



Republic of Liberia

National Elections Commission

**Counting Procedures for the Election of the President, the
Senate and Members of the House of Representatives of
the Republic of Liberia
11 October 2005**

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Part 1-General Overview

1. The Count

Counting the ballots in the elections for the President, Senators and members of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Liberia will take place immediately upon the conclusion of polling. Staff of the polling place will conduct the count.

Presiding Officers of polling place are responsible for organising the count in their respective polling places. The polling place Presiding Officers will monitor the counts to ensure that the proper procedures are followed at all times.

There are three phases of the counting procedures:

- preparing the polling place for the count;
- reconciling the ballots in each ballot box;
- sorting and counting the votes.

Carefully following these procedures will enable the count to be seen as fair and transparent.

The count for the Presidential election will take place first, followed by the count for the Senate and then finally the members of the House of Representatives.

At the end of the count the Record of the Count form will be signed and stamped by the Presiding Officer, which will officially endorse the result of the count. The stamp used for the Result of the Count forms is the same stamp used to validate the ballot papers. Party representatives may also sign the form if they wish. If party representatives are not unwilling to sign the form, the Presiding Officer will record this information in the Presiding Officer's Journal. The Presiding Officer will then publicly display the forms at the polling place.

Presidential, Senate and House of Representatives' Results of the Count forms (C01, C02 and C03) will contain the pre-printed names of the candidates.

Following the receipt of results at the county offices the results for each election will be tallied, both hard copy and electronically. These results will include the votes obtained by each candidate for the Presidential, Senate and House of Representatives elections. Following the tally at the county offices the results will be sent to the tally center in Monrovia. More detailed information on the tallying and announcement of results will be detailed in the tallying procedures.

2. Transparency of the process

It is essential that all stages of the counting process are transparent. It should not be possible for any person to have grounds for claiming that the process was open to fraud.

The counting process should be organized in such a way that observers and representatives can clearly see all stages. Clear guidelines on polling place layout and how each stage of the process should be carried out will be detailed in the polling and counting procedures manual.

Part 2-Preparing the Polling Place for Counting

1. Counting preparations

Following the conclusion of polling the ballot boxes will be sealed in order to allow the polling place staff to prepare the polling place for the count. The boxes should then be placed in a visible, separate area where they will remain until the actual count begins. Under no circumstances shall the count commence before all preparations are fully carried out and the polling place Presiding Officer has given clearance to begin.

2. Preparing the polling place for count

Following the conclusion of polling the polling place will be reorganized according to guidelines contained in the counting procedures manual.

Particular attention should be paid to the layout of the tables where the actual counting will take place. The tables should be placed directly in front of where the observers and representatives will be situated. The representatives and electoral observers should be able to clearly view the handling of ballot papers at all times. Under no circumstances may representatives or observers touch any ballot paper at any stage of the process.

3. Preparation of materials

All materials used during polling that are not required for counting, should be packed and stored in such a way that they do not interfere in the counting process. All materials required for the counting process should be carefully checked and placed in an appropriate area before the commencement of the count. The counting manual will detail the materials required for conducting the count.

In preparation for the commencement of the count the tables where the actual count shall take place should be completely empty. Materials required during the count will be supplied, as needed, by the Presiding Officer. At no time should there be a pen or marker on or near the counting tables.

The Presiding Officer will ensure that all the necessary preparations have been carried out in the polling place before the count can commence.

Part 3 Reconciliation of ballots

1. Prior to Commencing the Count

It is essential for an efficient and transparent counting process that all parties involved are clear of their role in the process. Therefore once the polling place has been prepared for counting, and prior to the commencement of the reconciliation process, the Presiding Officer will briefly explain the entire process to all those present in the polling place. The Presiding Officer will pay particular attention to the role of representatives and observers and what they are permitted to do and what they must not do.

The reconciliation of ballot papers in the ballot boxes with the number of ballot papers issued to voters is the first step in the process. This step will be carried out separately for the three elections.

2. Opening the Ballot Boxes

It is important that party representatives and observers witness the opening of ballot boxes as this stage of the process is vital for the procedural integrity of the process as a whole. If however there are no representatives or observers present the Presiding Officer will commence the process regardless.

Before a ballot box is opened, the Presiding Officer will confirm the seal numbers recorded on the Presiding Officer's worksheet to the actual numbers on the ballot boxes. The Presiding Officer will call these numbers aloud. The Presiding Officer will confirm that all seals are found intact.

The Presiding Officer will cut the one of the plastic seals on the side of the ballot box and empty the contents onto the table. The slot seal on top of the ballot box remains sealed. Seal numbers used to seal the ballot box at the end of the reconciliation will be recorded on the polling place journal.

The ballots for the Presidential elections will be reconciled first, followed by the ballots for the Senate election and then finally the House of Representatives election.

3. Reconciliation of Ballots

The Presiding Officer will open the Presidential ballot box, empty the contents on the table, and display the ballot box to confirm that it is empty.

