electoral Commission, direct that such election shall be conducted based on the existing districts in a manner to be known as the District Block Representation system instead of constituencies", directed that the June 2023 Parliamentary and Local Council Elections be conducted based on the District Block Proportional Representative system. This directive was considered by the opposition and some public sectors to be unconstitutional, quoting from "38A. (1) Where, under any law for the time being in force, a date for a general election of Members of Parliament has been appointed. Still, constituencies have not been established under subsection (3) of section 38 for such an election; the President may, after consultation with the Electoral Commission, direct that such election shall be conducted based on the existing districts in a manner to be known as the district block representation system instead of constituencies". The opposition took the matter to the Supreme Court, and the ruling favoured having the elections conducted in the District Block Proportional Representation system.

### b. Observation Approach, Activities and Strategies

NEW's approach to introducing the PR system in the 2023 elections was one of interrogating the process and embarking on public engagement. On 26th October 2022, in response to a press release announcing that the election will be conducted on the District Block System, NEW expressed disbelief on the timeliness, lack of prior engagement on the citizenry, low knowledge on how the PR works and how it would impact on elections. NEW then through an open letter to the ECSL published the following questions for clarifications:

- Were the political parties and other stakeholders consulted before reaching the decision to halt the Boundary Delimitation exercise and introducing the PR for the 2023 elections?
- What is the legal basis for the change of the electoral system?
- Are the 2017 boundaries (which have a minimum of five and a maximum of seven years) dissolved?
- What informed the dissolution?
- Does the provision of section 38A cover Local Council elections? If not, what law will guide PR for the Local Council elections?
- What data will inform the allocation of parliamentary seats and wards per district?
- How will the proposed PR cater for independent candidates?

Though the open letter was not responded to, at a subsequent PPLC meeting, the Commission explained the questions raised in the open letter. In addition to the open letter, NEW engaged the public through media, NEW on the invitation from the Select Committee on Political and Public Affairs in Parliament, presented its position in an open dialogue on the PR system on November 1st 2022. NEW reiterated questions earlier raised in the open letter to the ECSL and encouraged the Parliamentary Committee to work with other stakeholders to address the concerns noting the implications for the change of an electoral system months to the elections.

### c. Incidents, Obstructions and Deviations

Sierra Leone's default electoral system is the constituency-based First-Past-the-Post (FPTP),<sup>11</sup> in which each constituency returns one elected Member of Parliament (MP). Section 38(1) of the 1991 Constitution states that "Sierra Leone shall be divided into such constituencies to elect the Members of Parliament' as determined, and as prescribed in paragraph (b) of subsection (1) of section 74 of the 1991 Constitution." However, in 1996, as the country prepared for its first multi-party elections in over three decades, the then-military regime<sup>12</sup> Issued a decree for elections to be conducted using a Proportional Representation (PR) system, with the whole country as a multi-member constituency. This was justified by security challenges across the country and the electoral commission's inability to draw the boundaries provided in Sub-Sections 1 and 2 of Section 38 in the 1991 Constitution.

Ahead of the second democratic elections (and the first after the end of the civil), a new clause was introduced under Section 38 called 38(A), which makes provision for elections to be conducted using a district block proportional representation, where a date for a general election of Members of Parliament has been appointed but constituencies have not been established under Subsection (3) of Section 38 for such election. To do so, the President may, after consultation with the Electoral Commission, direct that such an election be conducted based on the existing districts in a manner to be known as the district block representation system instead of constituencies. The PR electoral system is a fallback option when constituencies are not readily available. The President decided to conduct the 2023 elections using a PR system without broad stakeholder consultations, leading to accusations by the opposition, the broader civil society and the Sierra Leonean public of changing the electoral system close to

elections. The validity and legality of the President's directives to the ECSL were challenged in the Supreme Court by the main opposition, APC, for which the Supreme Court ruled ahead of the elections.<sup>13</sup> It remains unclear in the judgment of the Supreme Court and within ECSL if subsequent elections will be conducted using the PR system or the default constituency-based FPTP system.

The ECSL allocated seats per district following a compromise between the 2015 census data and the 2021 Midterm Census data. A mean between the two census data per district was the determinant for the number of seats per district. The formula for allocating seats to each district is provided in the 2022 Regulations.<sup>14</sup> This was due to the long-standing disagreement between the two leading political parties on the two-census data and the delineation of constituency boundaries. During the delineation of the boundaries for the 2018 election, the SLPP rejected the data of the 2015 census, arguing that the data was falsified with artificially increased populations in the districts and regions in the then-ruling APC party strongholds to boost seat allocation, while the population in districts known to be traditionally supportive of the SLPP were reduced. When the SLPP won the 2018 elections, it announced an unprecedented midterm census despite criticism from the opposition and civil society and the withdrawal of donor funding.<sup>15</sup> There was also an outright boycott of the midterm census by the opposition, who argued that the SLPP wanted to gerrymander through population reallocation.<sup>16</sup> When the data from the midterm census indicated, for instance, that the population of Freetown had reduced by over half from that indicated by the 2015 census results, it was not difficult for the opposition and civil society observers to affirm the claim that the midterm census intended to redraw the electoral boundaries of Sierra Leone in favour of the ruling SLPP.

<sup>11</sup>Section 38 (2) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone.

<sup>12</sup>The National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) took power in a military coup in 1992.

<sup>13</sup>See: <https://www.judiciary.gov.sl/?p=1328> (Accessed on 22 December, 2023).

<sup>14</sup>See: <https://sierralii.gov.sl/akn/sl/act/si/2022/14/eng@2022.11.16/source.pdf> (Accessed on 22 December, 2023).

<sup>15</sup>See: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/world-bank-backs-out-funding-sierra-leone-census-2021.12.09/> (Accessed on 2 January, 2024).

<sup>16</sup>See: <https://sierraloade.sl/news/apc-rejects-mid-term-census/> (Accessed on 2 January, 2024).

NEW was among the voices opposed to the midterm census but also called on the Government of Sierra Leone and the ECSL not to use the data generated from that census for boundary delimitation.<sup>17</sup>

Following the Supreme Court's dismissal of the APC's case on the legality of the PR, options for the opposition were limited. The choice was either to boycott the elections or participate in the prevailing situation. Subsequently, the 14 political parties certified by the PPRC to contest the elections and independent candidates (for Parliament and Local Councils) were required to submit candidates that were twice the number of seats to the ECSL for each district, while respecting the provisions of the GEWE Act 2023 and PEA Act of 2022 on the gender quota which requires that for every three nominated candidates, one must be a woman. Based on the population of each district (taking from the mean estimate from the 2015 and 2021 census data), the number of parliamentary seats varied from four in districts such as Koinadugu and Falaba to twelve seats in Bo, thirteen in Kenema and sixteen in the Western Area-Urban. NEW observed that the ECSL merger between the 2015 and 2021 censuses was the best way forward in the prevailing disagreements on the two-census data. With this merger of the two-census data, districts in the APC stronghold either lost a seat or remained the same as the 2016 allocation of seats. However, in the SLPP strongholds, some districts gained as many as three seats, but others remained the same.

The Western Urban district, also deemed a stronghold of the APC party, was the hardest hit, losing nine seats. The use of any one of the two-census data alone would have created an alarming disparity in the allocation of seats to the districts. In addition, NEW also observed that the threshold of 11.9 % to win a seat in each district for parliament and 4.9 % for a local council was determined solely by the ECSL with no stakeholder engagement and input. The formula used by the ECSL for the threshold for Parliament noted the number of districts divided by the

number of seats in Parliament multiplied by one hundred. The same formula was used for the allocation of Local Council seats. By the use of this formula, the argument that the district block proportional system was an opportunity for smaller political parties to gain seats in the Parliament as well as councils was defeated, with only the APC and the SLPP meeting the threshold and therefore a two-party rather than a multi-party parliament and 14 out of 16 districts saw no other party in the councils. Subsequently, the high threshold for winning a parliamentary seat and the late introduction of the PR system, along with poor public awareness, meant that the 6th Parliament of Sierra Leone has limited plural voices, with all ordinarily elected MPs coming from the two leading political parties, the APC and the SLPP with no independent candidate as opposed to the previous Parliament.

## 4.6 Campaign Conduct

### a. Legal Framework

PPRC was established in December 2005 by the Political Parties Act of 2002 (as amended in 2022) and under sections 34 and 35 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. The Commission<sup>18</sup> is responsible for registering and regulating political parties and monitoring their accountability to their members and the electorate of Sierra Leone. It is also responsible for receiving financial statements and reports on the sources of income, audited accounts, assets, and liabilities of each registered political party, and it could take appropriate disciplinary action to ensure compliance. In the enforcement of this authority of the Commission, three political parties, namely the C4C, Unity Party (UP) and Nation Progressive Democrats (NPD), were disqualified from contesting the elections for failure to meet the criteria set by the Commission. As per the provisions of Section 34(1) of the Constitution, the Commission consists of four members appointed by the President. It includes a Chairman of the Commission, who shall be a person who has

<sup>17</sup>See: <https://politicosl.com/articles/new-calls-cancellation-sierra-leone-census-data> (Accessed on 2 January, 2024).

<sup>18</sup> Until the PPA of 2022, the changed its name from registration to regulation, the Commission was known as the Political Parties Registration Commission.

held judicial office or is qualified to be appointed a Judge of the Superior Court of Judicature nominated by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission (JLSC); the Chief Electoral Commissioner of the ECSL, a legal practitioner nominated by the Sierra Leone Bar Association (SLBA); and a member nominated by the Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC).

Under section 154 of the PEA, 2022 (Act No17 of 2022) and after consultations with registered political parties and candidates contesting the June election, the ECSL declared the period for campaigns from Tuesday 23rd May to Thursday 22nd June 2023 (from 7 am to 5 pm each day). This was preceded by PPRC regulations for campaigns published on 12th April 2023, which included Moving in rowdy processions, trading of obscenity and public insults against political opponents; the destruction of campaign materials of political opponents, as a semblance of opposing party supporters, members and sympathizers that are likely to disrupt the campaign party's activities; attacks on persons and properties of political opponents and other members of the public; among others.

#### b. Observation Approach, Activities and Strategies

As part of its 2023 Election Observation Strategy, NEW embarked on LTO of the pre-and post-election environment of the June 24, 2023, Elections. The objectives of this intervention were to:

- Assess the conditions that may impact the inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability of the 2023 electoral process;
- Document all election-related events before and after the June 24, 2023 elections in objectively inform the citizens of Sierra Leone and other interested stakeholders;
- Use the information provided by the NEW LTOs to alert relevant stakeholders and advocate for appropriate interventions.
- Use the observations made by LTOs to advocate for electoral reforms after

the June 24 Elections;

- Capture emerging issues that have the potential to negatively affect the electoral environment and processes and engage the relevant authorities to mitigate those effects;
- Enhance confidence in the electoral process through the highlighting and Commending of the best practices in the run-up to the election;
- Identify and highlight hotspots ahead of Election Day;
- Publicize all election-related developments to deter electoral malpractices and
- To encourage citizen participation in the political processes.

NEW recruited, trained and deployed 34 LTOs, two per district, for 3 months (May-July). The LTOs were recruited from NEW's district structures across the country. Training and deployment of LTOs were conducted on the 3rd and 4th of May 2023 in three locations, i.e. Bo, Makeni and Waterloo. These observers were trained and provided with checklists to collect data on the election's environment noting incidents, the work of EMBs and other election stakeholders. Data collected from these observers will help to map out potential hotspot areas ahead of the June elections. In addition to the LTOs, five Zonal Coordinators (one per region) were recruited, trained and deployed at NEW's Secretariat to support the LTOs in the field. The primary responsibility of the Zonal Coordinators is to coordinate the day-to-day work of the LTOs by collating daily and weekly reports, cross-validating reported incidents and generating a national report. The data capture, transmission, and analysis were done using Apollo software.

#### c. Conduct of the Exercise, Adherence to the Law, Good Practice and Principles

An executive secretary supports the work of the Commission, the administrative head of the Commission, and seven directorates, including Mediation and Programmes, Finance, Human Resources, and Audit. Relative to its counterpart, the ECSL, the PPRC is smaller and, until late 2021, had a

staff of less than 30 with three regional offices plus its headquarters in Freetown. However, following a capacity and systems review done by the Public Sector Reform Unit (PSRU) in 2021, recommendations were made for the creation of seven directors from the heads of departments who used to be officers, the recruitment of 30 new staff, the creation of one additional regional office in the northwestern regional city of Port Loko, and the transformation of the Office of the Registrar to that of an Executive Secretary putting the office at par with its ECSL counterpart. At the time of the elections, PPRC had just over 50 staff, with seven directorates supervised by an Executive Secretary.

