

Frequently Asked Questions *about* **VOTING IN SIERRA LEONE**

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

To learn more about the
National Electoral
Commission of
Sierra Leone,
please visit:
www.necsl.org

Why is it important for Sierra Leoneans to vote?

Participating in democratic election is a sovereign right. It enables citizens to express their views, affect political change, and determine national leadership in a way that is peaceful.

Who is eligible to vote in Sierra Leone?

Every citizen, aged 18 and over – regardless of sex, ethnicity, language, religion, status, or place of origin – is legally eligible to participate in elections, provided that they are registered.

When and where do voters go to cast their ballot papers?

Voters may cast their ballot papers on 7 March 2018, from 7am to 5pm. All voters who have entered the queue before 5pm will be allowed to vote, even if the polling centre closes before they have reached the front of the queue.

How do voters know which polling centre and station they should go to?

Voters may only cast their ballot papers in the centres where they are assigned. These will be the same centres where they registered to vote. An exception is made for those who are on official election duty, such as polling staff and police, who may vote in the centres where they are working. Once they are at their assigned polling centre, signage will direct them to the correct polling station. Otherwise, they may ask the Polling Centre Queue Controller for assistance.

Must all voters queue before voting?

Every voter is required to wait, patiently, in the queue to vote. However, polling centre staff should give priority to pregnant, disabled or elderly voters.

Who is allowed into polling stations/centres?

NEC staff, voters who are registered (to that particular station), Party/Candidate Agents, Observers and Media are allowed to enter the polling station. However, each voter casts his/her ballot paper, behind a voting screen that ensures the secrecy of his/her vote. Only the voter is allowed behind the screen, unless the voter requires the assistance of a helper (such as in the case of disabled or elderly voters).

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If a voter does not bring his/her voter identification card, is he/she still allowed to vote?

All eligible citizens who have registered to vote are entitled to participate in the election. However, voters are strongly encouraged to bring their voter identification cards with them.

In the case that a voter does not bring a voter identification card, he/she will be required to produce either an Attestation from the National Electoral Commission (NEC), proof of identity (national identification card, NASSIT card, national passport or driver's license) or witness (Paramount or Section Chief, religious or traditional leader).

What are the procedures for voting?

There are several simple steps to follow, when voting; and NEC staff will be nearby, to guide voters through the process:

1. Join the queue, outside the polling station.

While you are in the queue, the Polling Station Queue Controller will confirm that you are queuing at the correct station.

2. Enter the polling station and confirm your identity.

Inside the polling station, a Voter Identification Officer will confirm that your left index finger is not already inked (because this would indicate that you had already voted) and ensures that the details on your voter identification card are the same as those recorded in the voter register. You will be asked to sign or put a thumb print beside your personal details in the register.

3. Collect your Presidential and Parliamentary ballot papers.

There are four elections being held on the same day. First you will receive two ballot papers – one for the Presidential election, and one for the Parliamentary election. The Ballot Paper Issuer will detach the ballot papers from the ballot paper booklet, fold them (first vertically and then horizontally), and validate them with a stamp on the back, before giving them to you.



4. Mark your Presidential and Parliamentary ballot papers.

You will be directed to a voting screen, where you may mark your ballot papers, in privacy. Place a mark in the box beside the single candidate of

your choice, on both of the ballot papers. Do not write your name or any other words on the ballot paper. Fold each of the ballot papers separately, in the same way they have already been folded.

5. Cast your Presidential and Parliamentary ballot papers.

A Ballot Box Controller will ensure that you place each of your ballot papers in the correct box. (Ballot papers are divided, according to election. Presidential ballot papers must be placed in one box; and Parliamentary ballot papers in another).

6. Collect your Local Council ballot papers.

After having cast your first two ballot papers, you will be directed to another Ballot Paper Issuer. Once the Issuer has confirmed that your finger has not already been inked, you will receive your second (final) two ballot papers. Like the first set of ballot papers, these will be detached from a booklet, folded, and validated with a stamp on the back.

7. Mark your Local Council ballot papers.

Again, you will be directed to a voting screen, where you may mark your ballot papers, in privacy. Place a mark in the box beside the candidate(s) of your choice, on both of the ballot papers. Fold both of the ballot papers, the same way they have already been folded.

