



Media Reform Coordinating Group-Sierra Leone

MEDIA SITUATION ROOM REPORT FOR SATURDAY 24th JUNE 2023

(ELECTIONS DAY)

INTRODUCTION

This report is a synopsis of the activities of media practitioners/journalists across the country. The media performance is gauged against the provisions of the Independent Media Commission's Elections (Coverage and Reportage) Regulations 2022.

On a general note; the various media channels (Radio and Television) provided coverage of the voting process across the country; some in real time (Live); and others through recorded reports. The Independent Radio Network (IRN) provided the largest source of information with its member radio stations across the country covering and reporting on the elections.

SOUTHERN REGION

In the South, it is reported that there was little or no cause for alarm. Our monitors said that 'things are peaceful' and that there had not been any chaos or panic. They said that most of the radio stations in the district were linked to the Independent Radio Network (IRN) although there were few others that were doing independent broadcasts and conforming to the IMC Elections Coverage and Reportage Guidelines.

NORTH-WEST REGION

The Northwest Region, there were reports from three (3) radio stations (*Bankasoka, Kolenten* and *Lunsar*) about alleged intimidations and tensions from political party stakeholders, (predominantly from the All Peoples Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)). *Radio Kolenten*, alleged that one Alimamy H. Bangura believed to be a member of the SLPP was disturbing the peaceful process; while in Lunsar, there were allegations about acts of intimidation from members of the APC.



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EASTERN REGION

As far as the East is concerned, our monitors said that media houses and journalists were executing their duties professionally and that as at the time of the report, things were peaceful and normal. They said that the IMC and the MRCG had contributed to this by training the journalists very well, noting that no professional misconduct had been reported in the region.

A Social Media post by an APC Strongman, Dr. Richard Konteh, alleging that the APC Ward Coordinator, in Kenema was beaten by SLPP thugs; was debunked by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists' I-Verify team, as false.

NORTHERN REGION

MRCG's Monitor in Makeni reported a peaceful and conducive atmosphere, around the city.

There was an alleged case of someone being in illegal possession of ballot papers; the matter was handed over to the police. All the radio stations in the City were broadcasting, in accordance with the IMC Code of Practice.

WEST AREA URBAN

The Public Service Broadcaster, *SLBC TV* has a dedicated TV Elections programme. The programme did not contain any hate speech; or inciting or misleading messages or information, from political parties or their supporters. The *SLBC* hosted the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone staff, explaining the reason for the delay in the commencement of voting in certain areas in the country.

AYV TV and *Star TV* transmitted the voting process, since the commencement of voting. *AVY* had an 'On the road' programme and reporters were seen covering different parts across the country.

Star TV also had a studio-based moderator, with reporters filing in from various parts of the country especially in Freetown. Both *AYV TV* and *Star TV* provided depth coverage of the voting process of the APC Presidential candidate and the Mayoral candidate comparative to the *SLBC TV*.



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SOCIAL MEDIA

MRCG Monitors, observed the misuse of social media, by both individuals and political actors. Throughout the day, social media was awash with videos, photographs and texts, making accusations and counter accusations. One of the most prominent claims include; a letter purported to have been written by the APC Freetown Mayoral Candidate, Yvonne Aki-Swayer, calling for the boycott of the elections. Fact checking organization, Dubawa debunked the letter as False!

There were claims about ballot stuffing, and other forms of irregularities around the voting process in some parts of the country. SLAJ's I-verify also published a factcheck on one of such cases where social media claims suggested that someone had pre-marked ballot papers in favor of SLPP Presidential Candidate, Julius Maada Bio. The verdict of the Fact checks was that the materials and papers were voter education materials and not authentic ballot papers.

Conclusion/General Observation:

On the Election Day (24th June, 2023); the mainstream media (Radio and Television) acquitted itself with credibility and glory through its Elections Day programming. The real test, however, for the media will be the period between post-elections and the announcement of the Results.



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MEDIA SITUATION ROOM REPORT FOR SUNDAY 25th JUNE 2023

(POST-ELECTIONS DAY)

INTRODUCTION

This report is a continuation of a rundown of the activities of media practitioners/journalists across the country. The media performance is gauged against the provisions of the Independent Media Commission's Elections (Coverage and Reportage) Regulations 2022.