At the time of the 2023 elections, the PPRC was fully constituted with all four commissioners in office, including the chair of the Commission appointed in April 2019 following the death of the substantive Chairman in 2016. The opposition mainly criticized the chair's appointment, which described him as a 'Card Carrying Member' of the SLPP and, therefore, not neutral and independent. During his confirmation hearing in Parliament, MPs from the opposition APC party staged a walkout to protest his appointment and confirmation. Following his appointment, one of the first challenges the chair was confronted with was settling the longstanding division within the All-Political Parties Association (APPA) and other affiliate bodies, including the youth and women factions. NEW observed that despite the questions around the neutrality and independence of the Chair of PPRC, the commission has recorded a more favourable public perception of neutrality and engagement across the board, and political parties (despite their ongoing criticisms) consider the PPRC to be much more institutionally firm and fairer.<sup>19</sup>

NEW observed that on several occasions during the electoral cycle, the PPRC has been firm in implementing its policies and

decision-making process across the board, regardless of the offender. In February 2023, for instance, following a clash of supporters of the APC and SLPP in Calaba Town, in the east of the capital city, Freetown, the PPRC concluded after its investigation that it was supporters of the SLPP that provoked the incident when they made inciting remarks against the APC supporters who were waiting to welcome the motorcade of their newly elected presidential candidate who was travelling from Makeni to Freetown. In a press statement, the PPRC sternly warned the ruling party to desist from such provocative acts or face the total penalty of the law.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, after the election of their party standard bearer, the main opposition APC party celebrated and sang provocative songs against the ruling SLPP party, especially the First Lady of Sierra Leone. The Commission warned the APC party sternly to desist from such provocative actions. On another occasion the PPRC, pursuant to Section 39(2)(b) of the Political Parties Act 2022, find the main opposition APC, the sum of NLE 120,000/00 (One Hundred and Twenty Thousand new Leones) payable into the Consolidated Fund, within two weeks from date herein and furnish the Commission with evidence of such payment, for contravening of Section 39(1)(c&d) of the Political Parties Act 2022, adding that persistent infringement of that provision of the Act by his Party is not only a breach of the law but also borders on the peace and social cohesion of the state.<sup>21</sup> Section 39(2)(b) of the Political Parties Act 2022 gives power to the Commission, in contravention of this provision, to warn after the first offence, fine on a second offence, suspend on the third offence and deregister if the party continues to violate the provision.

In addition to the stern position of the PPRC on issues of campaign violations, some of the major successes of the PPRC include the mediation of the impasse within the main

<sup>19</sup> See: Press Release by the PPRC dated <sup>23</sup> February <sup>2023</sup>, titled "Alleged Physical Attacks on Members/Supporters of The All Peoples Congress Party Including its National Secretary General by Security Personnel".

<sup>20</sup> See: <https://sierraloadead.sl/news/pprc-warns-slpp/> (Accessed on <sup>27</sup> December, <sup>2023</sup>).

<sup>21</sup> See: <https://thecalabashnewspaper.com/for-violation-of-its-act-pprc-fines-apc-le120m-warns-apc-slpp/> (Accessed on <sup>27</sup> December, <sup>2023</sup>). Reference PPRC press statement instead

opposition APC, including dealing with petitions from its members on its lower-level elections, observation of the lower level and national delegate conferences for all political parties and the enactment of the 2022 PPA which provided additional powers to the PPRC for broader political party regulation, including political parties and candidate campaign financing. Regardless of this progress, NEW observed the criticisms of PPRC by mostly opposition parties in its fairness in adjudicating inter and intra-party disputes and the decision to certify 14 out of the 17 registered political parties to contest the June 2023 elections.

#### **4.7. Civic and Voter Education**

LTOs observed voter education efforts during May, most commonly led by ECSL, CSOs and political parties. Before 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 often led by ECSL, CSOs and political parties, followed by women's and youth groups and, to a lesser extent, faith-based organizations. 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. Meanwhile, 20 observers in 13 districts noted that political parties were also organizing such activities.

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

##### **i. Campaigns**

A total of 27 LTOs in 10 districts reported no incidents of physical violence, intimidation, or harassment. This trend continued during the

first week of the campaign.

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 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.

##### **ii. 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 May.

##### **iii. 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. A total of 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.

##### **iv. Distribution of money and other form of inducements to supporters**

At 44 % of campaign events observed, LTOs reported no distribution of goods or money to supporters.

##### **v. 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 at 8%. Approximately 89% of campaign events occurred at

designated locations, while 11% ended up as street rallies.

### **a. Incidents, Obstructions and Deviations**

NEW noted the use of hate speech, harassment, intimidation, online bullying, the proliferation of inflammatory audios on WhatsApp and Facebook, unregulated media shows and other forms of physical violence as key features spanning the electoral cycle.

#### **i. Use of Hate speech**

During May, 14 LTOs across nine 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, five observers reported instances of hate speech focused on regional politics, while 10 observers reported the use of hate speech focused on ethnic identity or tribalism.

#### **ii. Physical Violence, Intimidation, or Harassment**

Before the campaigns, seven LTOs in six districts reported nine 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 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 May, 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 vandalized. Senior members of the SLPP arrived on the scene with armed police.

#### **iii. Destruction of Election Campaign Materials and Property**

While NEW acknowledges that destruction of campaign materials has been widespread throughout the country, during May, LTOs reported eight incidents of destruction of campaign materials in seven districts. For example, in Blama Town, Kenema district, 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 unknown people tore an SLPP presidential candidate's banner, and their supporters retaliated by destroying the banners for the APC presidential candidate. The SLP and the military intervened, using tear gas and made arrests of perpetrators to cool down the situation. Curfew was passed later in the day till the morning of 24th May 2023. On 30th May in Kono district, Sandamanda area, Koidu City, unknown persons set the house of former APC cabinet minister Diana Konomani ablaze. In Western Area Urban, one of the vehicles of the APC Mayoral Candidate, Yvonne Aki Sawyer, was forcefully taken away and allegedly vandalized by a man called "Arata." The arrest was made, and the vehicle was later released to Aki-Sawyer. The perpetrator was also allegedly released.

#### **iv. Distribution of Goods or Money to Supporters & Presence of Individuals who appeared to be under the Influence of Drugs**

At 56% of events, multiple goods and/or cash types were distributed. Foodstuffs were

distributed at 40% of events, clothing at 38%, cash at 16%, and other items at 3%. At 88% of events observed, LTOs reported that no individuals appeared to be under the influence of drugs.

#### **v. 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.

### **4.8 Early Voting**

#### **a. Legal Framework**

Under section 33 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 (Act No. 6 of 1991) and sections 7, 42 and 171 of the PEA 2022 (Act No. 17 of 2022) and the Public Elections (Early Voting) regulation, 2023 (No.3 of 2023), the ECSL informed the public that Early Voting will be conducted for Presidential elections on 15th June 2023, starting from 7 am to 5 am. The elections were conducted for Muslim pilgrims who were registered voters to exercise their Franchise before leaving for the holy land of Mecca.

#### **b. Observation Approach, Activities and Strategies**

NEW used its existing LTO structures to observe the Early Voting in its various districts. A total of 34 observers were deployed, and NEW's 17 district coordinators supervised the LTO on E-Day. In addition to the supervisors, five Zonal Coordinators based in the Secretariat supported collecting and collating data from the field.

#### **c. Conduct of the Exercise, Adherence to the Law, Good Practice and Principles**

NEW acknowledged that discussions on early voting for pilgrims were done at various stakeholder meetings with civil society, political parties, and other international organizations and that polls would only be limited to the presidential election.

#### **d. Incidents, Obstructions and deviations**

NEW raised concerns on the following issues:

- **Late Notification about the Early Voting:** Information on the date for the early voting was communicated at a PPLC meeting held in Freetown on 14th June 2023, less than 24 hours before the commencement of polls on 15th June 2023. It was followed by a press statement released to the public on the 14th of June, although it was dated 13th June 2023. Findings from our observers indicated that some voters were turned away because their names were not on the Voters' List. This was mainly due to the lack of engagement with the pilgrims on the details and processes of the Early Voting by the ECSL, which, as a result, led to low voter turnout.
- **Non-Clarity on the Early Voter List:** Section 4 of the Public Election (Early Voting) Regulations 2023 provides for an early voter list. NEW observed that the list was not exhibited and that the number of early voting voters disaggregated by district was not available. Best practice dictates that all voter lists should be made public before an election. On 15 June 2023, NEW issued a press release indicating that discussions on early voting for pilgrims were done at various stakeholder meetings with civil society, political parties, and other international organizations. Early polling would only be limited to the presidential election. However, NEW was concerned about the late notification of the Early Voting Information. The date for the early voting was communicated at a PPLC meeting held in Freetown on 14th June 2023, less than 24 hours before the commencement of polls on 5th June 2023. It was followed by a press statement by the ECSL dated 13th June 2023. Findings from NEW's observers indicated that some voters were turned away because their names were not on the Voters' List. Additionally, non-clarity on the Early Voter List Section 4 of the Public Election (Early Voting) Regulations of



- 2023 provided for an early voters list. NEW observed that early voter lists were not exhibited, and the number of voters for early voting disaggregated by district was unavailable. Best practice dictates that all voters' lists should be made public before an election.
- **Lack of transparency around the procurement and printing of ballot papers:** The ECSL confirmed that ballot papers for early voting were printed in Sierra Leone. They had earlier informed a PPLC meeting that ballot papers printed in South Africa would arrive in Sierra Leone on Saturday, 17th June 2023. This means that ballot papers for the June 2023 elections were printed in two different countries and potentially by two different companies. NEW was thus concerned about the protection, custody, verifiability, transparency and accountability around producing ballot papers printed in two countries for the same elections.

To address the concerns, NEW recommended the following:

- ECSL make available information for public consumption on the service provider that printed the ballot papers for the early voting in Sierra Leone and how many were printed for the voting exercise.
- There should be consistency in managing all electoral processes to increase trust and public confidence.
- ECSL should ensure timely information for every stage of the electoral process to allow adequate preparation by election stakeholders and effective participation.
- The ECSL should fully comply with all legal provisions related to early voting.

It was expected that the ECSL would take the right steps to address the concerns, which eventually turned out not to be the case.

## **4.9. PCMP Elections**

### **a. Legal Framework**

Under sections 33, 72 and 74 (1) (a) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 (Act No. 6 of 1991) and pursuant to sections 98 to 101 of the PEA 2022 (Act No. 17 2022), the ECSL published date for the nomination and polling day for the Paramount Chief Member of Parliament (PCMP).

### **b. Observation Approach, Activities and Strategies**

NEW deployed 45 observers in the five election locations and five supervisors who monitored the stationed observers. NEW used its deployed LTOs in the field to observe the PCMP elections at the various chieftdom headquarters towns where polls were conducted. LTOs were provided with checklists to capture findings from the field on E-Day. The district coordinators, who served as supervisors and roving teams, monitored the stationed observers across centres.

### **c. Conduct of the Exercise, Adherence to the Law, Good Practice and Principles**

The Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) conducted Paramount Chieftaincy Elections on 20th May 2023 in five districts, i.e. Pujehun, Bonthe, Bombali, Falaba and Kambia. NEW observed the nomination of candidates from 30th March to 1st April 2023. Nominations were conducted for the 14 districts across the country; nine districts went unopposed, and five contested the elections. The PCMP elections were largely with a high voter turnout in almost all the districts

### **d. Incidents, Obstructions and deviations**

The PCMP election went on as planned except for Bombali Shebora Chieftdom, which was postponed to the 22nd May 2023 due to an incorrect Voter List supplied on 20th May.

#### **4.10. Voting Day: Counting and Announcement of Results**

This section of the report presents all election observation findings by the NEW. It collates all findings released for Election Day (E-Day) on the 24th of June, 2023, in Sierra Leone.

##### **a. Legal Framework**

Under section 33, 42(2)(e) and 38A (as amended) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 (Act No.6 of 1991) and according to section 7 and 68 (1) of the PEA 2022 (Act No.17 2022), the ECSL conducted Presidential election on June 24th 2023. Under section 38A of the 1991 Constitution (as amended), pursuant to section 92 of the PEA 2022, the ECSL declared the number of seats won by political parties for Members of Parliament.

##### **b. Observation Approach, Activities and Strategies**

NEW's Election Observation Strategy provided a strategic guiding framework and methodological approach on how the coalition should observe the June 24th 2023, elections in Sierra Leone.

NEW's vision was to see a governance and electoral context in which the outcome of all elections reflected the actual will of the voters. As a civil society election observation coalition, NEW's mandate is to observe and report accurately and independently on elections and electoral processes while advocating for electoral legal reforms consistent with international best practices.

