

ELECTION DIGEST

INTRODUCTION

The National Election Watch (NEW) is proud to introduce its maiden edition of ELECTION DIGEST, a bi-Monthly newsletter designed to inform citizens on key electoral reform activities, Paramount Chieftaincy elections and other election related activities and it features expert analyses in an engaging, easy-to-understand format. The Digest gives unbiased insights to bridge information gaps, promote transparency and encourage informed civic participation in the electoral process.

Disclaimer: Expert opinions in this ELECTION DIGEST remain the sole opinion of the individuals and their institutions. The purpose of this digest is to make issues around elections and elections related activities digestible to the public.

POSTPONEMENT OF 2025 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS.



On the 4th April, 2025, the National coordinator of the National Election Watch was invited to Liberty TV to discuss the postponement of the Population and Housing Census and its implication. Citizens must be reminded that the President proclaimed on the 8th August, 2024 that Sierra Leone's decennial National Population and Housing Census will commence on December 2nd- 15th 2025. The postponement of the census raised concerns among citizens and was discussed in a number of media houses. Statistics Sierra Leone in explaining the reasons for the postponement cited unresolved issues in the preparation process as the reason for the postponement.



In a visit to Statistics Sierra Leone, NEW was informed by Samuel Ansumana, Director of Communications and Public Relations that the postponement was triggered by expert recommendations.

According to Samuel Ansumana, following the president's official proclamation, Stats SL consulted with international partners including the United States Census Bureau, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) for the feasibility of having the census within the proclaimed timeline. This team formed an assessment mission from 13-17 January 2025 and identified critical gaps including the absence of a pilot census, which must be completed exactly one year prior to the actual census. Other issues raised by the assessment mission included the non-procurement of essential logistics such as tablets for data collection and the incomplete recruitment of census personnel. In addition, Sierra Leone was not captured in the UN's 2025 census calendar, and therefore the recommendation to reschedule the census. While the government initially resisted this recommendation because it would disrupt plans, Government had to agree to comply with global standards. Furthermore, Samuel Ansumana said that the postponement presents a mixed bag of implications. On the positive side, it will enhance credibility as the extra time allows Stats SL to meet international benchmarks, ensuring the census's legitimacy. It will also make room for robust preparations from cartography to staff training and thorough groundwork can now be completed. However, with results expected by March 2027, the census could collide with the 2028 election and campaign cycle, which could invite suspicion of manipulation.

Notwithstanding, Samuel Ansumana noted that Stats SL has a winning strategy with inclusion being the cornerstone. Stats SL has set up administrative machinery comprising critical committees including Resource mobilization committee, Technical Committee, Publicity Committee and District Census Committee. International partners have pledged financial support, while Stats SL with support from UNFPA has recruited specialized advisors, including a cartography expert and a Census Technical Adviser. Public advertisements are being made for recruitment of various cadre of staff including cartography staff, call center, via a portal and shortlisting is ongoing.

Stats SL has set up a census mechanism to work with a wide range of stakeholders such as CSOs, Political Parties and Paramount Chiefs.

PA ALIMAMY BAIO YEMBEH V ELECTED PARAMOUNT CHIEF OF KALANTHUBA CHIEFDOM



The Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs (MLG&CA) in collaboration with the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) has

concluded electoral processes including the finalization of the Chiefdom Councilors' list – the electoral college, declaration of rights, polling, counting and announcement of results in Kalanthuba Chiefdom, Tonkolili District.

On April 12, 2025, the Declaration of Rights process was conducted which is a crucial provision in the Paramount Chieftaincy Act of 2009. This is the process that validates the eligibility of aspirants from recognized ruling houses through which aspirants educate the chiefdom on their right to the throne. It also establishes the platform for voter education to stakeholders on their roles and responsibilities in the Paramount Chieftaincy (PC) election.

On Saturday, April 26, 2025, the Paramount Chieftaincy Election took place in Kalanthuba Chiefdom, Northern Sierra Leone with 7 candidates contesting. The elections were conducted under the oversight of Commissioner Abubakarr M. Koroma of ECSL and presided over by the Provincial Secretary Prince Alex Sorieba.

Key figures present included Assessor Chiefs PC Dr. Masakma Madibie and PC Alimamy Gbetgbo. A total of 356 Chiefdom Councilors voted at one polling center with two stations.

At the close of polling and counting Pa Alimamy Baio Yembeh V pulled the highest number of votes (288 votes)

and obtained 86.2% of valid votes above the threshold and was declared duly elected as Paramount Chief Kalanthuba Chiefdom.



