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# EISA-LIEOM Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) Assessment of the Liberia 2023 General Elections



## **Acronyms**

<b>BVR</b>	<b>Biometric Voter Registration</b>
<b>CEDAW</b>	<b>Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women</b>
<b>CSOs</b>	<b>Civil Society Organizations</b>
<b>EISA</b>	<b>The Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa</b>
<b>EU</b>	<b>European Union</b>
<b>FPTP</b>	<b>First Past the Post</b>
<b>GESI</b>	<b>Gender Equality and Social Inclusion</b>
<b>GIZ</b>	<b>German Agency for International Development Cooperation</b>
<b>IEOM</b>	<b>International Election Observation Mission</b>
<b>LTO</b>	<b>Long Term Observers</b>
<b>MoU</b>	<b>Memorandum of Understanding</b>
<b>NEC</b>	<b>National Elections Commission</b>
<b>NUOD</b>	<b>National Union of Disabled</b>
<b>PAPD</b>	<b>Pro-poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity</b>
<b>PwD</b>	<b>Persons with disability</b>
<b>SDGs</b>	<b>Sustainable Development Goals</b>
<b>UNDP</b>	<b>United Nations Development Programme</b>
<b>USAID</b>	<b>United States Agency for International Development</b>

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## 1. Introduction

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This report presents the findings of a comprehensive election assessment focusing on gender and social inclusion during the Liberia 2023 Presidential and Legislative elections. The report evaluates the current state of gender equality and the inclusion of marginalized groups within the political landscape of Liberia. The assessment identifies existing challenges, gaps, and potential strategies to promote inclusivity and equal participation in the electoral process.

Liberia, like many other countries, recognizes the importance of gender equality and social inclusion in establishing a fair and representative democracy. This assessment highlights the progress made, as well as the persisting barriers that hinder the full participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.

The report encompasses a multi-dimensional analysis, considering various aspects such as gender representation, political participation, perception, and social inclusion. It further outlines significant achievements and provides recommendations to address the identified challenges and enhance gender and social inclusion within Liberia's electoral system.

## 2. Contextual Background

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Liberia, the African continent's oldest independent country, has a history marked by periods of conflict, colonization, and post-war reconstruction. The civil war that ravaged the country from 1989 to 2003 left behind a devastated nation, with widespread destruction, loss of lives, and displacement of millions of Liberians. As with all wars, those most vulnerable in society, women, children, the elderly, and the infirm suffered the most severe consequences of the conflict. After the war, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement paved the way for the establishment of a democratically elected government, signaling hope for a new era of peace, stability, and progress.

As Liberia embarked on its journey toward democracy, there was optimism that the new political landscape would be inclusive and representative of all citizens. However, deep-seated structural inequalities and historical injustices continued to hinder the full participation of certain groups, particularly women, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities, in the country's political processes.

Gender disparities have been a long-standing challenge in Liberian society. Traditional patriarchal norms and cultural practices have often relegated women to subordinate roles, limiting their access to education, economic opportunities, and political decision-making positions. Although Liberia achieved a historic milestone in 2005 by electing Africa's first female

president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as its leader, women's representation in political positions has remained disproportionately low at various levels of government.

From the lead-up to the 2023 elections, the issue of gender and social inclusion became more pressing, with calls for increased representation and meaningful participation of marginalized groups in the political sphere. The international community underscored the importance of inclusive governance, recognizing that diversity in decision-making leads to more effective policies and programs that address the needs of all citizens.

## 2.1 The objective of the Assessment

This assessment on gender and social inclusion in Liberia's 2023 elections aims to comprehensively examine the status of political representation and participation of women, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities. The assessment also seeks to discuss the barriers and challenges faced by these marginalized groups, evaluate the effectiveness of existing initiatives, and recommend evidence-based strategies to promote gender equality and social inclusion in the electoral process.

## 2.2 Focus areas

**Political Representation:** This aspect of the assessment delves into the level of representation of women, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities in national and local governmental bodies and highlights any discrepancies in representation that impact and assesses on the policy-making processes.

**Barriers to Participation:** The focus here is to identify and understand the socio-cultural, economic, and legal barriers that hinder the active political participation of marginalized groups. Factors such as discrimination, traditional norms, lack of access to resources, and violence against women will be explored to comprehend their impact on political engagement. Religion is increasingly becoming an important factor too.