To fulfil our vision and mission, NEW observed and reported on all stages of Election Day (E-Day). A significant component of NEW's methodology in the 2023 elections was deployment to 100% polling centres nationwide. A 100% deployment to centres meant at least one observer per polling centre across the 3,360 centres across Sierra Leone. Essentially, NEW observers covered 50% of the polling stations nationwide. Approximately 6,000 observers were deployed nationwide. This approach was implemented through the following interventions:

**Incident Reporters:** NEW recruited, trained and deployed incident reporting observers on E-Day. The incident reporting mechanism involved moving information on incidents from all polling stations observed to the Citizens Situation Room (CSR). The information was verified by the 23 district-level incident reporters and directed to the relevant authorities for their intervention by the national-level incident reporters. This was to ensure that such incidents do not adversely affect the outcome of the elections.

**Tally Centre Observers:** NEW trained and deployed two observers each in all Regional Tally Centers and at the national level.

**Communication, Coordination and Monitoring:** The secretariat team and Strategic Committee members (SMC) coordinated the coalition's work in Freetown through the CSR located at New Brook Fields Hotel. NEW updated the public through regular press statements and conferences before and after the elections. NEW also collaborated with other Election Observer Missions (EOMs) and was supported by a network of partners, including International IDEA and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

The communication component constituted the following;

- NEW Observers trained to collect SMS data from polling stations.
- Generate Statistical and Analytical data for NEW Electoral Final Report on elections observation activities

As previously indicated above, NEW's established Citizen's Situation Room (CSR) at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown served as the nerve Centre of its observation efforts and attracted over 1,000 visitors from local institutions and international organizations. All PRVT information from the field was received by the CSR and collated for easy analysis supported with empirical evidence. NEW issued regular public statements through press releases that informed the coalition's election analysis.



## 5. NEW'S PRVT Methodology

For Sierra Leone's 24 June 2023 elections, NEW employed the PRVT, an advanced and proven election monitoring methodology that allowed the coalition to independently and impartially assess the quality of voting and counting on election day and the accuracy of official results of the presidential elections announced by the ECSL.

The PRVT methodology is routinely used by citizen election observation organizations worldwide. More than 35 PRVTs have been conducted for national elections in 10 African countries, including recent elections in Nigeria (2023), Kenya (2022), and Côte d'Ivoire (2020). This is not the first PRVT in Sierra Leone; NEW has employed the exact same methodology in 2007 and 2012 and for both the first and second round of Presidential elections in 2018.

### 5.1. PRVT Methodology for the 2023 Elections

For the 2023 elections, NEW trained and deployed 6,000 observers nationwide, covering every polling centre. Of these observers, 750 were specially trained and deployed to a statistically representative sample of polling stations across all five

regions and 16 districts in Sierra Leone using the PRVT methodology.

The PRVT methodology involved deploying observers to a random, statistically representative sample of polling stations. On election day, PRVT observers stayed at their polling stations all day, observing the setup and opening, voting, counting, and closing processes. Throughout the day, they transmitted their observations on the process at the end of the day, the official results for their assigned polling station, as documented on the RRF.

Because observers are deployed to a statistically representative sample of polling stations, the PRVT provides independent and impartial projections of the official results. While only the ECSL declares the outcome of elections, the PRVT is based on the official results as announced by ECSL polling officials. If the official results are consistent with the PRVT projections, as they were for both the first and second rounds of the presidential election in 2018, then it gives greater confidence that the results, as announced by the ECSL, reflect the ballots cast at polling stations. However, when the

official results are inconsistent with the PRVT projections, as for the 2023 presidential election, it provides evidence that the results do not reflect the votes cast at polling stations.

### **5.1.1. Representative Sample**

For 2023, the PRVT employed a statistically representative random sample of 750 polling stations with 213,164 registered voters. The size of the PRVT sample was determined to ensure that it included sampled polling stations in all five regions and all 16 districts of the country. The sample size is similar to those used for PRVTs in other African countries. It is larger than the sample size for the PRVTs for the presidential elections 2018 that verified the outcomes of those elections.

In 2018, the PRVT sample size was 506 polling stations, while in 2023, it was increased to 750 to provide additional precision and confidence. NEW increased the sample size for 2023 to reduce the margin of error for PRVT projections. Increasing the sample size for a PRVT from 1500 to 2000 or 1000 to 6000 would not have a significant impact on the margin of error and may render rigorous observer recruitment, training and data verification challenging. However, increasing the sample size from 506 to 750 kept a reasonable number of observers while allowing for increased precision in PRVT projections.

The quality of PRVT projection does not depend on the percentage of polling stations covered but on how the sample is drawn. Polling stations must be drawn randomly, and the sample must be geographically representative. NEW's sample adhered to both of these requirements.

NEW drew its representative sample of 750 polling stations using interval sampling, a form of random statistical sampling. To ensure geographical representativeness, the PRVT sample was drawn using stratification. This means including in the sample of polling stations the same percentage of polling stations for every region and district as the percentage of polling stations in the complete list of 11,832 polling stations. For example, there are a total of 1,106 polling stations in Bo District. These 1,106 polling stations represent 9.3% of all 11,832 polling stations in Sierra Leone. The NEW PRVT sample included 70 polling stations in Bo District, which is 9.3% of the total 750 polling stations in the sample. Since these percentages are approximately equal, the sample does not overrepresent or underrepresent Bo district in terms of assessing the quality of election day processes and projecting the results. As Table 1 below shows, for every district, the percentage of sampled polling stations closely matches the percentage of total polling stations, and therefore, the sample is geographically representative.

Districts	Total Polling Stations	% Total PS	Sample PS	% Sample PS	Variance
Bo	1,106	9.3%	70	9.3%	0.0%
Bombali	721	6.1%	46	6.1%	0.0%
Bonthe	884	3.2%	25	3.3%	0.1%
Falaba	250	2.1%	16	2.1%	0.0%
Kailahun	679	5.7%	43	5.7%	0.0%
Kambia	547	4.6%	35	4.7%	0.1%
Karene	359	3.0%	23	3.1%	0.1%
Kenema	1,127	9.5%	71	9.5%	0.0%
Koinadugu	309	2.6%	19	2.5%	-0.1%
Kono	616	5.2%	39	5.2%	0.0%
Moyamba	537	4.5%	34	4.5%	0.0%
Port Loko	836	7.1%	53	7.1%	0.0%
Pujehun	422	3.6%	26	3.5%	-0.1%
Tonkolili	729	6.2%	46	6.1%	-0.1%
WA – Rural	1,161	9.8%	74	9.9%	0.1%
WA – Urban	2,049	17.3%	130	17.3%	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,832</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>750</b>		

Once the number of polling stations per district was determined using stratification, each district's polling stations were selected randomly to prevent any possible bias.

### 5.1.2. PRVT Observer Recruitment and Training

NEW recruited PRVT observers from its member organizations across the country. Seventeen verification teams drawn from NEW's SMC and individuals from the

coalition's broader civil society member organizations were sent to all districts across the country (Bonthe District divided into Mainland and Island) to physically locate the sample points/polling centres and verify the recruited observers. The verification teams assessed network coverage and accessibility of the sampled polling stations and ensured that recruited PRVT observers were independent and nonpartisan, without any known preference for any political party or candidate, region, ethnic group or person.

Observers were required to reside near the sampled polling station where they observed and needed to know how to read and write in English to understand key election documents and observation tools. A rigorous two-day Training of Trainers workshop was conducted for the PRVT trainers at NEW's Secretariat. Trainers were drawn from the cohort of NEW member organization leaders who made up the verification teams. PRVT observers underwent a rigorous full-day training on the NEW PRVT methodology, ECSL election day procedures, the observation checklist, and NEW's reporting strategy, including how to send reports to the NEW Citizen Situation Room via coded SMS. Before election day, NEW carried out two national simulation exercises to test observers' understanding of the PRVT checklist and NEW's reporting systems. During the first simulation, observers were required to deploy to their assigned polling stations.

### **5.1.3. PRVT Data Collection**

On Election Day, trained PRVT observers deployed to the statistical sample of polling stations, where they examined crucial aspects of voting and counting at assigned locations, reporting on strengths and irregularities that affected the quality of the election. After observing the counting of ballots, PRVT observers also recorded the number of ballots cast and the votes for each candidate in the presidential election as announced by the polling officials and recorded by officials on RRF #1. Of note, PRVT observers reported whether party agents agreed with the official results announced by the polling officials. PRVT observers did not count any ballots. Instead, they observed the process and reported on it and its official results. PRVTs use technology to assess what is happening with the election in near-real time. At specific times during the day, observers sent their observation information to the NEW Situation Room via coded SMS. SMS reports were transmitted via an SMS gateway to a specialized database. NEW then carefully verified the

reported observations, analysed aggregate data, and distilled findings into observation statements, providing accurate characterization of elections and confident verification of official election results. NEW conducted rigorous data verification procedures, using logical checks to identify and correct any inconsistencies in PRVT data submitted via SMS. NEW had three observers who reported data for more than one polling station, failed to report results data, or reported figures that were not possible, so all three were excluded from the results projection, and results projections were announced based on 747 of 750 observers' data. The integrity of the sample was not impacted by excluding these three observers' data, and there is no way that their data could have changed the ultimate finding that no candidate reached the 55% threshold. NEW followed a similar practice in 2018 when the PRVT verified official results for the first and second rounds of presidential elections. This is a common practice for citizen observer groups implementing PRVTs to exclude any data from their results projections that are illogical. As noted above, excluding several sample points does not negatively impact the integrity of the overall sample, and PRVT projections remain accurate.

### **5.1.4. Margin of Error**

The margins of error for the PRVT's projections are the window within which the actual results for all polling stations for the presidential election must fall. The official turnout rate, vote shares for each candidate, or the rate of invalid ballots must fall within the PRVT's margin of error for these results. The margin of error is not a quality measurement and does not indicate the degree of "mistakes" in the data. Instead, it is a technical term used by statisticians to describe a measurement of precision. A smaller margin of error means a more precise estimate. The margin of error is determined by three key factors: the confidence interval, the sample size (750 polling stations), and the degree of homogeneity or variance of the data

received (i.e. the variance in vote shares between candidates or, rather, the differences in voting patterns in sampled polling stations). NEW used a confidence interval of 95%, a standard confidence interval in social science research. A lower confidence interval, such as 90%, would have a smaller margin of error, while a 99% confidence interval would have a larger margin. Even at a 99% confidence interval, the PRVT showed that no candidate would have reached the constitutional threshold of 55% of valid votes cast in the first round of the elections to avoid a runoff.

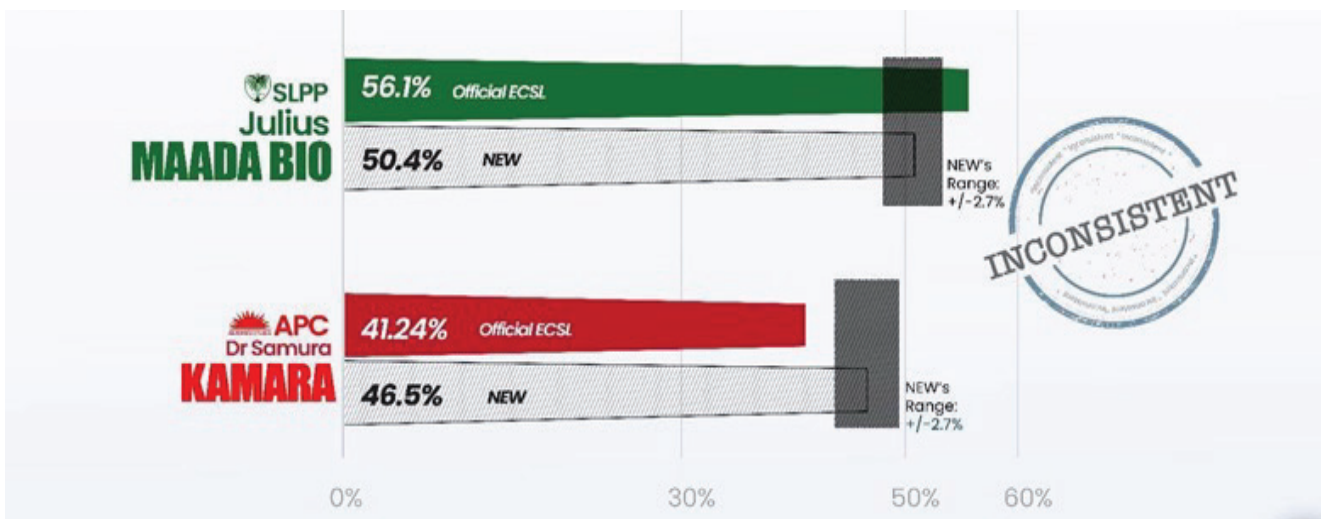
### 5.2. Key PRVT Findings

On the basis of the official results recorded on the RRF for the presidential election (RRF #1) at a statistically representative valid sample of 750 polling stations from across the five regions and 16 districts of Sierra Leone, NEW observed and recorded that the official final presidential results announced by the ECSL are inconsistent with PRVT data. The PRVT data clearly shows that no candidate met the threshold in the first round and that there should be a runoff election between the candidate of the SLPP and that of the APC.