The various media channels (Radio and Television) provided coverage of the counting process, at the various polling stations across the country; some in real time (Live); and others through recorded reports. Provisional results from polling stations are being announced by the Independent Radio Network (IRN). No winner has been announced, but then, there were scenes of jubilation by some members of the APC and the SLPP.

SOUTHERN REGION

Our monitor in the South informed that the situation was still normal and that acts of intimidation and incitements had not been recorded. The monitor said that the APC, SLPP, Civil Society Organizations and party agents were rigorously monitoring the processes along with the police. It was however reported that whilst most stations were linked with the IRN, there were few others that were still doing independent broadcasts.

NORTH-WEST REGION

The monitor said that things were peaceful and calm, but that falsified social media projections of the outcome of the Multi-Tier Elections, have the tendency to cause chaos, panic and incitements.

EASTERN REGION

Our monitor said that almost all radio stations were still linked to IRN, which is announcing, in no particular order, the provisional results from Polling Stations, across the country. A peaceful and calm atmosphere was however reported.



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NORTHERN

MRCG's Monitor in Makeni reported that as a follow-up on the alleged irregular activities that were believed to have occurred on polling day (ballot stuffing), the police were currently handling the situation, but stated that a final verdict was yet to be made on those matters.

WESTERN AREA URBAN

IRN's breakfast show dedicated most of its time to announcing the provisional results as well as endeavoring to manage citizens' expectations on the outcome.

AYV TV reported how the tallying was ongoing in all district headquarters and that the presence of stakeholders was felt.

The *SLBC TV* was also on air and there were reports about the tallying processes across the country.

A radio station, located in the east of Freetown, *Justice FM 89.3* Special Elections programme projected that there will be victory for the ruling SLPP; based on the provisional results they claimed to have in their possession.

SOCIAL MEDIA

MRCG monitors, observed a plethora of social media posts, with claims and counter claims, by the political parties, their supporters and political pundits. This misinformation and disinformation on social media, is fueled by the anxiety of the citizenry, regarding the outcome of the vote. SLPP and APC supporters unofficially released results; claiming victory in their respective strongholds.

The SLPP National Secretary General, Napoleon Koroma, in a Press Statement, published on social media; claims a Landslide victory for his party.

Some of the candidates also amplified those claims. SLPP Freetown Mayoral aspirant, Mohamed Gento Kamara, tweeted that he was in the lead; whilst APC supporters shared a purported result sheet from Falaba District claiming victory.

Anonymous users on WhatsApp also shared various unofficial elections results on social media.



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CONCLUSION/GENERAL OBSERVATION

Social media has become a major channel for the dissemination of misleading information. Radio and Television stations, have so far refrained from amplifying such claims.



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MEDIA SITUATION ROOM REPORT FOR MONDAY 26th JUNE 2023

(POST- ELECTIONS DAY)

INTRODUCTION

The report is another continuation of analyses from the MRCG Media Situation Room where monitors in the regions provide firsthand information about the media's performance in their respective Regions. Such reports are assessed in line with specific parameters regarding media contents (Radio, Television, and Newspapers) after the close of the June 24th 2023, polls.

SOUTHERN REGION

Our monitor in the South gave an account of how APC and SLPP supporters were beginning to claim electoral victory even before the official announcement, by the ECSL. Same was seen and monitored via social media, specifically Facebook, WhatsApp and TikTok. During a phone-in programme, on *All-out radio FM 92.9* Bo, listeners raised concerns about managing their expectations.

Our Southern monitor also reported that at the ECSL regional tally centre, APC representatives alleged that ECSL personnel were aggressive, but it was reported that the matter was later settled, amicably. The monitor also refuted claims about alleged APC agents that were believed to have been 'thrown and chased out' of polling centres in the South during the voting process.

NORTH-WEST REGION

The situation is said to be peaceful and that people were awaiting the final announcement although it is said that social media misinformation was still an issue.

EASTERN REGION

Our monitor said that on *radio Nongowa 101.3 FM*, the police personnel, media wing, Brima James Musa was questioned by journalist Bassie David Lahai regarding inadequate security during polling day. The officer however said that they did scan the environment and realized that there were areas that presented minor security threats.



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NORTHERN REGION

Reports from the North indicate that the situation was normal and that people were still following IRN's announcement of the provisional Presidential elections' reports. The unofficial announcement of the elections results on social media continues unabated.