TRIPARTITE TRACKER: MONTHLY STATUS REPORT



This section of the Digest tracks key milestones on electoral reforms based on the Electoral Systems and Management Bodies Review (Tripartite Committee) and Election Observation Mission (EOM) recommendations and related processes.

The Tripartite Steering Committee Secretariat (TSCS) has been established to coordinate, oversee and monitor the implementation of the TC recommendations (80). The secretariat is headed by a coordinator, supported by expert professionals. The Secretariat holds quarterly steering



committee meetings chaired by the Chief Minister. In order to monitor progress of the implementation, the Secretariat has initiated a maiden monthly inter-agency coordination meeting for all tripartite recommendation implementation institutions.

Since inception, the TSCS has paid initial courtesy calls to relevant stakeholders within the inter-agencies, political parties, development partners and civil society organizations including NEW.

FROM BOTTOM UP: SIERRA LEONE'S POLITICAL PARTIES AND LOWER-LEVEL ELECTIONS

Sierra Leone is in the season of lower-level elections. These elections are central to building democratic political party structures and fostering community participation in party politics. They serve as a test for upholding internal party democratic norms, as local party officials shape the candidate selection processes; especially for party flagbearers. As more citizens become interested in holding political office, elections at every level have become highly competitive and

intense. Outcomes of upper level elections are determined by the lower level elections. Failing to get delegates at the Lower level elections, disadvantages aspirants at the upper level elections.

For the upcoming 2028 elections, credibility will be a central theme shaping electoral delivery for all elections from the lower to national level. Therefore, free, transparent, and peaceful processes are crucial at this stage of the lower-level electoral process to foster party legitimacy and for the general citizens to trust political parties as democratic institutions.

The Legal Framework, as per the Political Parties Regulation Commission Act 2022, accords political parties the authority to design guidelines for conducting lower-level elections, and gives the PPRC the responsibility to monitor the process and ensure that they comply with their political party constitution. In the event a party-run election becomes acrimonious or unmanageable, as was witnessed in 2016, 2021 and even for the current lower level elections of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP), the PPRC can step in to conduct these elections upon the political party's request or in the event the matter goes to court and the court orders for PPRC's intervention.

LOWER-LEVEL ELECTIONS



The SLPP lower-level elections whilst peaceful and successful in most locations had issues in some location that called for PPRC's intervention. The issues generally included list tampering, sale of party cards to selected voters and in some

instances allegations of ballot stuffing which has led to petitions by aggrieved parties and violence in some areas in Kenema and Aberdeen community. The PPRC has followed up on the petitions and resolved most of the complaints by harmonizing delegate lists and recommended re-run in some instances and an election, where election did not take place.



APC Announces Internal Party Structure Elections Timeline:

The opposition All People's Congress (APC) has released the timeline for internal Party structure elections.

Lower-level conventions are slated to start on July 19, 2025, and the National Delegates Convention on February 19, 2026.

So far, several candidates, including young people and a woman, have made public declarations for the party flagbearer position.

Lower Level Elections: Key Observations & Trends

- ✓ **Factional Disputes:** Most violence stems from factional politics within the party and over candidate legitimacy.
- ✓ **Youth Involvement:** Politically mobilized youths are frequently the main perpetrators of violence.
- ✓ **Weak Accountability:** Despite police intervention, there are hardly public record of perpetrators being prosecuted.

National Election Watch (NEW) will continue to follow lower-level elections of all registered political parties in Sierra Leone and will highlight issues that might impact credible electoral processes.

INDIGESTION

Risk of Escalating Tensions

The challenges observed highlight the fragile state of intra-party democracy, as violence continues to undermine the integrity of participatory processes, especially elections. Disputes over lower-level elections often lead to factional divisions. Failure to resolve the aforementioned issues could deepen internal rifts within parties. This development also signals that the general elections might be chaotic if the internal elections are this violent. Peaceful elections are a vital feature of a healthy democracy.

Action Required

1. The Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion should lead in designing a National Strategy for addressing violence in elections. This can be part of the broader package of ongoing electoral reforms to enhance social cohesion.
2. Political parties should consider establishing transparent, inclusive, and accountable internal dispute-resolution mechanisms across the regions. These structures would help manage grievances arising from intra-party contests and

reduce the escalation of conflicts that often lead to factionalism and violence.

3. Government, Political parties, civil society, and democratic institutions like the National Commission for Democracy (NCD) should intensify civic education efforts to promote non-violence, tolerance, and peaceful co-existence. Such programmes should not only target youths who are mostly the perpetrators and victims, but also the instigators of such violence, who are typically the lead political actors.

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