For June 2023 Presidential election, NEW's PRVT data indicates that the official results announced by ECSL are statistically incorrect, mathematically inaccurate and does not reflect the actual votes cast.

**The PRVT concludes that:**

1. Voter turnout was 77.3% with a margin of error of +/- 1.7% (between 75.6% and 79%) while ECSL's official turnout is four percentage points higher than the upper limit of the margin of error at 83.0%.
2. Rejected, or invalid, ballots were 5.1% with a margin of error of +/- 0.6% (between 4.5% and 5.7%).
  - The PRVT's estimate is consistent with past elections. In 2018, the number of rejected ballots for the first round was 5.2%, 4.7% in 2012, and 7.3% in 2007.
  - ECSL's rejected ballot rate of 0.4% represents a significant departure from the trend in Sierra Leonean elections over time.
3. The results announced for the top two candidates are statistically impossible, and no candidate should have met the constitutional threshold of 55% to avoid a runoff.
  - The candidate of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) should receive 50.4 % of the vote with a margin of error of +/-2.7% (between 47.7% and 53.1%) of the vote, while:
    - ECSL's official result is 56.1%, which is three percentage points higher than the upper limit of the PRVT range.
    - The candidate of the APC should receive 46.5% of the vote with a margin of error of +/- 2.7% (between 43.8% and 49.2%), while ECSL's official result is 41.2%, 2.6 percentage points lower than the lower limit of the PRVT range.



### **5.3. PRVT Communication**

Throughout the 2023 electoral cycle, NEW engaged the media, EMBs, Political Parties, other civil society organizations and the public on its observation methodology and findings. NEW launched its 2023 Elections Observation Strategy on 19 May 2023 in a ceremony attended by a wide range of election stakeholders and members of the international community. NEW invited the Chief Election Commissioner to launch the strategy, and the Commissioner for the Eastern Region represented him. Ahead of election day, NEW hosted a breakfast event with media representatives on Friday, 23rd June, to explain and answer questions about

the PRVT and officially launch its PRVT Situation Room.

NEW also held a series of press conferences - on 23rd June to release the pre-election statement, on 24th June to issue the mid-day statement, and on 25th June to issue the preliminary statement - to ensure the timely communication of observation findings with the public. Before, during, and after election day, NEW hosted visitors to its PRVT Situation Room, including representatives from the media, civil society, the diplomatic community, and international election observation missions. All these statements listed in this report can be found on NEW's website.





## 6. Pre-Election Statements

The coalition issued several press statements indicating its observation and initial recommendation on major pre-election and election activities. The content of these press statements is summarized in this section, while the press statements themselves are attached as annexes to this report.

### **a. Pre-Election Statements Issued by NEW on 23rd June 2023**

#### **As Sierra Leone Votes on Saturday, June 24, New Deploys Observers Nationwide**

On the eve of the elections on 23rd June 2023, new published a press statement to inform the public about its preparedness to observe the elections, including the recruitment, training and deployment of observers to over 5,000 polling centres across the country supported by Long-term observers, the deployment of the PRVT methodology and other support mechanisms. It called on citizens to go out peacefully to cast their ballots. It congratulated the PPRC, the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC), for working hard to resolve the standoff between the ECLS and

the main opposition, the APC party. NEW noted the tense of the elections as observed by its long-term observers and called on political parties to exercise restraint and respect the rule of law. It concluded that it observed the arrival at Lungi International Airport and distribution to ECLS district warehouses of sensitive election materials, including ballot papers. It asked the ECLS to continue to make itself available to political parties and members of the public to answer critical questions on the electoral process.

### **b. New Mid-Day Situational Report-24th June 2023**

#### **Election Day Begins with Late Opening of Polling Stations and Missing Materials in Some Areas**

On Election Day, NEW released a press statement on its observation of the opening process of polling stations across the country, noting the late opening of polling stations and missing election materials in some stations. NEW observed 12 critical incident reports across the country, including:

- Late opening of polling centres as a result of incomplete or unavailable sensitive materials;
- Missing data of voters: where names and details of voters with voter cards or slips are not found in the register;
- Unavailability of validation stamps in polling stations
- The police arrested a man for having ballot papers at a polling centre in Makeni.

NEW concluded by calling on the ECSL to respond to centres that have not opened. Equally, it calls on the ESCL to resolve issues of voters with IDs whose names were not on the register. It committed to continuing to observe the voting, closing and counting, and results processes and keeping the public periodically informed on the key observations and findings.

### **C. Preliminary Statement 25th June 2023**

#### **Sierra Leoneans returned to the polls yesterday for the 24th June 2023 presidential, parliamentary and local council elections.**

Following its pre-election and election-day statements, NEW issued a preliminary statement regarding its initial finding of its observation on 25th June 2024, a day after the election. In the statement, NEW noted that despite the tense political environment that preceded voting day and the logistical challenges associated with deployment and voting, with few critical exceptions, the elections were generally peaceful across the country. NEW commends the resilience of the Sierra Leoneans in their determination to participate in electoral processes and exercise their right to vote. Among its key findings on the opening process, NEW noted the following:

- Polling stations were set up to allow both observers and party agents to observe the process.
- In 88% of polling stations, NEW observers reported queues outside their polling stations at 6:30 am. In 75% of polling stations, observers reported that there were no campaign materials present within 400 yards of the 56% of

polling stations had at least 7 polling officials present. 96% had at least one woman polling official. Additionally, in 23% of polling stations the presiding officers were women.

During the voting process, NEW observed the following:

- NEW observers report that at 81% of polling stations, polling officials consistently checked voters' fingers for indelible ink. In 95% of polling stations, voters were consistently marked with indelible ink after voting.
- In 97% of polling stations, voters on the voter register but without voter ID cards were allowed to vote. Where these voters were allowed to vote:
- In 73% of polling stations, voters were permitted to cast ballots after comparing their photo and details from the voter register;

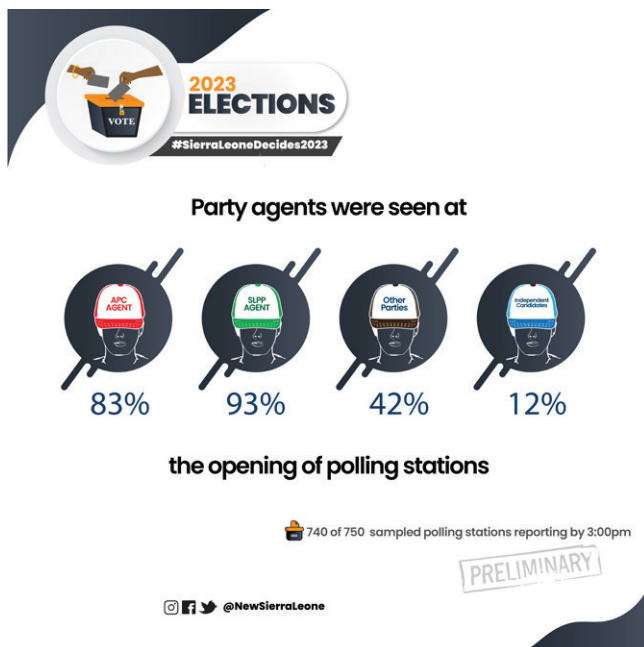
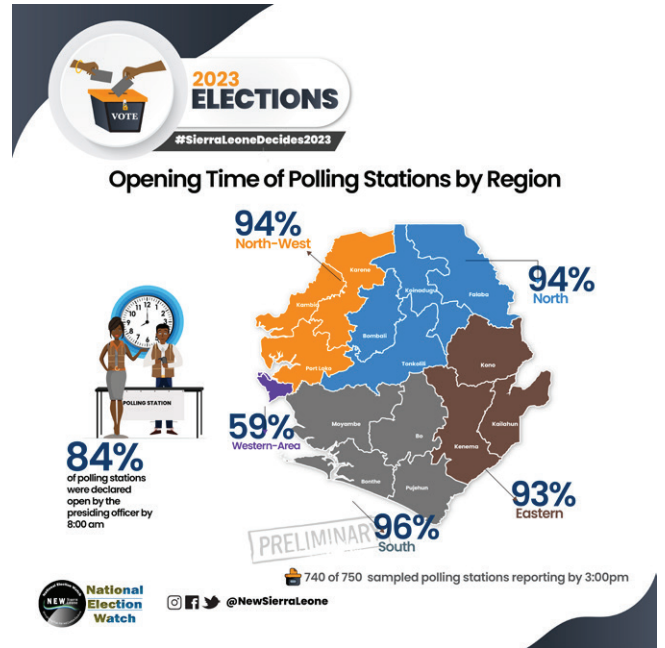
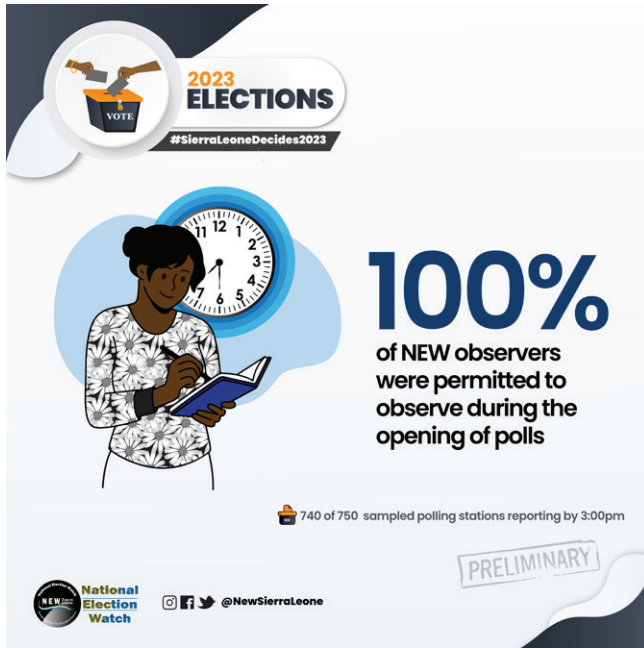
On counting votes, NEW noted that despite the late opening of polling stations in some areas, closing and counting procedures were largely followed across the country. The closing and counting processes were observed by party agents and observers, noting these significant findings:

- In nearly all polling stations, voters in the queue at 5:00 PM were allowed to vote.
- NEW observers reported that nationally, 90% of polling stations closed by 6:00 pm and 10% after 6:00 pm, and the counting process commenced. Of those polling stations that closed after 6:00 PM, 16% were in the Eastern Region, 10% in the Northern Region, 8% in the North West Region, 8% in the Southern Region, and 58 % were in the Western Area.

NEW concluded that the logistical challenges affected voting and disenfranchised some citizens, especially in the Western Area and some parts of the northern region where the logistical challenges were more profound. NEW recommended that the ECSL release election data promptly, including polling station-level results, in an analyzable format to build citizens' confidence in the results tabulation process under Open Election Data principles. To the security

forces, the statement calls on the Office of National Security (ONS) and the SLP to continue to exercise professionalism and restraint in securing the results tabulation

process and asks Sierra Leoneans to be calm and patient while awaiting the official announcement of results by ECSL, as mandated by the law.





## 7. Tabulation of Results

For the 2023 elections, NEW deployed observers in all the regional tally centres. A total of 10 Tally Centre Observers, two for each centre, were recruited, trained and deployed across the six regional tally centres. The deployment of Tally Centre Observers in the 2023 elections allowed observers and party agents to access the centres to observe the tally process. However, unlike other previous elections, NEW observers were not allowed to observe the inputting of the figures in the database fully. The Tallying procedures were not explained to observers and party agents to allow for a proper understanding of how the process was to be conducted. In the South region, for instance, NEW observed that printouts were given to observers and party agents of what ECSL tally staff claimed to be the data inputted into the database. This was not the case in other regions, as no printouts were given to observers and party agents. In the North, party agents of both the APC and SLPP objected to the non-transparency of the tallying process and requested that the results be projected. The ECSL tallying team insisted that projection will not be done and the observers and party agents will not be allowed in the tallying room as this is not the standard procedure for the tallying of results.