**Voter Education:** The effectiveness of voter education programs in promoting awareness about gender equality and social inclusion will be evaluated. The assessment will examine the inclusivity of these initiatives and whether they adequately address the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups.

**Electoral Violence and Intimidation:** The area will investigate incidents of electoral violence and intimidation and their impact on marginalized communities' willingness to participate in the electoral process. Special attention will be given to the experiences of women and vulnerable populations.

**Legal and Policy Framework:** The assessment will evaluate the adequacy and implementation of existing laws and policies related to gender equality and social inclusion in Liberia. It will further review the effectiveness of these measures in promoting equal representation and protection of marginalized groups' rights.

**Civil Society Efforts:** Recognizing the contributions of civil society organizations in advocating for gender equality and social inclusion, the assessment will assess the impact of their initiatives on shaping public discourse and promoting inclusivity in politics.

**Public perception of elections and women's political participation:** This area considers how perception shapes behavior and determining if women's perceptions of their own political chances are low.

### 3. Methodology.

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This section outlines the approach used to gather data, conduct analysis, and draw conclusions to inform the observations and recommendations of the assessment.

An extensive literature review was conducted to understand the historical context and existing research on gender and social inclusion in Liberia. Academic papers, reports from international organizations, government publications, and civil society documents were reviewed to gain insights into past efforts, challenges, and best practices. The literature review also served to identify gaps in existing knowledge, which informed the focus areas for the pre-election assessment.

**In-depth interviews:** These were conducted with key informants from various stakeholder groups, with political leaders from major political parties and government ministries to understand their perspectives on gender and social inclusion within their parties/agencies and their commitment to promoting diversity and equal representation. Interviews with representatives from civil society organizations working on gender and social inclusion issues to understand their advocacy efforts, initiatives, and experiences in promoting inclusivity in politics. Interviews with gender activists and advocates to explore their perspectives on the state of gender equality and social inclusion in Liberia's electoral process. Interviews with representatives from persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups to capture their experiences and challenges related to political participation and representation.

**Focus group discussions** were conducted to gain deeper insights into the views and experiences of different community stakeholders at the county level. Separate focus groups were organized for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. These discussions provided a platform for



participants to share their perspectives and engage in open dialogue on issues related to political participation and representation.

**Relevant documents**, including electoral laws and regulations, national policies, and international agreements related to gender and social inclusion, were analyzed. This document analysis provided contextual background information and a comprehensive understanding of the legal and policy framework in place.

The combination of literature review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis provided valuable insights into the perspectives, experiences, and challenges faced by women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups in Liberia's electoral process. The findings derived from this approach form the basis for evidence-based recommendations to promote gender equality and social inclusion, fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy in Liberia.

## 4. General Observations/Expectations

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### 4.1 Legal Framework

The legal framework on gender and social inclusion plays a crucial role in shaping the electoral process and promoting equal representation and participation of all citizens in Liberia's democracy. It is essential to assess the existing laws and policies that address gender equality and social inclusion. This section focuses on examining the legal framework's effectiveness, identifying gaps, and examining the role of the legal framework in shaping and safeguarding an inclusive electoral process.

### 4.2 Constitution of Liberia

The Constitution of Liberia<sup>1</sup> serves as the supreme law of the land and forms the foundation of the legal framework governing the electoral process. Key provisions about gender and social inclusion include:

1) Equal Protection Clause: Article 11 of the Constitution provides for the equal protection of all Liberians under the law. This clause forms the basis for advocating gender equality and the protection of marginalized groups' rights in the electoral process.

2) Affirmative Action: The Constitution empowers the government to adopt affirmative action programs aimed at rectifying historical imbalances and promoting social inclusion. This provision serves as a basis for policies that seek to increase the representation of marginalized groups in elected positions.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.necliberia.org/doc\\_download/Final%20Amended%20Elections%20Law.pdf](https://www.necliberia.org/doc_download/Final%20Amended%20Elections%20Law.pdf)

### 4.3 Elections Law

The Elections Law of Liberia contains provisions that regulate the conduct of elections and the eligibility of candidates. It includes specific provisions related to gender and social inclusion:

1) Gender Quota: The Elections Law incorporates a gender quota system, requiring that political parties present a certain percentage of female candidates on their party lists. This provision is aimed at increasing women's representation in elected positions.