The ballot papers shall be unfolded one at a time and placed **face down** on the table into bundles of 50 so that only the back of the ballot paper is visible. Any ballots without the official ballot stamp should be placed in a separate bundle without looking at the front of the ballot.

Unstamped ballot papers will be considered invalid. A rubber band should be placed around each bundle of 50 ballot papers and the bundle recounted to confirm the quantity.

All ballots are to be unfolded and placed face down on the table without observing how the fronts of the ballots are marked.

The Presiding Officer will add the totals of stamped and unstamped ballots to determine the total number of ballot papers in the ballot box.

If any ballot paper is found to have been placed in the incorrect ballot box the Presiding Officer will transfer that ballot paper to the correct ballot box when the ballot box is opened. As the marked ballot paper is very sensitive material special care should be given to misplaced ballots in different ballot boxes.

The total number of ballot papers, for each election, is recorded at Row **D** of the Presiding Officer's worksheet (P01). The number of ballots taken from the ballot box, at Row **D** of the Presiding Officer's worksheet, should be equal to the number of ballots that should be in the ballot box [Row **C** of the Presiding Officer's worksheet (P01)].

Any ballot paper discrepancy is recorded at Row **E** of the Presiding Officer's Worksheet. If there is no discrepancy, at the end of the reconciliation process this ballot box may go forward to the next stage of the counting process which is sorting and counting.

If the discrepancy is less than 10 ballot papers per 500 ballots, which is less than 2%, the Presiding Officer will continue with the sorting and counting of the ballot papers.

In this instance, the number of the ballot papers will be recorded on the form (Presiding Officer's Worksheet P01) and the sorting of the ballot papers for each candidate will start.

If there is still a discrepancy, the Presiding Officer will check envelopes with spoiled and discarded ballot papers, as well number of unused ballot papers against the Presiding Officer's Worksheet to ensure that all records and calculations on the Worksheet (P01) are correct.

If two polling places were collocated in the same room, the number of ballots in the ballot box from the second polling place should also be reconciled, in case any voters mistakenly put their ballots in the wrong box.

If there is no longer a discrepancy, the ballot box may go forward to the next stage of the counting process, which is sorting and counting.

If there is still a discrepancy, the ballot papers should be recounted.

In the event that the number of ballot papers in the ballot box is less than the number issued to voters

If the discrepancy is not more than 10 ballot papers per 500 ballots, the Presiding Officer will record the discrepancy on the Presiding Officer's Worksheet (P01), and make a note in the Polling Place Journal.

This ballot box may go forward to the next stage of the counting process, sorting and counting.

In the event that the number of ballot papers in the ballot box is more than the number of ballot papers issued to voters

The Presiding Officer's Worksheet is checked to ensure that the calculations on the worksheet (P01) are correct.

If the discrepancy is not more than 10 ballot papers per 500 ballots, the Presiding Officer will record the discrepancy on the Presiding Officer's Worksheet (P01), and make a note in the Polling Place Journal. This ballot box may go forward to the next stage of the counting process, which is sorting and counting.

In the event that the discrepancy is more than 10 ballot papers per 500 ballots, the county office must investigate the reasons for the discrepancy.

Ballot boxes with discrepancy of more than 10 ballot papers per 500 ballots will nonetheless be counted and the results put on public display. Party representatives and observers will be informed, however, that the displayed results are strictly provisional.

Upon conclusion of the reconciliation of the Presidential elections and after the Presiding Officer's Worksheet (P01) form has been completed, the Senate ballot box will be opened and reconciled as per the steps outlined above. The same procedures will apply for the House of Representatives ballot box.

After all the ballot boxes are reconciled, sorting and counting of the ballot papers will start following the same order as for reconciliation (Presidential, Senate, House of Representatives).

Part 4 Counting the Votes

1. The Presidential Election

After the reconciliation has been satisfactorily completed at the polling place, and all reconciliation problems have been resolved, the Presiding Officer will announce the total number of ballot papers in the ballot box, and writes down the number of ballot papers found in the ballot box on the Presiding Officer's Worksheet (P01).

The ballot papers for the Presidential election will be counted first, followed by the ballot papers for the Senate and House of Representatives elections.

The Presidential Record of the Count (C01) form is used to control and document this process.

For the Senate and House of Representatives counts, the Senate Record of the Count (C02) and House of Representatives Record of the Count (C03) forms will be used to control and document the process.

2. Validity of Ballot Papers

Voters record their choice by marking the square on the ballot paper corresponding to the candidate of their choice with a pen or thumbprint. The Presiding Officer and polling staff must interpret this requirement as liberally as possible.

Ballot papers are valid if the intention of the voter is clear, even if the mark includes marks made by implements other than pens or the voter's thumbprint. If it is unclear which candidate the voter intended to vote for, the ballot paper will be placed in the 'invalid' stack.

Counting Procedures cannot anticipate every situation. Detailed information on the validity of ballot papers will be detailed in the polling and counting manual.

If possible, the Presiding Officer should personally check all votes that are declared invalid. If there is a dispute about the validity of any ballot paper, the Presiding Officer is the final arbiter.