NEW observers reported that the setup of all five regional tallying centres lacked transparency; as they could not see the data inputted in the computer. The collation process was grossly undermined, making it impossible for observers and party agents to verify the results received and inputted. In all tally centres, NEW observed that the tallying staff did not respond to questions raised by observers and party agents; they stated they were waiting for instructions from the data operations manager at the ECSL headquarters. NEW noted that the previous best practice by ECSL of projecting tallying in all bye-elections was abandoned during the 2023 elections

NEW observers reported incidents of violence in Lunsar township, in which a Ward Coordinator was beaten and his car destroyed, such that the ballot boxes were not at that time transported to the tallying centre for timely voting. Other Observers and party agents present were: EU-EOM, British High Commission, ECOWAS, US Embassy, The Carter Center, AU, ONS, West Africa Youth Network for Peace Education and Economic Development – Sierra Leone (WAYNPEED-SL), EON, CCSL, PPRC, the Media, APC, NDA, NGC, SLPP and APPWA.

Overall, NEW observed that the tallying process in all regions failed to meet international benchmarks of openness and clarity. Observers at tallying centres did not know the status of results inputted and tallied when 60% of presidential results were announced by the National Returning Officer. NEW tally centre observers reported that they only knew about the 60% presidential results announced when they heard citizens jubilating outside the centres.

### **7.1. Partial Election Results Released by ECSL: 27th June 2023**

On 27 June 2023, the ECSL announced partial results based on 60% of polling stations in each district but not 60% of the total votes cast because polling stations vary in size. For example:

- In Kailahun, the valid votes cast in the 60% of polling stations announced represented 80% of the registered voters in the district;
- In Bombali, the valid votes cast in the 60% of polling stations announced represented 71% of registered voters in the district;
- In Port Loko, the valid votes cast in the 60% of polling stations announced represented 66% of registered voters in the district;
- In Bonthe, the valid votes cast in the 60% of polling stations announced represented 71% of registered voters in the district, and
- In Western Area Urban, the valid votes cast in the 60% of polling stations announced represented 44% of registered voters in the district.

Based on our PRVT findings and the ECSL data announced then, NEW was of the conviction that the counting was done some amount of with integrity and that the final results were going to reflect the votes cast by Sierra Leoneans.

### **7.2. Analysis of Official Results Released by the ECSL**

As a component of our comprehensive observation strategy for the 2023 elections, NEW undertook an analysis of official results released by the ECSL to complement direct observation of pre-election and election-day processes and the PRVT. In comparing the parliamentary election results announced by ECSL to district-level presidential election results circulated immediately after the final presidential election results announcement on Tuesday, 27th June 2023, NEW noted significant inconsistencies in turnout and vote shares between the presidential and parliamentary election in multiple districts, which required further clarity from the ECSL.

The analysis further strengthens our PRVT findings, which indicate that the official results announced for the presidential election do not align with the true ballots cast at polling stations. NEW reiterated its call for ECSL to release all polling station-level results to increase transparency and allow for further independent analysis.

The following findings were derived from an analysis of official election results for the parliamentary and presidential elections as published by the ECSL:

**Turnout:** There are a total of 3,374,258 registered voters across 16 districts in Sierra Leone. Official results show roughly 83% turnout rates for the presidential and parliamentary elections (2,800,691 ballots cast for the presidential and 2,789,939 for the parliamentary). While overall turnout was relatively stable between the 2018 and 2023 elections within districts, the turnout rates varied between the two elections. For example:

- In four districts, one district in the northern region (Falaba) and three districts in the southern region, (Bo, Bonthe, Moyamba), turnout was significantly lower in the parliamentary election as compared to the presidential: Falaba (23.8% lower for

- parliamentary), Bo (13.7% lower), Bonthe (15.4% lower), Moyamba (17.1% lower).
- In the Western Area, 47,200 voters in Western Area Rural and 78,805 voters in Western Area Urban cast ballots in the

parliamentary election but not vote in the presidential elections (representing 13.8% and 13.2% of registered voters respectively, in the two districts).

Region	Districts	RV	Parliamentary Turnout (Ballots cast)	Parliamentary Turnout (% of RV)	Presidential Turnout (Ballots cast)	Presidential Turnout (% of RV)	Difference in Ballots Cast between Parliamentary and Presidential Elections	Difference in turnout rates between Parliamentary and Presidential Elections
East	Bo	192,333	179,095	93.1%	185,168	96.3%	-6,073	-3.2%
East	Bombali	318,306	286,754	90.1%	303,551	95.4%	-16,797	-5.3%
East	Bonthe	174,036	124,129	71.3%	125,719	72.2%	-1,590	-0.9%
North	Falaba	206,380	154,111	74.7%	158,928	77.0%	-4,817	-2.3%
North	Kailahun	69,170	39,018	56.4%	55,483	80.2%	-16,465	-23.8%
North	Kambia	85,209	53,273	62.5%	55,010	64.6%	-1,737	-2.0%
North	Karene	207,525	156,214	75.3%	156,700	75.5%	-486	-0.2%
Northwest	Kenema	152,642	103,393	67.7%	111,030	72.7%	-7,637	-5.0%
Northwest	Koinadugu	100,296	75,490	75.3%	73,553	73.3%	1,937	1.9%
Northwest	Kono	237,021	170,035	71.7%	173,582	73.2%	-3,547	-1.5%
South	Moyamba	317,216	247,368	78.0%	290,713	91.6%	-43,345	-13.7%
South	Port Loko	107,645	86,411	80.3%	102,936	95.6%	-16,525	-15.4%
South	Pujehun	150,402	108,392	72.1%	134,102	89.2%	-25,710	-17.1%
South	Tonkolili	115,925	113,156	97.6%	107,121	92.4%	6,035	5.2%
West	WA – Rural	341,870	336,664	98.5%	289,464	84.7%	47,200	13.8%
West	WA – Urban	598,282	556,436	93.0%	477,631	79.8%	78,805	13.2%

Vote Shares: The results in some districts are characterized by large differences in voting patterns between the presidential and parliamentary elections.

- In Falaba, APC received a significantly higher percentage of the vote share in the parliamentary election (43%) as compared to the presidential (27%). Conversely, SLPP received a lower vote share in parliamentary election (51%) as compared to the presidential election (67%).

In Karene and Port Loko, APC received a significantly lower percentage of the vote in the parliamentary election (72% and 60%, respectively) as compared to the presidential election (84 % and 80%, respectively). Conversely, SLPP received a higher percentage of the vote in the parliamentary election (26% and 36%, respectively), as compared to the presidential election. This is uncharacteristic of the voting patten in Sierra Leone in which most voters tend to vote for the same party for President and Parliament.

Region	Districts	APC votes in Parl. Election	APC Vote Share in Parl. Election	Parliamentary Turnout (% of RV)	Presidential Turnout (Ballots cast)	Presidential Turnout (% of RV)	Difference in Ballots Cast between Parliamentary and Presidential Elections	Difference in turnout rates between Parliamentary and Presidential Elections
East	Bo	6,813	3.8%	93.1%	185,168	96.3%	-6,073	-3.2%
East	Bombali	11,541	4.0%	90.1%	303,551	95.4%	-16,797	-5.3%
East	Bonthe	32,067	25.9%	71.3%	125,719	72.2%	-1,590	-0.9%
North	Falaba	140,566	91.6%	74.7%	158,928	77.0%	-4,817	-2.3%
North	Kailahun	16,666	43.0%	56.4%	55,483	80.2%	-16,465	-23.8%
North	Kambia	33,127	62.5%	62.5%	55,010	64.6%	-1,737	-2.0%
North	Karene	125,015	80.4%	75.3%	156,700	75.5%	-486	-0.2%
Northwest	Kenema	57,970	56.4%	67.7%	111,030	72.7%	-7,637	-5.0%
Northwest	Koinadugu	54,058	72.0%	75.3%	73,553	73.3%	1,937	1.9%
Northwest	Kono	101,142	59.8%	71.7%	173,582	73.2%	-3,547	-1.5%
South	Moyamba	24,148	9.8%	78.0%	290,713	91.6%	-43,345	-13.7%
South	Port Loko	4,154	4.8%	80.3%	102,936	95.6%	-16,525	-15.4%
South	Pujehun	18,825	17.5%	72.1%	134,102	89.2%	-25,710	-17.1%
South	Tonkolili	4,961	4.4%	97.6%	107,121	92.4%	6,035	5.2%
West	WA – Rural	175,410	52.3%	98.5%	289,464	84.7%	47,200	13.8%
West	WA – Urban	307,479	55.4%	93.0%	477,631	79.8%	78,805	13.2%

Invalid ballots were fairly consistent across districts in both elections, with rates of invalid ballots that are inconsistent with historical trends. Rates of invalid ballots in official results released by the ECSL were approximately 0.4% for both the presidential and parliamentary elections.

Rates of invalid ballots have historically been higher in parliamentary elections, with 7.4% in 2018 and 7.3% in 2007. As noted previously,

the official results for the presidential election also indicated a rate of 0.4% invalid ballots. This is more than 10 times lower than the PRVT projection and the rate of invalid ballots for previous presidential elections. The PRVT demonstrated that the rate of invalid ballots for this election was 4.8% with a margin of error of +/- 0.4%, in line with previous first round presidential elections (5.2% in 2018, 4.7% in 2012, and 7.3% in 2007).





## 8. Cardinal Issues in the 2023 Elections

This section of the report presents critical issues that are related to the 2023 elections including the approach to electoral and political parties' administration, the experiences of women, youth and PwDs.

### 8.1. Electoral and Political Parties' Administration

Principally, two institutions are responsible for electoral and political parties' administration, both of which account for the effective and efficient management and oversight of electoral processes in Sierra Leone. They include the ECSL and the PPRC. For the purposes of this report, we have separated electoral administration, led by ECSL, from political parties' administration and oversight, led by the PPRC.

#### 8.1.1. Electoral Administration

The ECSL, previously the National Electoral Commission (NEC), is a creation of the Constitution of Sierra Leone (Act No 6 of 1991). It was established as a permanent and independent electoral administration institution with powers to create regulatory

and administrative policies for the conduct of elections and referenda, registration of eligible voter and candidates for elections and demarcation of constituency boundaries for the purpose of elections. The Commission is composed of a chairman, who doubles as the Chief Electoral Commissioner and National Returning Officer, and five commissioners appointed for a five-year term, each responsible for a different region, namely the East, North, South, West, and for the first time, Northwest. The constitution provides that all commissioners are appointed by the President in consultation with leaders of all political parties, and approved by parliament. NEW observed that the 'consultation' provision of the law has either been misinterpreted and/or not fully adhered to, by successive governments without meaningful consultation with members of the opposition to agree on a candidate before appointment. Regrettably, NEW observed the appointment process of Commissioners was largely one of 'informing', rather than 'consulting', as provided by law. Subsequently, the appointment of Commissioners has been contentious, disputed and sometimes, it has

led to acrimony and division across parties and state institutions, such as the APC's rejection of the appointment and approval of Mr. Mohamed Konneh as Chairman and Chief Electoral Commissioner in July 2020. This perennial problem is, in part, due to the lack of independent institutions for the appointment of critical public sector and democratic governance institutions, such as the ECSL, the Sierra Leone Police, the Judiciary, and PPRC, with reduced executive control and discretion over the appointment process.

While being 'credible' and 'proven integrity' are criteria for the appointment of ECSL Commissioners, there is yet to be an established system for measuring credibility and integrity, or even a merit-based process that ensures minimum qualification and experience. In effect, the Presidency can appoint anyone as commissioner of ECSL, whether or not the appointee has the requisite qualifications and experience to deliver on the role. In addition, the 2023 PEA makes provision for the removal of ECSL commissioners, which is inconsistent with the provisions of the 1991 constitution on the removal of Commissioners. Knowing that the constitution takes precedence over an act of parliament, there is a need to bring coherence in the legal provisions between the PEA and the 1991 constitution of Sierra Leone.

Ahead of the 2023 elections, the existing board of commissioners was not only increased from five to six, but all existing commissioners of the ECSL were appointed between April 2019 and March 2023, giving the commission a completely different set of Commissioners from those who conducted the 2018 elections. This was a process that critics believed gave the ruling party the opportunity to determine the composition and leadership of the Commission. NEW observed the controversies associated with the appointment of all current six commissioners, and the expansion of the administrative and professional directorates of ECSL from 10 in 2018 to 15 directorates at the time of the elections. NEW noted that in addition to the board of commissioners, the work of ECSL was led by a Secretariat headed by an Executive Secretary, and 17 District Election Managers (DEMs). Following the development of the Commission's 2021–2025 Strategic Plan, NEW observed the appointment of two assistants to the Executive Secretary and the redeployment of the DEMs and directors of the 15

directorates. Opposition parties condemned the staff deployment, noting that nearly all of the 15 Directors and 17 DEMs were from the south-east, a perceived traditional stronghold of the ruling SLPP. Subsequently, while the ruling SLPP expressed trust and confidence in the ECSL, the main opposition party, APC considered the ECSL to be biased and instrumentalized by the SLPP. In spite of the changes and accompanying criticisms by political parties, NEW observed, following several years of interaction, that the ECSL has the appropriate technical and administrative structures and personnel to deliver on its mandate, and at the time of the elections, all 15 directors, 17 DEMs and 6 commissioners were in post. In addition, NEW observed that unlike previous elections that either had funding challenges or were largely dependent on donor funding, in the 2023 elections, ECSL received adequate and timely funding from the consolidated fund for the roll-out of its activities. However, the availability of funds did not prevent the printing of sub-standard Voter Identification cards, delays in their procurement and arrival, and omissions in the delivery of sensitive materials needed on voting day, leading to extremely late commencement of voting in some polling stations. Despite these challenges and criticisms, NEW observed that the ECSL recruited and trained about 91,300 temporary election staff to support election day activities. NEW observed that ECSL, (though at a limited scaled), took deliberate action to recruit women and persons with disability PWDs to work as ad-hoc staff for the commission on election day. NEW observers noted that while in some polling stations the staff were professional and followed established opening, voting, counting and closing procedures, in several other polling stations this was not the case. Among the major challenges observed by NEW on election day, were the late delivery of voting materials, omissions and misplacement of voters from the voter register, inconsistencies in the application of the set-out procedures, late opening of polling stations, and inconsistencies in the application of the opening, polling, counting and closing procedures.