2) Persons with Disabilities: The law ensures that persons with disabilities have the right to participate in the electoral process, including the right to register and vote. It also makes provisions for accessible polling stations and voting materials for persons with disabilities.

3) Gender Equity Policy 2018 - 2022: Liberia has developed a National Gender Policy that outlines the government's commitment to promoting gender equality in all sectors, including politics. The policy recognizes the need for equal representation of women in elected and appointed positions, as well as measures to address gender-based violence and discrimination.

4) Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) 2018 – 2023)<sup>2</sup>:

The government's agenda recognizes the value of increasing women's political participation at both the national and county levels in Pillar 1: Power to the People.<sup>3</sup>

### 4.4 Application and Relevance of National Gender Equity Policy<sup>4</sup>

The NEC is the body responsible for overseeing and managing the electoral process in Liberia. It plays a crucial role in implementing the legal framework on gender and social inclusion. The NEC is mandated to conduct voter education programs that raise awareness about gender equality, social inclusion, and the importance of diverse representation in politics. The body is also expected to work closely with traditionally excluded groups and provide support where required to mitigate challenges including complaints related to electoral violence, intimidation, or discrimination against marginalized groups during the election period.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://mfdp.gov.lr/index.php/docs/national-development-plan/pro-poor-agenda-for-prosperity-and-development-papd>

<sup>3</sup> <https://mfdp.gov.lr/index.php/docs/national-development-plan/pro-poor-agenda-for-prosperity-and-development-papd>

<sup>4</sup> <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/lbr167565.pdf>



Liberia is a signatory to several international agreements and conventions that promote gender equality and social inclusion. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>5</sup> and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 on Gender Equality<sup>6</sup>.

While Liberia's legal framework on gender and social inclusion represents significant progress, several challenges and gaps remain:

*Implementation and Enforcement:* The effectiveness of the legal provisions depends on their proper implementation and enforcement. Some measures, such as the gender quota, have faced challenges in practice, leading to limited progress in increasing women's representation. Weak wording of legislation also makes it almost impossible to incriminate those who violate the law.

*Voter Education:* Despite legal provisions mandating voter education on gender and social inclusion, the impact of these initiatives on public awareness and behavior change requires further assessment.

*Political Will:* Sustained political will is essential for effectively implementing and strengthening the election law. Political parties and government institutions must remain committed to promoting gender equality and social inclusion in the electoral process.

*Intersectional Approach:* The legal framework should consider the intersectionality of discrimination and ensure that policies address the sometimes-complicated needs of marginalized groups, including women from different ethnicities, disabled women, and young women. This approach acknowledges that women may suffer different types of discrimination.

The legal framework on gender and social inclusion in Liberia's 2023 election underscores the importance of strong legislation and policies to promote inclusive and representative democracy. By recognizing the existing legal provisions, identifying challenges, and proposing recommendations, Liberia can move towards a more equitable and inclusive electoral process that fosters the active participation of all citizens, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or disabilities. Implementing and strengthening the legal framework will contribute to building a more just and inclusive society in Liberia.

## **5. Traditional Barriers to Women's Political Participation**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

<sup>6</sup> <https://unric.org/en/sdg-5/ep>

Interactions with prospective female candidates for the House of Representatives (HoR) race highlighted the entrenched patriarchal system hindering women's political ambitions. Patriarchal values with cultural influences were noted to favor men. Across various counties, EISA LTOs observed that political parties are men-led. Despite the provision of women's chair positions in political parties, women's meaningful participation and representation in political party decision-making is limited because the women's chair position is not mainstreamed into the party's top leadership. With the limited representation of women in party structures, women's candidature highly depends on the support of political party leaders who are men. However, women's positions are potentially very important to the success of political parties, given the level of influence women's chairs could exercise over voters.

Male dominance in political parties is noted to limit women's political participation, as endorsements by political and traditional leaders are usually given to male candidates. Consultations and canvassing for support to contest on a political party ticket, in some contexts, are led by political and traditional leaders who are male. For instance, among the Loma Community in Lofa County, EISA LTOs noted the influence of tradition on political decisions. Chiefs and traditional leaders were found to play significant roles in political decision-making processes and influence political dynamics. Their endorsement or support for a particular candidate carries considerable weight among the local population, and in this year's election, as has been in previous ones, their support has been given to male candidates<sup>7</sup>.