WESTERN AREA URBAN

The *Justice Radio, 98.5 FM* in East Freetown, claims that IRN has been compromised and that people should stop listening to IRN. The station went further to declare that there will be no Presidential Run-off Elections; as Julius Maada Bio of the SLPP has won on the first ballot. *Justice Radio* also reported that the SLPP Mayoral Candidate for the Freetown Municipality; Mohamed Gento Kamara had won the race. The claims are in breach of the IMC's Electoral Coverage and Reportage Regulations 2022.

SLBC TV continued to give general updates on the atmosphere across the country; while IRN partner radio stations continue to announce provisional from various ECSL Polling centres, across the country.

AYV and *Star TV* were also giving updates while preaching messages of peace and national cohesion.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media circulation of misinformation was active on Monday 26 June 2023. *AYV Newspaper* was a target on Monday as its front page was manipulated with a fake superimposed online editing. The fake newspaper had a frontpage report; titled "Inter Religious Council congratulates Dr. Samura Kamara as president elect." *AYV* subsequently debunked the claim.

Social Media claims of victory by the two dominant political parties were fake and unverified.

CONCLUSION/GENERAL OBSERVATION

The deliberate attempts by political parties, especially the APC and the SLPP, including their supporters to make pronouncements on the outcome of the elections have not helped situations.



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Attempting to pronounce the outcome of the election is not only, misleading and inciting, but could also be a catalyst for political unrest and violence. However, the IRN partner radio stations continue to remain a trusted source of information for public consumption.

On Monday 26th June, 2023, Sierra Leone's Electoral Commission made a partial (60%) announcement of results, giving Julius Maada Bio of SLPP the lead with 1,067,666 of votes while Samura Kamara of APC pulled 793,751 of votes so far.



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MEDIA SITUATION ROOM REPORT FOR TUESDAY 27th JUNE 2023

(POST- ELECTIONS DAY)

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL ANALYSES

Our monitors' report of Tuesday June 27th captured the speculations and counter speculations after Monday's announcement of 60% of results from the five Regional Tallying centres. Some quarters of the main opposition, the All People's Congress Party (APC) have questioned the authenticity of the tallied 60% which was pronounced by the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL). Others believe that the APC will emerge victorious when the remaining 40% would have been announced.

We observed that members of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) were forecasting what they saw as 'a resounding victory' and; five more years in governance for Julius Maada Bio. All of this was happening at a time when the ECSL was yet to announce the remaining 40% of tallied results.

There were sections of the media that were still making projections and mathematical calculations, for a win/loss or run-off situation.

There were also reports about some unrest at Masiaka (47 Miles outside Freetown) with video circulating on WhatsApp showing some angry youths mounting road-blocks, saying no vehicles will be allowed to ply the routes. The video also showed one youth that was believed to have been shot dead. It was reported that teargas was used to disperse what was seen as some illegal gathering. The reaction of the youths at Masiaka may not be unconnected with the announcement of the 60% of tallied Polling Stations, by ECSL.

Later on Tuesday 27th June 2023, ECSL declared Julius Maada Bio of the SLPP as winner of the June 24th elections, having polled, 1,566,932 (56.17%) of valid votes, defeating the main challenger, Samura Kamara of the APC who polled 1,148,262 (41.16%) of valid votes.



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CONCLUSION/GENERAL OBSERVATION

Unverified information and fake pronouncement of results are still prevalent on social media especially Facebook, TikTok and WhatsApp, mostly by either APC or SLPP supporters and sympathizers.

There were reports about how certain people faced challenges in understanding the 60% of tallied polling stations results that were read out on Monday June 26th 2023.

This caused some misinformation because there were unverified proclamations about who may have won the elections even before the final announcement of the additional 40% of results.



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MEDIA SITUATION ROOM REPORT FOR WEDNESDAY 28th JUNE 2023

(POST- ELECTIONS DAY)

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL ANALYSES

Wednesday 28th June 2023, being observed as the Muslim Feast of Eid ul Adha (a public holiday, throughout the country); Radio and Television stations, provided more coverage of the activities marking the feast day than for the post-declaration of the Presidential Results. On the other hand Newspapers did not make it to the newsstands.

The *African Young Voices TV*; however, ran a post-elections programme. The panelists, observed the need for peace and reconciliation after the elections; as well as pursuing the legal approach for addressing grievances.