### **8.1.2. Political Parties' Administration and Oversight**

Established in December 2005, by the Political Parties Act of 2002, (as amended in 2022), and in accordance with Sections 34 and 35 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone; the PPRC is charged with the responsibility of registering and regulating political parties and monitoring their accountability to their

members and to the electorate of Sierra Leone. It also has the responsibility, among other things, to receive the financial statement reports on the sources of income, the audited accounts, assets, and liabilities of each registered political party and could take appropriate disciplinary action to ensure compliance. As per the provisions of Section 34(1) of the Constitution, the Commission consists of four members appointed by the President. It includes a Chairman of the Commission, who shall be a person who has held Judicial office or is qualified to be appointed a Judge of the Superior Court of Judicature nominated by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission (JLSC); the Chief Electoral Commissioner of the ECSL, a legal practitioner nominated by the Sierra Leone Bar Association (SLBA); and a member nominated by the Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC).

The work of the Commission is supported by an Executive Secretary, the administrative head of the Commission, and seven directorates ranging from Mediation and Programmes, to Finance, Human Resources and Audit. Relative to its counterpart, the ECSL, the PPRC is smaller and, until late 2021, had a staff of less than 30 with three regional offices plus its headquarters in Freetown. However, following a capacity and systems review done by the Public Sector Reform Unit in 2021, recommendations were made for the creation of seven directors from the heads of departments who used to be officers, the recruitment of 30 new staff, the creation of one additional regional office in the northwestern regional city of Port Loko, and the transformation of the Office of the Registrar to that of an Executive Secretary putting the office at par with its ECSL counterpart. At the time of the elections, PPRC had just over 50 staff, with seven directorates supervised by an Executive Secretary.

At the time of the 2023 elections, all four Commissioners of the PPRC were in place, including the chair of the Commission appointed by President Bio in April 2019 following the death of the substantive Chairman in 2016. Before his appointment to PPRC, Lawyer Abdulai Bangura was appointed Deputy Attorney General and Minister of Justice under the 2018 first cabinet of President Bio. The opposition criticized his appointment, who described him as a 'Card Carrying Member' of the SLPP and, therefore, not neutral and independent. During his confirmation hearing in Parliament, MPs from the opposition APC party staged a walkout to protest his appointment and confirmation. Following his appointment, one of the first challenges

Chairman Bangura faced was settling the longstanding division within the All-Political Parties Association (APPA) and other affiliate bodies, including the youth and women factions. NEW observed that despite the valid questions around the neutrality and independence of its chair, the PPRC has a more favourable public perception than its counterpart, the ECSL, and political parties (despite their ongoing criticisms) consider the PPRC to be much more institutionally firm and fairer than the ECSL.

NEW observed that in several occasions during the electoral cycle, the PPRC has been firm in the implementation of its policies and decision-making process across the board, regardless of the offender. In February 2023, for instance, following a clash of supporters of the APC and SLPP in Calaba Town, in the east of the capital city, Freetown, the PPRC concluded after its investigation that it was supporters of the SLPP that provoked the incident when they made inciting remarks against the APC supporters who were waiting to welcome the motorcade of their newly elected presidential candidate who was travelling from Makeni to Freetown. In a press statement, the PPRC sternly warned the ruling party to desist from such provocative acts or face the total penalty of the law. In a similar vein, the PPRC, pursuant to Section 39(2)(b) of the Political Parties Act 2022, fined the main opposition APC the sum of NLE120,000/00 (One Hundred and Twenty Thousand new Leones) payable into the Consolidated Fund, within two weeks from date herein and furnish the Commission with evidence of such payment, for contravening of Section 39(1)(c&d) of the Political Parties Act 2022, adding that persistent infringement of that provision of the Act by his Party is not only a breach of the law, but also borders on the peace and social cohesion of the state.

In addition to the stern position of the PPRC on issues of campaign violations, some of the significant successes of the PPRC include the mediation of the impasse within the main opposition, including dealing with petitions from its members on its lower level elections, observation of the lower level and national delegate conferences for all political parties and the enactment of the 2022 PPA which provided additional powers to the PPRC for broader political party regulation, including political parties and candidate camping financing. Regardless of this progress, NEW observes the criticisms on PPRC by mostly opposition parties in its fairness in adjudicating inter and intra-party disputes and the decision to certify 14 out of the 17 registered

political parties to contest the June 2023 elections.

## **8.2. Participation and Representation of Women**

The GEWE Act (2022) and the Public Elections Act 2022 provided a favourable environment for women's representation in the 2023 elections. The GEWE Act is unprecedented in terms of a candidate's nomination and provided that for every three nominations, one must be a woman. A total of 52% of women registered to vote; however, only one female presidential candidate contested the elections, with five women in the presidential race as running mates. Women constitute 32% of all candidates nominated for parliament, and 29 female candidates contested as independent candidates. Among the elected candidates in parliament, 30.37% are women, of which one is a Paramount Chief member of parliament. For Local Councils, two women (Freetown and Bonthe) were elected as Mayors, and out of the 493 councillors, 195 women won council seats.

NEW observed during the elections that most of the polling station stations preferred older women, lactating and pregnant women. The ECSL also made sure women were recruited and deployed at the Polling Officer level both during voter registration and on polling day. To enhance its approach to gender mainstreaming, NEW made intentional efforts to ensure the representation of women among observers and at the data centre.

Some of the challenges identified by NEW's observers include the fact that high candidature fees are a barrier to women's participation. Most of the women who wanted to participate in the lower-level elections were poor and could not afford to pay the fees. This caused them not to present themselves as candidates. Furthermore, there was rampant violence against women, including cyber-attacks, online bullying, intimidation and harassment. Such experiences have been causing women to stay off politics over the years, and it was very

persistent during the 2023 elections. Finally, while the existing laws guarantee the nomination of women, it does not guarantee them the positions, so given the patriarchal nature of the Sierra Leonean society, women most women were disadvantaged because of their gender.

## **8.3 Participation of Youth**

It was observed that many young people registered to vote, which was positive because they make up most of the population of Sierra Leone. During the campaigns and engagements with First-Time Voters (FTV), they also had huge expectations from the electioneering process and turned in their numbers to vote. Some CSOs were active in engaging youth in non-violent elections. For instance, the Centre for the Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA) and other youth-focused organizations identified and trained peace ambassadors nationwide, preaching peace and cohesion. Such engagements were critical to the process, as there was tension in every district of the country among the main political parties.

Several challenges were observed in youth participation and in putting youth issues on the parties' agenda. These challenges included the following:

- There was limited voter education that targeted young people; this left them with more questions than answers on the process and even undermined the willingness on the part of some to participate.
- FTVs had challenges during registration because most computers could not capture their data. However, this was later addressed.
- There were limited funds to engage political parties in their manifestos and demand the inclusion of youth-related issues.
- Youth debates were conducted, but there were financial challenges in 2023 for the National Presidential Debate.

- Some positions meant for young people in political parties were held by older people, thereby disenfranchising the youth.

Despite the listed challenges, young people were very active during the process, and their turnout helped to maintain the momentum of the elections. They were also seen trying to protect their votes in several country districts, which occasionally led to skirmishes with security forces.

#### **8.4. Persons with Disabilities**

NEW concluded from its observations that investment in the meaningful participation of people with disability was limited. This was the case both at the national level and the party levels. Political parties did not take any reasonable steps in prioritizing or mainstreaming PwDs in their planning and preparations for the elections and supporting their elections in party positions or in the respective positions contested in the elections. It became apparent that while the Act supports the protection and protection of the rights and welfare of PwDs and an existing commission for PwDs, there is still a limited shift from theory to practice. Thus, they are not included in governance as they should be, and their voices and aspirations were not fully integrated into the parties' manifesto. There was also no effective monitoring system by the PPRC before the elections to ensure that parties mainstreamed PwDs into the electoral process as they should.

#### **8.5. The Role and Conduct of the Media**

The media was very divided and conflicted during the 2023 electoral cycle. However, that has mostly been the case in the country's history. The traditional media houses provided more airtime to the candidates they were most comfortable with, which was also observed with community radio stations. Additionally, male candidates had more time on air than female candidates due to their ability to fund media activities or access such houses.

NEW observed that the intimidation by security actors of institutions and individuals critical of the government undermined the ability of some journalists to be objective. Thus, the media was largely uncertain of what may happen if a report was made unfavourable to the government. NEW also observed that very few journalists had the skills and knowledge to undertake real-time election reporting and how to conduct themselves as journalists ethically. The lack of professionalism and integrity on the part of some journalists and media houses also contributed to the tension experienced in the country.

Social media became an outlet for information and a space for expression of view regardless of the nature of the news. Thus, it became a toxic space with attacks and counter-attacks by bloggers of the main political parties. Hate speeches and false news were traded from various quarters, which heightened the country's tension. It also affected the potential for meaningful dialogue and constructive engagements among the political actors. Thus, by the time the country went to the polls, there were heightened levels of mis/disinformation, hate-speech and verbal abuse both online and offline.

#### **8.6 The Role and Conduct of the Security Sector**

Elections Security is coordinated by the Office of National Security (ONS), with the SLP taking primacy in the operations. The ONS launched two dedicated elections secretariat on the 11th of May, 2023: the National Situation Room (NSR) and the Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee (IESPC). These platforms consulted with relevant stakeholders, including NEW, with the aim of providing credible information on the elections and addressing issues of violence. The security architecture and planning for the elections through these committees were technically robust for handling the traditional spaces around the elections. However, the circumstances with threats emanating from

social media, including verbal attacks, cyberbullying, and inflammatory language, rendered the elections very tense and intimidating. The security sector's strategy, therefore, had limited scope to address these emerging forms of violence online and on social media, exposing frontline stakeholders to extreme aggression.

NEW observed heinous crimes perpetrated throughout the electoral cycle for which the security sector had done very little to address those challenges. For example, during the bye-elections in Sambaia Bendugu, houses were vandalized, and properties were destroyed, including the burning of motorcycles. Both the violence during the movement of the opposition flag bearer into Sambaia Bendugu happened right in the presence of the SLP. After the 8th of May 2023, in Pujehun, where Massa emerged as the APC party candidate who was awarded the symbol to contest the parliamentary elections, staged a celebration of her victory at her residence. During the celebration, the Town Chief questioned where she got permission to celebrate. There was a confrontation between her supporters and some young men in the community where acid was sprayed on her person, and the perpetrator was never identified. NEW observed that the perpetrators were never prosecuted.

On 25th June 2023, the headquarters of the main opposition, the APC, was attacked by security actors, with live ammunition used, resulting in the death of Hawa Dumbuya, 64, a nurse and party volunteer, who was shot in the head. This incident, among others, further undermined the public's confidence in the security sector, with opposition members convinced that the government instrumentalized the force.

The ONS equally became a threat to freedom of expression and association. Before the June 24th general elections, ONS had made a public statement prohibiting any person or institution from announcing election results, stating that it was the sole responsibility of the ECSL. This statement, though correct,

was perceived as an intimidation to discourage organizations, especially election observers, from making public their findings. The statement furthered that a breach of that decision would result in the prosecution of the person or institution.

In addition, a press statement from ONS of 29th June 2023, quoting Section 93 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone Act no.6 of 1991, denounced a publication of presidential election data captured by the PRVT methodology used by NEW. It accused NEW of committing an election offence. In the same press statement, the joint press statement signed by (6) development partners stating the lack of transparency in the election's tabulation process was equally condemned and considered erroneous and misleading. These became an attempt to shrink the already contracted civic space and rid the elections of independent analyses and accountability.