Based on past electoral history, the 2019 by-elections in District Number 15 in Montserrado and the Senatorial elections in Gbarpolu in 2020 were especially violent for female political aspirants. Talia Urey<sup>8</sup> experienced damages to her bulletproof vehicle and injuries when she and her supporters were attacked during campaigning. A year later in Gbarpolu, elections could not take place in Nomodatanaudue due to heightened violence against a female candidate, Madam Botoe Kanneh. She was intimidated by traditional devils. Voting materials were also seized by the town chief and she was prevented from entering the village to vote. A team of women's organizations was forced to intervene and rescue Madam Kanneh and her supporters after reports of their detention and beatings. After a long-drawn-out case, Madam Kanneh won her legal battle against the election commission and the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) and was eventually certificated as the winner of the senatorial seat. These two cases in recent electoral history left a noticeable dent in the confidence of female aspirants around the role of the police during

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<sup>7</sup> <https://allafrica.com/stories/202012240249.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/politics/liberia-we-couldnt-get-out-telia-urey-on-how-she-escaped-death-in-district-15-attack/>

elections, whilst at the same time highlighting women's solidarity in a manner that had only previously been seen during the election of Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf<sup>9</sup>.

Although more Liberians want women to be given the same chance as men of being elected to public office, women are unable to mobilize the political support required to contest and win elections. As noted by EISA observers, the challenge of the lack of support for women candidates is sometimes posed by their spouses. This lack of support sometimes manifests in the harassment of women aspirants. Some female aspirants that EISA LTOs interacted with noted gender-based violence perpetrated against female politicians, with some of this harassment occurring on online platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp chatrooms<sup>10</sup>.

Women aspirants often lack the financial strength to campaign and contest in elections, at the bare minimum often unable to compete on the same level financially as their male counterparts. Elections and campaigns are expensive, and women's candidatures are highly determined by the level of influence and financial muscles to stage a campaign. For instance, during the BVR, female aspirants noted they could not finance observation of the BVR exercise and facilitate the movement and participation of prospective registrants as their male counterparts did. As some political parties admitted, men control the resources, and with most men not supporting women's political aspirations, this tends to limit women.

### 5.1 Poor perception of women

Poor perception of female candidates plays a significant role in voter choice and women's own decision to run for elected office. Liberian voters unconsciously discriminate against women through their contradicting socio-cultural criteria set to compare candidates. A recent perception survey commissioned by UNDP (2023)<sup>11</sup> concluded that considering personal qualities such as honesty, strength in decision-making, and ambitiousness, women and men were perceived to be equally intelligent, but men were perceived to be better decision-makers and slightly more respondents perceived men to be more dependable. However, although women were perceived to be more honest, respondents' perception of their ability to stand up for what they believed was low; 40% against 28%. Overall, 81% of respondents agreed that there was some level of discrimination against women in politics.

### 5.2 Efforts to implement gender quota<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30224940>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.liberianobserver.com/liberia-women-struggle-elective-offices-amidst-sexism>,

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.undp.org/liberia/publications/public-perception-elections-and-women-political-participation>

<sup>12</sup> <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/gender-issues/liberia-strengthening-laws-to-institutionalize-womens-political-participation%ef%bf%bc/>

Across Africa, 46 out of the 54 have adopted some form of legislated quota and 37 have fully adopted quotas. In the case of Liberia, since 2005, there have been several attempts to adopt a quota system. In 2014, the New Elections Law included the Voluntary Party Quota provision. The more recent attempts have been geared towards strengthening the language of the law. In May 2023, the National Elections Commission (NEC) and political parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), committing political parties to ensure a minimum of 30% female representation on candidate nomination. Thirty-six political parties collaborating under the inter-party consultative committee signed the MoU. The MoU on the 30% gender quotas was agreed upon and signed following consultations with political parties to address the declining women's political participation, which has corresponded with a decline in the percentage of women on candidate listing. Stakeholders agree that the original wording of the law was weak and open to interpretation; "a list of candidates submitted to the commission for an election should endeavor to have no less than 30% of the candidates on the list from each gender". The amendment addresses the use of the word "endeavor ". It now says it says, "a list of candidates submitted to the Commission for an election shall have no less than 30% of the candidates from each gender."

