



Frequently Asked Questions *about* **ELECTION RESULTS**

Election of
President, Parliament
and Local Council
Sierra Leone
7 March 2018
7am - 5pm

For more information about
the National Electoral
Commission,
please visit:
www.nec.gov.sl

How are election winners determined?

A Presidential candidate must receive 55 percent of the total valid votes cast to win the elections. If no candidate reaches 55 percent, the two candidates with the most votes participate in a “runoff” or second round. In this case, the runoff is conducted according to a simple majority or “First Past the Post” (FPTP) system. This means that the candidate who receives the majority of valid votes in the second round is declared the winner.

In all other types of elections, the simple majority/FPTP system is used to determine winners. In Parliamentary elections, there are 112 constituencies in the country and one member is elected for each constituency. They may run either as members of registered political parties or as independent candidates. In the election of Chairs/Mayors, 19 Chairs/Mayors contest to head the 19 local councils, into which Sierra Leone is sub-divided.

How are election results tallied?

The election results process occurs in two stages:

1. Ballot Paper Counting

Immediately after polls close on election day, the ballot papers cast in every polling station will be counted by the Presiding Officer. When counting is complete, results are recorded on a Results and Reconciliation Form, which is then sealed inside a tamper-evident envelope. Tamper-evident envelopes from all polling stations are sent to the National Election Commission (NEC) District Office and are grouped together for transport to a Regional Tally Centre – but they are not opened at this stage.

2. Regional Tally Centres

Sealed tamper-evident envelopes are received at one of five Regional Tally Centres throughout Sierra Leone. Provided that there is no sign of tampering, each envelope will be opened and the results recorded on the Results and Reconciliation Form (RRF) will be entered into a bespoke database. This system will collate results from all polling stations and, ultimately, will produce election results.

What time does counting start at polling stations?

Counting begins after the polling station has closed and the last voter in the queue has voted.

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What measures are in place, to protect ballot papers/ results from tampering?

A number of technical measures are in place to protect election materials and results, throughout the results process. These include the use of security printing on ballot papers and RRFs, tamper-evident envelopes, boxes that are sealed with numbered seals, and multiple carbon copies of RRFs, stored and secured in different locations.

What safeguards are there to counter the possibility of errors in counting?

Polling station Presiding Officers count ballot papers in the presence of political party/candidate agents and official observers. Ballot paper counting is also open to the media. Therefore, any mistakes can be identified, immediately.

May political party/candidate agents request a recount of ballot papers?

An agent who is present during the counting of ballot papers may request a recount. However, the Presiding Officer retains the right to decide whether the request is reasonable and to refuse if in the case that it is not.

How can one be confident that Results and Reconciliation Forms are not amended, in private, after they are completed?

After ballot papers are counted, results are recorded on RRFs, which are sealed inside tamper-evident envelopes – in the presence of political party/candidate agents and official observers – and sent to the Regional Tally Centre, National Tally Centre and District Offices.

There are five carbon copies of every original RRF. While the process is being observed, the original RRF is placed in a tamper-evident envelope, and sent to the Regional Tally Centre, where results will be entered into a national data management system. The first copy is placed in another tamper-evident envelope and sent to the National Tally Centre. The second copy is placed in yet another tamper-evident envelope and sent to the District Office. The third copy is closed into the election ballot box, with the ballot papers, and also stored in the District Office. The fourth copy of the RRF is posted outside polling stations, for public viewing.

There are three extra sets of RRFs for each of the four election races and these may be distributed to agents and observers. Agents and observers may also photograph the RRFs for their own reference.

How are RRFs protected during transport to Regional Tally Centres?

As an additional security measure, the tamper-evident envelopes in which RRFs are sealed are grouped together, according to polling centre, and secured in boxes that are sealed with a serial number. RRFs could only be accessed by breaking both the seal on the box and the tamper-evident envelopes. Thus, any sign of tampering would be immediately clear.

What happens at Regional Tally Centres?

Once they reach Regional Tally Centres, boxes are opened and tamper-evident envelopes are screened and – provided there are no signs of tampering – the RRFs inside them are registered as having been received. The data from each RRF is then entered into an electronic database through a process known as “double blind entry.” This means that all data is entered into the system twice – by two separate people. When the data entered by one Data Entry Clerk is different than the data entered by the other, errors are identified and corrected.

Why aren't there serial numbers on the tamper-evident envelopes?

There is no need for serial numbers on tamper-evident envelopes. Polling centre codes and polling station numbers are recorded on RRFs. The RRF itself has a serial number. As data is entered into the electronic data management system, any absent RRFs will be immediately identified and investigated.

What happens if a tamper-evident envelope shows signs of tampering when it arrives at the Regional Tally Centre?

In cases where tampering or attempted tampering is apparent, the District Election Officer (DEO) will be consulted. If the DEO can offer a reasonable, verifiable explanation for the appearance of the envelope, the form will be processed. If the DEO can offer no reasonable, verifiable explanation for the appearance of the envelope, the Ward Coordinator and, if necessary, the Presiding Officer will be consulted. In the fact that none of these persons is able to offer a reasonable, verifiable explanation for the appearance of the envelope, RRF may be cross-checked with the three other copies or – if ordered by the Regional Returning Officer – the ballot box will be opened and a recount conducted in the District Office. Agents and observers present in the Regional Tally Centre and the District Offices will be able to follow these processes.

Can political party/candidate agents physically follow the transport of tamper-evident envelopes and ballot boxes?

Political party/candidate agents and official observers are permitted to observe and follow the transport of election materials (at their own cost). In addition, agents and observers can record the serial numbers on the transport boxes and ensure that the number on the box that is being opened (as the seal is being broken) is the same as the number on the box that they observed being closed and sealed.

How do we know who is staff of NEC, who are agents, who are observers and who are official security persons?

NEC polling staff will all wear identification badges and NEC aprons in the polling stations and centres. Agents and observers must wear their identification badges and police on duty will be in uniform.

When will election winners be announced?

The National Returning Officer, who is the NEC Chair, will announce and certify provisional results in Freetown as soon as possible.

How long do results take to tally?

Any discrepancies or irregularities must be thoroughly addressed, to ensure the accuracy of election results. Therefore, the length of time required to finalize the tally is largely dependent on the volume of cases requiring special attention or review.

Will there be progressive results?

“Progressive results” refers to the number of results tallied, at any given point before the process is complete. Progressive results of the Presidential election will be shared on the NEC website when:

- **25% of the polling stations in each district** have been cleared in the IT system;
- **50% of the polling stations in each district** have been cleared in the IT system; and when
- **75% of the polling stations in each district** have been cleared in the IT system.