## **8.7. Role and Conduct of Political Parties and the Impact on the Elections Environment**

There were 17 registered Political Parties for the 2023 elections. Part of Sierra Leone's democratic success was the formation of the APPA, to which all registered political parties belong. APPA was a multi-party-political space created to restore and sustain multi-party democracy in Sierra Leone; however, in 2023, this political party assemblage disintegrated into three factions. The APPA, Political Parties outside Parliament and the Consortium of Progressive Political Parties. As mentioned, APPA was formed for collective action and engagement of all political parties to influence policies and to promote national cohesion and peace consolidation in the general governance of the country. Some of the political parties, however, claimed that the leadership of APPA was more pro-government and other than pursuing the objectives for which the association was formed. These political parties dissociated themselves from the association and formed the Consortium of Progressive Political Parties (CoPPP). Like with the APPA, the

CoPPP, too, could not survive the test of time. Individual interests became paramount to the consortium's interests, and some members opted out of CoPPP. This resulted in counter and confusing statements, making political parties' contributions to democratic progress chaotic.

The All-Political Party Women's Association (APPWA) organized itself and launched its strategic plan, but its influence in mobilizing, organizing and supporting women's political aspirations was minimal. APPYA were not so visible in the 2023 elections. Access to resources or subsidies from the state to run political party affairs was lacking. This limited the capacity of many political parties to engage meaningfully and constructively. Survival, for the most part, became the driver of their actions. Adherence to policies and guidelines instituted by the PPRC or compliance with their party constitution became challenging. Delegate conferences were either delayed, denied or manipulated. Inter and intra-party tensions led to violence in some instances. Most of the 17 political parties lacked internal democratic systems. Despite these lapses, it is worthy of note that there were confident political party leaders who raised national political and economic concerns: NURP, the NGC and the UP, for example, were among those who raised such concerns.

It is essential to state that political party capacity building avenues were lacking. Most political party leaders had limited or no knowledge of how the PR system works and its implications for the survival of the growing political parties. They were made to believe that introducing the PR system would allow smaller political parties to secure seats in parliament. Whilst NEW was trying to enlighten political parties and engage with the ECSL during PPLC meetings and other forums, representatives of these smaller political parties verbally attacked NEW members that they were trying to undermine their chances to go to parliament. For the 2023 elections, 3 political parties were disqualified from contesting. The PPRC claimed that these political parties did not

meet the criteria set for political parties to participate in the elections, including having an office space in every region and complying with the provisions of their party constitutions to conduct lower-level elections to culminate into their national delegate conference. However, This position was challenged vehemently by some of the disqualified political parties to get them out of the race.

Finally, the main opposition was also fraught with internal challenges that left it less prepared for national elections. These challenges stemmed from factors such as how its presidential candidate was hand-picked in 2017 and contestations as to who is qualified to be a leader of the party. Since the party adopted a new constitution in February 2023, with the candidate elected in the same convention, the party had only four months to prepare and campaign for the elections. Additionally, threats by the party to boycott the elections left their supporters confused, which led to some not eventually voting. These challenges point to the gaps in parties and how they affect their performance in general and presidential elections.

## 8.8. The Judiciary and 2023 Elections

The judiciary has always been a controversial institution in Sierra Leone. Over the years, it has been criticized as being instrumentalized by successive governments. The confidence of the main opposition in the judiciary was eroded when they passed a judgment that removed ten of their MPs from parliament, with the government replacing nine of them with their members, with one having to run again in a bye-election. As an international media house reported,

**“The Sierra Leone high court on Friday revoked the parliamentary seats of ten leading opposition party legislators, wiping out their majority in the chamber and prompting clashes with police on the streets of Freetown. The court took action against 10 of the 16 deputies of the opposition APC who were being prosecuted**

## for alleged breaches of electoral law linked to the legislative elections in March 2018.”<sup>22</sup>

Coupled with the above, the ruling on the PR system on 27 January 2023 left the opposition dissatisfied, perceiving that any matter related to the opposition would get an unfavourable outcome. The APC indicated this, which informed them of their decision not to contest the 2023 election results in court. They preferred to use a political rather than a legal route to address their grievances. In a press release by the APC dated 3 July 2023, they stated some of their reasons for not going to court, and they include:

**“... In April 2018, the APC sought redress against malpractices in that year's presidential elections. The chief Justice delayed assigning the case until three years later. Even with this administrative abuse of powers to assign, the Chief Justice assigned the case to himself, presided over same, wrote the judgement himself and disposed of the matter by throwing it out of court.”<sup>23</sup>**

On 7 June 2023, APC and Lansana Dumbuya filed a case against the ECSL and The Chief Electoral Commissioner, seeking the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone to produce the disaggregated voter register and to comply with provisions of the PEA 2022. This matter has not yet been assigned up to the point of drafting this report.

The judiciary was also accused of witch-hunt in relation to the cases against the APC and its presidential candidate and the actions taken by the court to determine an interim executive of the party. These actions stifled the party's ability to prepare for the elections at an early stage. Thus, by the time of the elections, there was limited confidence on the part of the members and supporters of the APC in the judiciary and its

independence.

The failure of the APC to go to court also left minimal room for the party to have its claims heard legitimately. Thus, it became very precarious, with the party refusing to participate in governance. This led to a political and governance stalemate until a negotiated political settlement was reached on 18 October 2023.<sup>24</sup>

## 8.9. Civil Society and the 2023 Elections

For the 2023 elections, civil society played a significant role in observing, monitoring and educating the citizens on elections and electoral processes. NEW was the principal non-partisan domestic elections observation coalition. Other groups who observed the elections included the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) and the Elections Observer Network (EON). Several women, youth and disability groups were engaged in civic education and non-violence campaigns across the country. International partners and government agencies funded these efforts for the promotion of free, fair, participatory, peaceful and credible elections. This is the tradition of civil society since democratic renewals after the civil conflict. In the 2023 elections, some sections of civil society became front runners pushing for partisan interests. Although this stance was seen in 2018, the 2023 posture was well-organized and destabilizing. Lead civil society actors who knew and understood how the PRVT/PVT worked were discrediting the methodology in public. It became apparent that independent and non-partisan actions were only meaningful for such civil society actors when their interests were not at stake.

After NEW released its PRVT findings, as was done in 2018, this category of civil society actors became the pioneers in mobilizing hate for NEW, exposing the leadership of NEW to intimidation, harassment, and death threats and calling for attacks and arrest of

<sup>22</sup> See: <https://www.trtworld.com/africa/clashes-arrests-after-sierra-leone-court-unseats-10-opposition-mps-27172> (Accessed on 14 March, 2024).

<sup>23</sup> See: <https://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/apc-will-not-go-to-court-to-seek-redress-and-calls-for-the-chief-justice-to-resign/> (Accessed on 14 March, 2024).

<sup>24</sup> See Section 9 below for details.



NEW members. It is essential to state that NEW has played similar roles since 2002 and has employed the PRVT in 2007, 2012 and 2018. The actions of this section of civil society undermined citizens' trust and respect for civil society, and civil society's role became a disappointment for the Sierra Leonean public, regional election observer groups who released several statements in support of the PRVT and the international community. NEW notes the worrisome nature of the shrinking civic space in the country and had previously released a statement on the deteriorating state of the civic space and how several state institutions and civil society leaders and groups had been captured.

### **8.10. Attacks on NEW**

NEW is the country's preeminent citizen election observation group, having monitored Sierra Leone's elections since 2002. NEW's ability to state facts about election unequivocally is on record in Sierra Leone. The coalition used the PRVT methodology to provide citizens and electoral stakeholders with systematic, impartial information on voting and counting and to independently and impartially assess the accuracy of the official results as announced by the ECSL. NEW publicly released the findings from the PRVT on 27 June, which led to intense security threats for the leadership and members.

Following the release of findings from the PRVT, which was conducted in line with international standards as noted by leading PRVT experts at the NDI, NEW as an organization faced direct threats of intimidation, violence, and harassment. For instance, the ONS issued a press statement on 29 June 2023, stating our PRVT was in contravention of the law (even though it was widely accepted by stakeholders, including the current ruling party, for the 2018 elections) and specifically noted that NEW could face "unfortunate consequences."

On the 25th of June 2023, the governing SLPP stated the conduct of the Presidential Parliamentary and Local Council election in which the party dedicated half a page of a press statement to make unfounded allegations and, in the process, threatened the safety of NEW and its members. The statement noted that the SLPP believes 'that NEW's professionalism is compromised.....and the SLPP has reviewed and verified many reported instances of collusion between NEW and the APC party in many parts of the country'. It further noted that 'the SLPP has received reports from many NEW staff in the Western Area Rural, Bo, Kailahun and Port Loko Districts who were not paid approved allowances ... thus increasing the vulnerability of such staff to unscrupulous politicians'.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from the fact that the SLPP's allegations were unfounded, NEW considers such unfounded allegations an attempt to threaten the coalition, set discord among members, and discredit the work of NEW. NEW members received death threats and threats of physical violence over the phone from unknown numbers starting on 28th June 2023. Additionally, the leadership of NEW were also subjects of attacks on WhatsApp and on Facebook by party operatives. On their way out of Sierra Leone on 30th June 2023, a section of the NEW leadership was temporarily prevented from leaving by immigration authorities and the Sierra Leone Police. NEW, therefore, documents the aforementioned examples as evidence of violations of our rights as human rights defenders.

NEW regretted that as Sierra Leonean citizens who organized themselves to observe the elections, we became subject to harassment and personal attacks due to our role as nonpartisan election observers and human rights defenders. The resulting threats faced by NEW members were in direct contradiction with the statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders on the situation of election

<sup>25</sup> See the Press Release by the SLPP on 25th June 2023.

observers as human rights defenders, which urges member states, including Sierra Leone, “to protect [election observers] from any violence, threats, retaliation, adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of their legitimate exercise of their rights and freedoms.”

Citizen and international election observers and members of the international community have issued statements in support of NEW's PRVT, many of which referenced the recognition of election observers as human rights defenders. These

include the African Election Observers Network (AfEONet), the Carter Center, the East and Horn of Africa Election Observer Network (E-HORN), the Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa (ESN-SA), EUEOM, the Global Network of Domestic Election Observers (GNDEM), the National Democratic Institute and the United States Department of State. The support and solidarity expressed by local and international actors strengthened the confidence and resolve of NEW to stay on track and continue delivering on its mandate.

Theme

## Pathways for Impactful Democratic and Electoral Reforms in Sierra Leone:

A Reflection of the 2023 Elections

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Time: 9:00 am

Venue: Shangri-la Hall, Beach Road, Aberdeen



## 9. Post-Elections: The Agreement for National Peace and Unity

Given the stalemate experienced after the results were announced by the ECSL, the international community, alongside the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion, established by an Act of Parliament in 2021, embarked on shuttle diplomacy with the government and the APC. Eventually, both parties agreed to have a dialogue facilitated by international actors. The dialogue occurred from 16th to 18th October 2023, with the Commonwealth, the AU, and the ECOWAS overseeing as negotiators. The lead facilitator was the former Vice President of the Gambia, Madam Fatoumata Jallow.

At the end of the dialogue, an agreement was reached, with the parties agreeing to the following: the President will make a national address on dialogue, unity, cohesion and peace; the APC will end its non-participation in governance; a cross-party committee on Electoral Systems and Management Bodies Review with a three-way leadership; Government to consider the release of persons arrested, detained and/or imprisoned for alleged elections and civil protest informed by a list to be

submitted by the APC and other Political Parties; Government to consider the discontinuation of any politically motivated court cases against the APC, different parties and their supporters based on a list to be submitted by the APC and other parties; and upon assumption of their elective governance positions, all elected APC officials (Members of Parliament, Mayors, Chairpersons, Councillors) will have the issue regarding their entitlements addressed accordingly by the appropriate institutions.

The outcome of the dialogue was received with mixed feelings by members and supporters of both parties. However, the cross-party Committee on Electoral Systems and Management Bodies Review has been established with its ToR developed. It is hoped that this report, alongside those provided by other international observer missions, will contribute to the committee's work.



## 10. Recommendations

This section of the report proffers recommendations drawn from NEW observation of the 2018-2023 electoral calendar, its engagement with governance and electoral stakeholders, EMBs, national and international elections observation groups and citizens across the country. The recommendations are

categorized based on the target group or lead implementing agency. NEW also identified a few recommendations as 'Priority' (P) recommendations for which the coalition will immediately engage the relevant stakeholders for implementation.

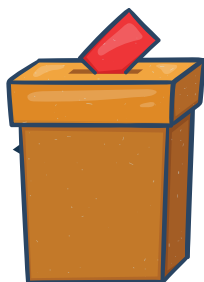
### TARGET GROUP, OR LEAD IMPLEMENTING AGENCY.