Voluntary quotas for women's political participation and representation, particularly within the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, have not substantially increased women's participation and representation. Its limitation is explained by political parties' unwillingness to field women candidates in hard-to-win electoral areas since women are not considered safe bets. NEC's MoU follows the failure of a gendered political affirmative action to be legislated. As part of the revised Election Law in February 2023, a mandatory minimum of 30% gender quotas aimed at being introduced to compel political parties. Even though compulsory women candidate quotas do not guarantee a win for female candidates, the proposed revision would increase women's participation in the electoral race since parties that fail to attain a minimum of 30% of gender quotas would either be fined or delisted by NEC. The proposed amendment was, however, vetoed by the president.

Following the elections, none of the delinquent political parties have been fined or openly shamed for not adhering to the agreement. Even more concerning was the fact that some political parties did not produce any female candidates at all. Out of 32 political parties, 6 did not recruit any female candidates.

## **6. Women's political participation in 2023 elections - Results**

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### **6.1 Voter Registration**

Observations speak to the involvement of women in different aspects of the 2023 electoral process, taking on roles as political aspirants, electorates, party agents, observers, registration,

and exhibition workers. Women supporters have also been extremely visible and vocal during this year’s campaign process, especially in using social media to show support for candidates.

The 2023 voter registration process recorded nearly equal participation of men and women. Of the 2,471,617 registered voters, 1,234,360 are women, representing 49.94%<sup>13</sup>. The figure implies an increase in women voters from the previous election. County-level disaggregated data shows that the difference between female and male registered voters is especially high in counties such as Lofa, Bong, and Montserrado, with Montserrado recording the highest difference of 12,909<sup>14</sup>. EISA noted the facilitation of participation by NEC for certain groups, including lactating mothers and pregnant women. The table below with the five most populous counties accounts for 80% of the total number of women registered to vote. Data is not yet available to show the ages of registered voters.

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<sup>13</sup>NEC, 2023 Preliminary Figures per BVR Centres.  
[https://www.necliberia.org/pg\\_img/BVR\\_Preliminary\\_Figures\\_Counties\\_20230605.pdf](https://www.necliberia.org/pg_img/BVR_Preliminary_Figures_Counties_20230605.pdf)

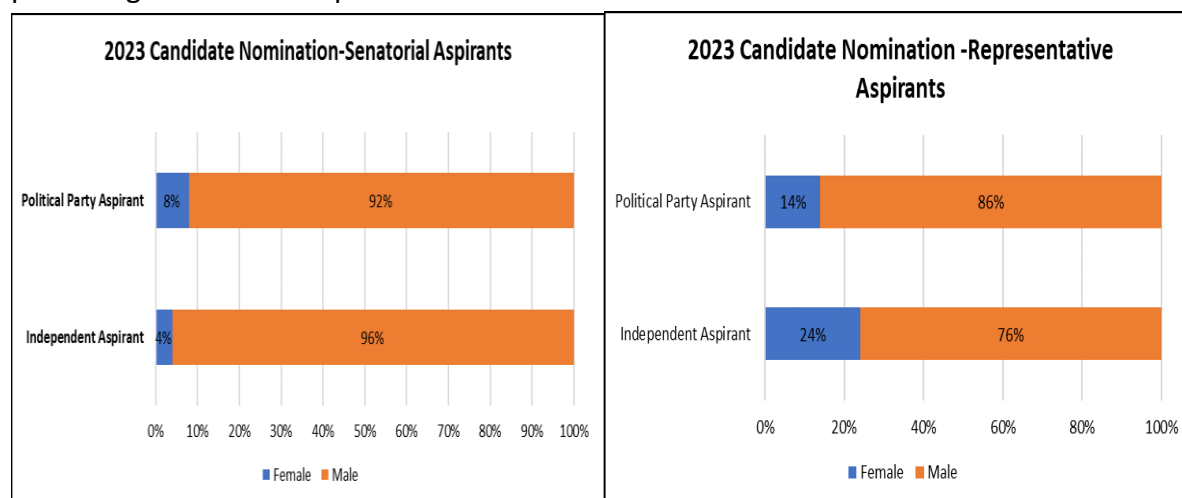
<sup>14</sup> NEC, 2023 Preliminary Figures per BVR Centres.  
[https://www.necliberia.org/pg\\_img/BVR\\_Preliminary\\_Figures\\_Counties\\_20230605.pdf](https://www.necliberia.org/pg_img/BVR_Preliminary_Figures_Counties_20230605.pdf)