8. Cast your Local Council ballot papers.

A Ballot Box Controller will ensure that you place each of your ballot papers in the correct box. (Ballot papers are divided, according to election. Chair/Mayor ballot papers must be placed in one box and Councillor ballot papers in another).

9. Have your finger inked and quietly leave the polling station.

The Ballot Box Controller will mark your left index finger with indelible ink. This indicates that you have participated in the election and ensures that every voter votes only once. You should then leave the station and allow others to vote, without distraction.

What is the proper way to mark a ballot paper?

Voters should make a mark inside the box, beside the candidate of their choice. This might be a \surd , an X, a finger print, or any mark reflects clear intention of the voter without affecting his/her privacy.

Is there a wrong way to mark a ballot paper?

A fundamental principle of democratic election is that votes should be anonymous. Therefore, there must be no words, signature or hand writing on the ballot paper – either inside or outside of the box. Voters must not write their names or any other words on their ballot papers. They must be sure to make their intention clear and should make their mark only in one box, beside the candidate of their choice.

What happens to ballot papers that are wrongly marked?

If the intent of the voter is not clear (for example, if the voter has made a mark inside more than one box, or made a mark outside of the available

boxes), his/her vote will not be recognised. It is therefore very important that voters make only one, clear mark on the ballot paper – inside the box, beside the candidate of their choice.

What if a voter makes a mistake while filling out the ballot paper?

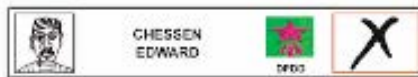
If a voter makes a mistake while completing the ballot paper, he/she should simply bring the paper back to the Ballot Paper Issuer. The Issuer will write the word “spoiled” across the back of the wrongly marked ballot paper and provide the voter with a new ballot paper.

Can a person vote on behalf of someone else, if they bring that person’s voter identification card with them?

No. Every voter must cast their ballot paper, in person.

Can illiterate persons vote? How?

Ballots include the names of candidates, their personal photograph and their party emblem. This way, all voters can easily identify their preferred candidates, even if they do not read.



What assistance is available to disabled voters?

Wherever possible, polling centres are on premises that are accessible to wheelchairs and to those who face challenges with mobility. Ramps will be used where premises are not wheelchair-accessible; and every polling station will have at least one screen that is lower, in relation to the height of wheelchairs.

Some public service announcements are available in sign language so that they may be understood by those who are deaf or hearing-impaired.

Disabled and elderly voters are permitted to be accompanied by their own appointed helpers – even behind the voting screens.

This year, for the first time ever, Sierra Leone will use tactile ballots. These ballots enable blind and visually-impaired persons to identify their preferred candidate by feeling the ballot paper, all though they may not see it. This affords them even greater independence as they do not require personal assistance. (However, they are still entitled to personal assistance if they choose).

Can those detained in prison vote?

Citizens who are serving prison sentences are not entitled to participate in elections. Those who are on remand in prison are entitled to vote. However, there are currently no provisions that enable them to vote.

Can eligible voters cast ballots from outside of Sierra Leone?

There are currently no provisions to accommodate voters outside of Sierra Leone.

Are there any limitations to the rights of voters?

Voters are strictly prohibited from:

- Attempting to vote if they have not been registered;
- Buying, selling, forging or giving away voter identification cards;
- Impersonating others;
- Voting more than once;
- Using bribery, personal influence or threats as a way to coerce another person to vote, not to vote, or to vote for a particular candidate;
- Bearing symbols and emblems of candidates or political parties within the voting area;
- Infringing on the secrecy of others;
- Stopping, obstructing or disturbing an election;
- Interfering with any election materials;
- Acting or encouraging others to act in a disorderly manner.

What should voters do if they observe fraud or irregular behavior at a polling centre?

Any voter who observes fraud or irregularities at the polling centre should approach the Presiding Officer who will record the complaint in his/her journal and address it promptly.

In the case that he/she is unable to resolve the issue, the Presiding Officer will bring the complaint to the Polling Center Manager, who will record the complaint in his/her journal and address it promptly.

The journals of both officials will be returned, with other election materials to the District Electoral Officer.

In the case that the complainant is not satisfied with the response of either officer, he/she should address the District Electoral Officer, in writing. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the District Electoral Officer, he/she should refer the complaint to the Election Offences Court, or petition the results of the election to the High Court.