**GOVERNANCE AND ELECTORAL  
STAKEHOLDERS**



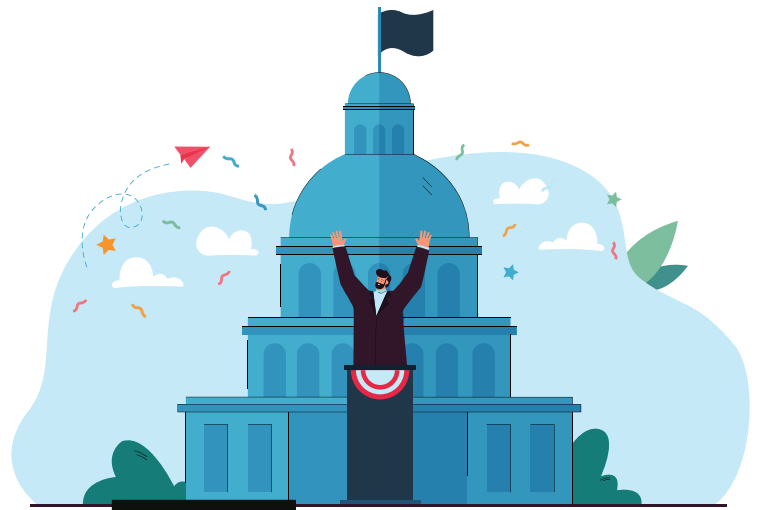
**NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL  
ELECTIONS OBSERVATION GROUPS**



**ELECTION MANAGEMENT  
BODIES**



**CITIZENS**



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT

Parliament should enact a law that specifically calls for the protection of citizen observers during the entire electoral process. All national elections observation groups should be part of the national conversation for the preparation of the election observers' protection bill.



## Priority Recommendations

Government in consultation with political parties, civil society and ECSL, should take a definitive position on the type of electoral system to be used for future elections. The aim is to identify an electoral system that is inclusive and considers the multiparty nature of democracy and the citizens' participation requirement in electing their representatives.

In consultation and collaboration with Political Parties, CSOs, and International Development Partners, the Government should conduct a credible Population and Housing Census in 2025, publish the benchmarks and guidelines for the census to correct the anomalies of previous censuses.



## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- Parliament to pass a law and provide for the adequacy of early voting with clarity on categories and circumstances applicable for the use early voting provision
- Government should work collaboratively with the opposition and civil society, to establish (by law) a cross party governance board to act as an inclusive platform for dialogue between the government and the opposition. The board (with a secretariat) could be co-chaired by the President and the Leader of the main opposition. This should be a permanent infrastructure for dialogue on critical governance issues.
- Set up an apolitical technical committee of experts to lead the vetting and assessment of appointees as heads of key state institutions, such as the ECSL, PPRC, the Police, the Judiciary, the ACC, Statistics Sierra Leone and others, with pre-selected three names for appointment by the President. Members of the committee should be experts in public sector governance with no prior partisan associations.
- Through a broad consultation with political parties, Civil Society and International Development partners, Parliament should pass new census and statistics acts that provides the technical and broad-based requirements for inclusive and participatory censuses.
- Consistent with the TRC recommendations, Government should enact a law that provides a representative quota for young people and persons with disabilities.
- Parliament should revise its regulations to ensure provision is made for youth and PWD representation in every parliamentary committee.
- In consultation with political parties, parliament to pass act to provide for state funding of political parties.
- While we recommend a review of the Government White Paper on the Constitutional review, the process should take into account recent political and social developments in the country and legislate a clear timeline for implementation.
- Parliament to amend the 1991 constitution to provide precision on a fixed date for elections and transitional clause that will provide for a transitional legislation guide time frame from to swearing elected officials.
- The current PR system with two parties in Parliament is not the answer to the current crisis of political exclusion in Sierra Leone. Government should embark on a public dialogue, facilitated by experts with the aim of having the views of the public guide decisions on the most plausible option that the country should use in the next elections.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF SIERRA LEONE



ECSL to ensure the voter registration is continuous and public to protect and promote the right to vote



## Priority Recommendations

The ECSL to fully display their tally processes and procedures to political parties, international and domestic observation groups in all their tally centres.



Create a publicly available digital version of the voter register and make provisions made for citizens to request for amendment to their personal details with relevant supporting documents.



Review the provision of the PEA 2022 to include clear provisions around the collation process and transmission of results, and publication of certified polling station results, to allow for the projection of collation figure inputted at the tally centre, with a corresponding accessible online version. These provisions must be brought in tandem with the provisions of the constitution

## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the ECSL should efficiently and accurately disaggregate and publish voter registration and voting data for analysis across different categories of voters from women, to first time voter, and PWDs
- ECSL should collaborate with NCRA to make possible the registration of inmate on remand - including the requirement of identification of inmates.
- ECSL and NCRA to establish clear procedures and processes to synchronise the civil register as a basis for the voter registration.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE POLITICAL PARTIES REGISTRATION COMMISSION

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- PPRC should ensure that political parties have guidelines in their constitutions that ensure the election of 30% of women.
- PPRC should work with political parties to ensure women's safe participation in the political mainstream, such as effective complaint mechanisms for sexual violence/ harassment etc.
- PPRC to work with the law officers' department to review the PEA to ensure the implementation of recommendation four under the government category of recommendations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SECURITY SECTOR

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- The security sector should ensure the safety of all electoral staff, observers and journalists during the voting and tallying processes.
- The Sierra Leone Police to investigate, document and publish elections related violence for public consumption.
- The Office of National Security should come up with guidelines on electoral policing to avoid the repetition of police violence against opposition parties. NEW has recorded such incidences in 2018 at the residence of the Flag Bearer of the SLPP, and the Offices of the APC in 2023.





## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE POLITICAL PARTIES



### Priority Recommendations

Political parties should review their constitutions and policies to allow for the meaningful implementation of the provisions of GEWE and PPA on the nomination of women in parliament. The aim is for political parties to prioritise the nomination of women at the top of the list



### OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Political parties should actively engage in the election process by deploying party agents across polling centres and should ensure that they keep within the election code of conduct while campaigning. If there are any grievances, they should utilise the legal system instead of taking matters into their own hands.

That all political parties should have members that represent the youth bracket (18-35 years) and the PPRC should enforce youth enrolment and representation in the leadership cadre of political parties.

That political parties must include youth issues in their manifestos and must be held accountable for the deliverance of such youth focused policies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MEDIA



- IMC to develop a code on political advertising in publicly funded media house.
- IMC to work with SLAJ and other media house to develop a code for digital and social media to effectively regulate the digital space.
- IMC and the media fraternity to provide constant training for traditional media and new media to reduce the pollution of the digital space.
- SLAJ and IMC should provide a system of monitoring for media houses to ensure fair, equal and balancing reporting of campaign activities of political parties.
- The SLBC should publish its airtime allocation schedule for all political parties.
- That the media should ensure gender sensitive programming and awareness raising, and provide space to women who aspire to be candidates or are already elected members.





## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CIVIL SOCIETY

- Civil society leaders must take immediate action to abort the polarization of the civic space along political party lines, as this offensive trend in the post-war civic space in Sierra Leone has the potential to ignite ethnic and regional divisions.
- The NEW recommends for greater community engagement and civic advocacy from CSOs as well as institutions such as the ECSL to educate citizens on the processes for voter registration.
- Civil society should maintain peace and neutrality and not engage in violence or hate speech of any kind.
- That the active engagement and representation of youth in consultation and advocacy committees is important to address the issues that youth face in electoral processes.
- That civil society organisations should help build youth capacity in order for young people to realise and express their participation in governance and democracy – from being involved in election observation to political representation.
- To support youth to develop a shared aspiration for the upcoming elections in 2028.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

- Through collaboration with civil society and the government of Sierra Leone, donor partners should support the government to establish a 'Democracy Fund' to support political parties, civil society and democracy promotion in Sierra Leone.
- International Development partners to set benchmark on democracy promotion as the basis for bilateral development.



## 11. Annexes

### **NEW Strategic Plan 2022-2026**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KuwI6QM2DUGed8tYh6i0JkJOOM6tXCCL/view?usp=sharing>

### **Analysis Of Official Results Released by the ECSL**

[https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/4Jul2023\\_NEW\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Official\\_Results-1-7.5.23.pdf](https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/4Jul2023_NEW_Analysis_of_Official_Results-1-7.5.23.pdf)

### **PRVT Methodology**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2-Jul-2023-NEW-PRVT-Methodology-.pdf>

### **Independent Non-Partisan Assessment of Presidential Election Results Statement**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NEW-Statement-Independent-Nonpartisan-Assessment-of-Presidential-Election-Results-27-June-2023.pdf>

### **Partial Election Results Released By ECSL**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/27-June-NEW-PRVT-UPDATE-Partial-election-results-released-by-the-ECSL-26-June-2023-NEW-FINAL.pdf>

### **Preliminary Statement**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NEW-25-June-2023-Preliminary-Statement.pdf>

### **New Mid-Day Situational Statement**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NEW-MIDDAY-STATEMENT-24-0623.pdf>

### **Sierra Leone goes to the polls on Saturday 24th June 2023 to elect a President**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NEW-Pre-Election-Statement-23June2023-1.pdf>

### **Early Voting**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NEW-Press-Release-on-EARLY-VOTING.pdf>

### **Long-Term Observers Ahead of June 24th, 2023**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/NEW-PR-LTO-DEPLOYMENT.pdf>

### **Distribution of voter registration cards**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/NEW-PR-VOTER-CARDS-DISTRIBUTION-FINAL.pdf>

### **Documentary Proof Left a Number of Adults Unregistered**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/NEW-PR-LAST-DAY-OF-PHASE-TWO-FINAL-2.pdf>

### **Second Phase Registration of Voters**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NEW-PR-VR-EXERCISE-SECOND-PHASE.pdf>

### **ECSL Starts Voter Registration as Scheduled but Some Registration Centres Did not Open on the first Day**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PR-VOTER-REGISTRATION-EXERCISE-FINAL-6th-Sept.pdf>

### **Six bye-elections in Constituency 056 Tonkolili District; Ward 031, Kenema district; Ward 138, Falaba district; Ward 252, Port Loko District; and Wards 212 and 216 in Karene District**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/NEW-PR-ON-BYE-ELECTION-1-N-CONST.-056-AND-5-WARDS.pdf>

**Re-run of the bye election be done for Ward 091 Kono District**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NEW-Press-Release-17-11-2021-ward-091.pdf>

**Bye-elections in Ward 069 and Ward 091**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Press-Release-on-BYE-ELECTIONS-KENEMA-AND-KONO.pdf>

**Bye-elections in Koinadugu**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/PR-KOINADUGU-BYE-ELECTIONS-FINAL.pdf>

**Bye-election in Ward 350, Pujehun District**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Pujehun-bye-election.pdf>

**Bye-election in Ward 405**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/PR-WARD-405-APRIL-2021.pdf>

**Bye-election in Ward 192, Khonimaka Chiefdom in Kambia District**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FINAL-PRESS-STATEMENT-WARD-192.pdf>

**Bye-elections in Constituency 010 and Ward 012 in Kailahun District**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NEW-PRESS-STATEMENT-BYE-ELECTIONS-CONST-010-AND-WARD-012-2.pdf>

**Bye-elections in Constituency 078, Wards 287, 348 and 226 and Re-run election in Constituency 110.**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/THIRD-PRESS-STATEMENT-ON-THE-RE-RUN-AND-BYE-ELECTIONS.pdf>

**Re-run and Bye-elections (Constituency 110, 078, Ward 226, 287 and 348, in Western Rural, Bo, Moyamba and Karene Districts respectively)**

[https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NEW-1pm-Statement-on-the-re-run-and-bye-elections\\_12122020.pdf](https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NEW-1pm-Statement-on-the-re-run-and-bye-elections_12122020.pdf)

**Voting, Closing and Counting on the Re-run and Bye-elections. (Constituency 110, 078, Ward 226, 287 and 348, in Western Rural, Bo, Moyamba and Karene Districts respectively)**

[https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NEW-Press-Release-Voting-Closing-and-Counting\\_12122020.pdf](https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NEW-Press-Release-Voting-Closing-and-Counting_12122020.pdf)

**Village Head Bye-Elections in the Western Area Rural District**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Press-Release-7-12-2020-VHE.pdf>

**NEW's Position on the Provisional Results of the Controversial 2021 Mid-Term Population and Housing Census**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/NEW-PR-ON-MID-TERM-CENSUS-PROVISIONAL-RESULT-FINAL.pdf>

**Postponement of the Mid-term Census**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Press-Release-26-10-2020.pdf>

**Proclamation of a Mid-term Census**

<https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NEW-PRESS-STATEMENT-29TH-JULY-2020.pdf>