**Figure 1: Counties with most registered voters for 2023<sup>15</sup>**

County	Females	Males	Total
Bong	120,155	114,632	234,787
Grand Bassa	79,241	79,222	158,463
Lofa	91,828	85,301	177,129
Margibi	93,678	91,623	185,301
Montserrado	457,049	444,113	901,162
Nimba	155,337	151,917	307,254
<b>Total</b>	<b>997,288</b>	<b>966,808</b>	<b>1,964,096</b>

## 6.2 Party Nominations

Despite all political parties signing the MOU, only two one political parties achieved 30% of women candidates. Women's political participation and representation in Liberia have declined since 2006. Consistent with trends from previous elections, women's nominations for the highest office of the land have largely been limited to the vice-presidential race. Of the 20 presidential candidates that submitted their nominations, only two were female, while six of the 20 vice-presidential candidates were women. The downward trend of women's political participation in Liberia contradicts the progress made within the Sub-Saharan region, where the percentage of women in parliaments increased from 17% in 2010 to 25% in 2020.



**Figure 2: 2023 candidates for nomination**

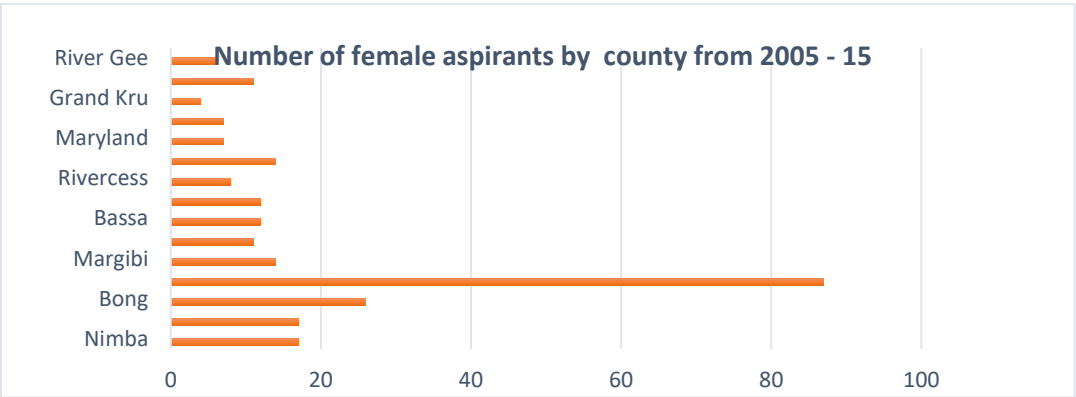
EISA interviews with political leaders repeatedly mentioned the lack of suitably qualified women who could be nominated for party tickets. However, it has become clear that voting behaviour

<sup>15</sup> <http://necliberia.org/others.php?&e49c7921cb156014099756961908d03f94e3584c=MTY0Mw%3D%3D>

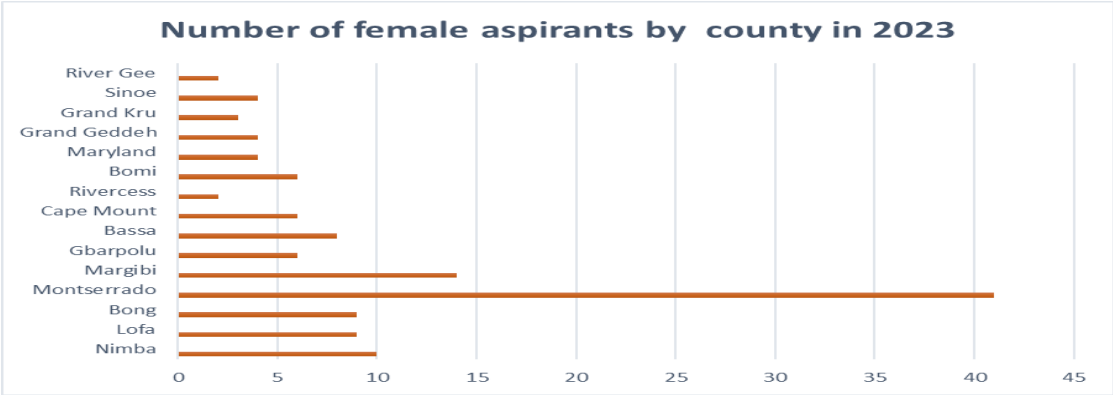
patterns are shifting and that even in some of the most traditional counties, women are being endorsed by county structures.