3. Sorting and counting of votes

The elastic bands will first be taken off the bundles of ballot papers. The ballot papers are then sorted into stacks according to the voters' choices of candidates. There is also a stack for invalid ballot papers. The stack of invalid ballot papers is set to one side, in clear view of all party representatives and observers. The Presiding Officer will place written cards with the names of each candidate that receives votes to help with the sorting of ballot papers. A card for invalid ballots will also be written.

After all the ballot papers are sorted, the team will check every ballot paper in every stack to make sure it has been sorted correctly. The Presiding Officer will check all ballots in the 'invalid' stack to ensure that they are invalid.

The Presiding Officer of the polling place will then count the votes in bundles of 50 ballots for each candidate, with a rubber band placed around each bundle. Quantities of less than 50 ballots will not be banded, but will be held together with a clip, and the number of such ballots will be written on a piece of paper.

The Presiding Officer will also assign a second member of the polling place to recount the ballots to confirm the total is reached twice before any record on the number of votes is written on the Record of the Count form.

Before any record is done for the total of votes, invalid ballot papers should be counted and the number should be recorded on the Presidential Record of the Count (C01) form. (S)he will then record the number of votes obtained for each candidate.

When the ballots have been counted, a rubber band is placed around each bundle of ballot papers for each candidate separately and the results of the count will be transcribed onto the Presidential Record of Count form (C01). The following will be transcribed:

- The number of the votes for each candidate;
- The number of invalid ballot papers;
- The total number of the votes.

The Presiding Officer will announce the results for each candidate loudly so that representatives and observers present at the polling place can record the results.

A party representative that objects to the recorded results at the polling place may request from the Presiding Officer to record his/her opinion in the polling place Journal.

Two copies of the Presidential Record of the Count (C01) form will be signed by the Presiding Officer and by any party representatives that wish to do so. The form will also be stamped by the Presiding Officer of the polling place at the end of the count. One copy of the Presidential Record of Count (C01) form will be displayed at the polling place for public viewing. Party representatives will also receive copies of the results if they so wish.

One copy of the Presidential Record of the Count form will be placed in a Tamper Evident Envelope and sent to the county office. All the ballot papers will then be placed in the Presidential ballot box, which is then sealed, with the seal numbers recorded on the Presidential Record of the Count (C01) form. These seal numbers are read aloud so that they can be recorded by representatives and observers.

For sorting and counting of the Senate and House of Representatives ballot, the same procedures will be followed as were followed for the Presidential ballot.

Part 5-The Close of the Count

1. Displaying electoral results

Presiding Officers will display results for all three elections at the polling place once the count is completed.

2. Packaging of sensitive materials

After the completion of the count, all ballot boxes containing ballots and all Tamper Evident Envelopes must be returned to the NEC county electoral office. The Presiding Officer of the polling place packs the sensitive polling place materials as follows:

For each Polling Place

Tamper-Evident Envelope (TEE) Number 1

- Stubs of Used Ballot Papers
- Unused Ballot Papers and Partially Used Ballot Papers
- Spoiled Ballot Paper Envelope
- Discarded Ballot Paper Envelope

Tamper-Evident Envelope (TEE) Number 2

- Final Registration Roll
- Unused Ballot Box Seals
- Polling Place Staff Badges
- Polling Place Declaration of Secrecy
- Official Stamp (validating stamp for ballot papers)

Tamper-Evident Envelope (TEE) Number 3

- Presiding Officer's Worksheet
- Presiding Officer's Journal
- Presidential Record of the Count
- Senate Record of the Count
- House of Representatives Record of the count.

The contents of TEE 3 are to be used by the NEC county electoral office to add together the results from all the polling places in their constituency in order to publish the provisional results of the elections in their county.

3. Disposing of non-sensitive materials

All items, including voting screens, must be packed into the polling kit and returned to the county electoral office and from there to the county storage facility. It is important that all materials are returned as these can be used for the run-off elections.

Polling place staff must ensure that no election material is left behind.

4. Delivering materials to the county electoral office

The Presiding Officers carefully pack all materials and hand them over to the Presiding Officer who is responsible for the collection of materials by ESO/ES teams. The Presiding Officers must fill in Transfer of Electoral Materials forms (P03) before handing over materials to the Presiding Officer in charge.

The Presiding Officer in charge of collecting materials signs the Transfer of Electoral Materials form upon receiving the materials from the other Presiding Officers in the voting precinct. The Presiding Officer handing over the materials keeps the original of the form and gives a copy to the Presiding Officer in charge of collection.

The ES/ESO team will be responsible for ensuring that all material is safely returned to the county electoral office.

Annex 1: Forms to be used during counting process

Form number	Form name	How many?	Used during	Purpose
C01	Presidential record of the count	Two per polling place	Counting	To record the results of the Presidential election
C02	Senate record of the count	Two per polling place	Counting	To record the results of the Senate election
C03	House of Representatives record of the count	Two per polling place	Counting	To record the results of the House of Representatives election