Social media was also awash with comments and arguments regarding the outcome of the Presidential Elections. In the hours after the final announcement of results were pronounced and Julius Maada Bio declared winner, APC's Samura Kamara published on Facebook and Twitter that the results lack authenticity and transparency. He cited irregularities on the part of Sierra Leone's Electoral Commission.

On other Social media fora; WhatsApp, Facebook and TikTok, APC supporters and sympathizers held the view that the result was not a reflection of what they referred to as 'the people's will.' SLPP's supporters however accepted the ECSL's pronouncement. Some members of the SLPP remained in jubilant mood to the extent of targeting APC members with provocative and inciting messages.

Videos were also circulating on social media, mostly shared by APC faithful, alleging that some of their supporters were being harassed and chased out of their abode. The Office of National Security (ONS) however in a Press Release debunked the allegations and described the videos being circulated, as 'very old events' and urged the public to ignore them.

Our Eastern Region Monitor reported that *Kamboi Agriculture Radio 92.5 FM*, on Tuesday 27th June 2023 at 6:00 P.M, started playing provocative music and songs, following the announcement of the presidential results.



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The station was immediately called and advised against airing out messages that promote conflict, incitement and public disorder. The station was advised to operate within the IMC Media Code of Practice.

CONCLUSION/GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Speculations are rife on social media, regarding the outcome of the Freetown Mayoral Race. The Electoral Commission, is yet to declare a winner largely between Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr of the APC; and Mohamed Gento Kamara of the SLPP.



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MEDIA SITUATION ROOM REPORT FOR THURSDAY 29th JUNE 2023

(POST- ELECTIONS DAY)

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL ANALYSES

The MRCG monitors' report for Thursday June 29th 2023 observed that Samura Kamara of the APC was yet to accept the result of the June 24th 2023 elections.

A congratulatory message was said to have come from former President Ernest Bai Koroma. This however turned out to be fake.

On Wednesday 28th June, 2023, the European Union, Election Observation Mission called on Sierra Leone's Electoral Commission to 'promptly publish disaggregated results data at polling station level, to ensure transparency and public scrutiny.' The EU Mission added that it continues to observe the 'ongoing electoral process, including the ongoing tabulation of results for parliamentary and local council elections.'

A joint statement by the U.S, U.K, Ireland, Germany and the EU delegations noted that 'significant logistical problems hampered voting on election day in certain areas.' The statement also shared 'concerns on national and international observation missions about the lack of transparency in the tabulation process.' The statement, however, ended by stating that 'despite these difficulties, we remain committed to supporting democracy and the aspirations of the Sierra Leone people. We urge everyone to exercise restraint, respect the rule of law, and engage in peaceful dialogue to resolve disputes.'

In recent tweets, the leaders of Turkey, Liberia and Guinea Bissau have congratulated President Bio on his reelection, but some other leaders are yet to send in their 'expected congratulatory messages.'

The electronic media is relatively preaching messages of peace via radio and television. Two television programmes (*Wake Up Sierra Leone* and *Newspaper Review*) were broadcast on **AYV TV**. On the *Wake Up Sierra Leone*; the Chairman of the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion, Reverend Shodanke Johnson; appealed for peace and reconciliation. Another panelist, Moses Mambu, said that the National Elections Watch (NEW), Chairperson Marcella Samba-Sesay, usurped the powers of the ECSL, by the publication of NEW's Presidential Elections projections. While one of the panelists on *Newspaper Review* (William Sao Lamin) also



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on *AYV TV*; however, accused the Chairperson of NEW, Marcella Samba-Sesay of “trying to organise a Coup”; against President Bio. He claimed that the coup, was planned with Adebayor (the notorious Social Media Blogger) based in the Netherlands.

Most of the newspapers, reported the Swearing-in of President Bio; following his re-election; the *Forum Newspaper*, however carried a banner headline ‘Stolen verdict... ECSL steals majority victory.’

CONCLUSION/GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

For TV and radio, there are some issues of poor moderation, and programme production, as some of the presenters are ‘relatively new and inexperienced in media and journalism.’

The speculations continue on social media as to who will be the next mayor of Freetown; as well as for the other Municipal and District Councils.

All of this was happening even before the official pronouncement of those particular results by the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone.

Hate speech is still evident on social media, especially against the Chairperson of NEW, Marcella Samba-Sesay, whose organization had projected a Run-off in the Presidential Elections. There are still issues of misleading/false information, divisive and inciting messages.