**6.3. Female Aspirants according to counties**

In terms of nominations per county, female aspirants were represented across all the counties, with Montserrado and Margibi counties recording the highest number of female aspirants. The smaller counties in the Southeast recorded the lowest amounts. River Gee counties and Rivercess and River Gee each recorded 2 female candidates across their counties which is consistent with the population sizes. The figures below illustrate the number of female aspirants according to counties. Across the two graphs, aspirants from Montserrado, Nimba, Bong , Lofa are consistently high across the two timespans , while River Gee and Grand Kru produced the least amount of aspirants across the two time election timeframes. There is a correlation between the counties with the highest number of female registered voters and the number of female aspirants. The higher the number of female registered voters, the higher the number of female aspirants.



**Figure 3: Number of female aspirants by county**



**6.4 Results and representation**

There has been a steady decline of women being elected to the legislature over the last 4 elections. During the 2023 elections, seven new lawmakers were gained: six representatives and



one senator, were elected which is three less than the previous elections in 2017.<sup>16</sup> Data from NEC shows that new female lawmakers are now representing some of the most traditional counties in Liberia such as Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Cape Mount, Bong, and Lofa. Although three female incumbents were defeated, one senator was gained, making it a total of three females in the Senate. In Montserrado, the largest county with seventeen districts, only one district was won by a female candidate. So, whilst the numbers may appear to be low, women are being represented in strategic counties.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, out of the seven lawmakers, only 4 were newcomers, while three were returning lawmakers.

**Figure 4. Comparing representation in the Legislature from 2005 to present<sup>18</sup>**

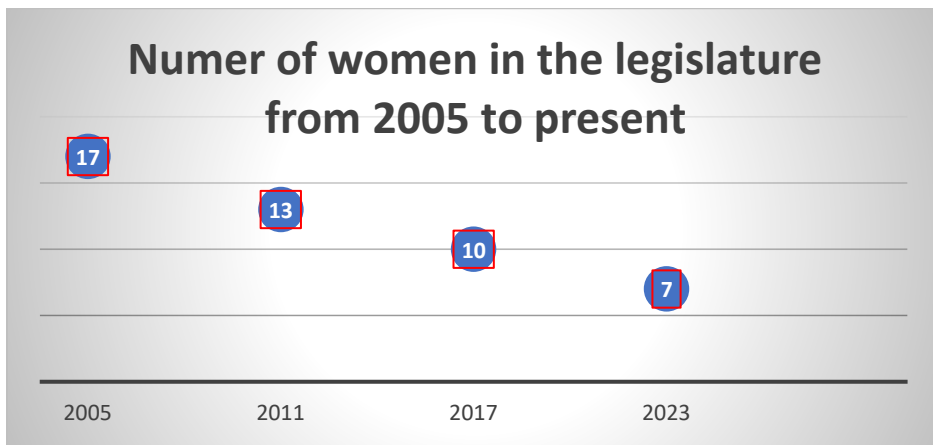


Figure 5 above shows the evident decline in women’s political participation as lawmakers. The election after the civil war saw the highest number of women lawmakers being elected. This is attributed to the strong women’s movement which largely endorsed the election of Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.<sup>19</sup>The 2017 election saw the first term of President Weah. Although there was a decrease in the number of women elected, one female candidate contested, coming 6<sup>th</sup> ahead of some of Liberi’s most established politicians.<sup>20</sup> The last year’s election results have resulted in the lowest number of women in the legislature ever, but two female presidential candidates contested which shows an increased level in the confidence of women to run and

<sup>16</sup> <https://newnarratives.org/featured/slamming-the-girl-power-what-went-wrong-for-liberias-women-at-the-2011-polls/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://newnarratives.org/featured/slamming-the-girl-power-what-went-wrong-for-liberias-women-at-the-2011-polls/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.liberianobserver.com/liberia-low-numbers-women-elected-55th-legislature>

<sup>19</sup>

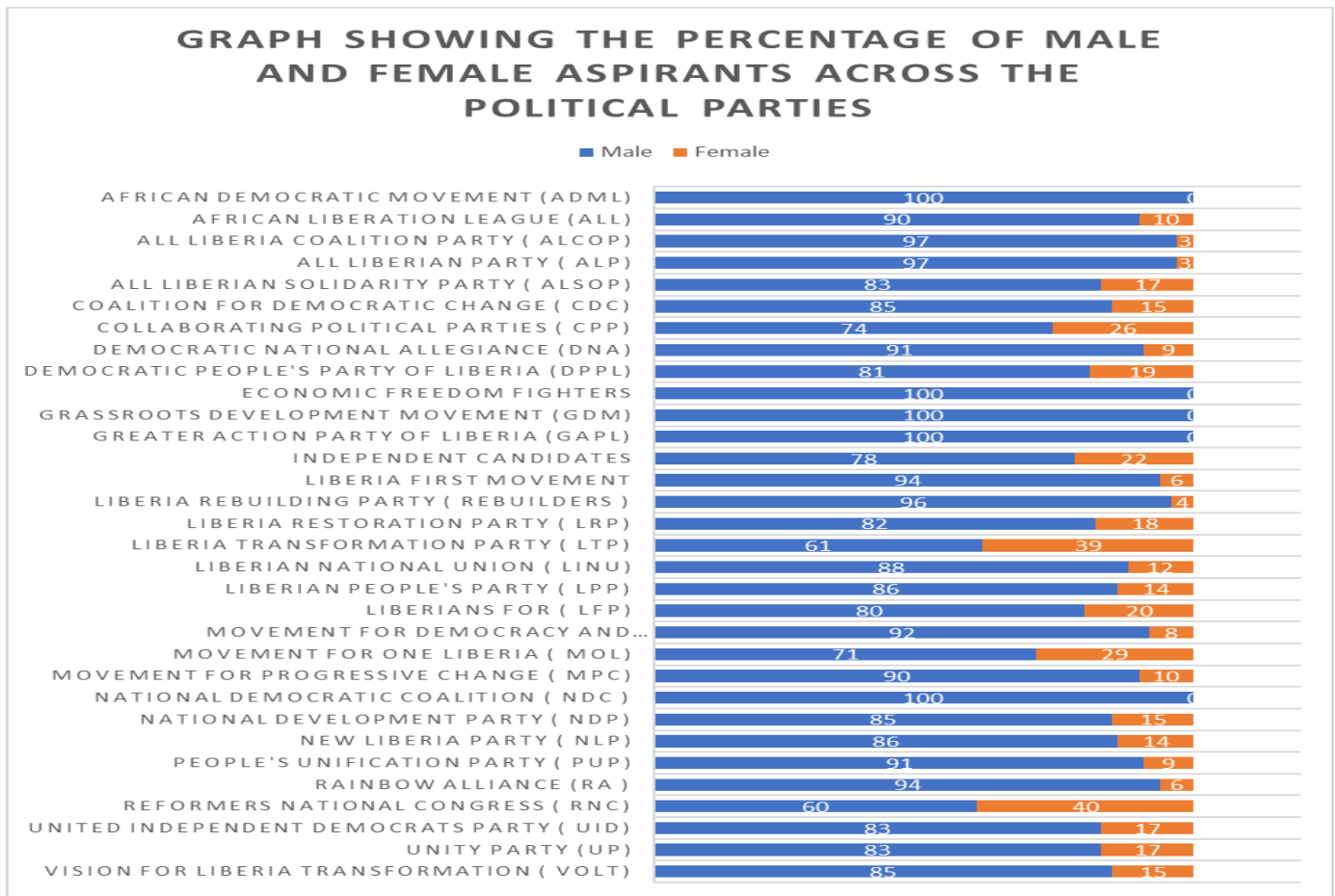
[https://www.bing.com/search?q=pray+the+devil+back+to+hell+summary&cvid=e91a8578e58a4b96afe78fb1d70aa0d9&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBggEEAAYQDIGCAAQRrg5MgYIARAAGEAyBggCEAAYQDIGCAMQABhAMgYIBBAAGEAyBggFEAAYQDIGCAYQABhAMgYIBxAAGEAyBggIEAAYQINIBCTE4NzcwajBqNKgCALACAA&FORM=ANAB01&PC=HCTS](https://www.bing.com/search?q=pray+the+devil+back+to+hell+summary&cvid=e91a8578e58a4b96afe78fb1d70aa0d9&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBggEEAAYQDIGCAAQRrg5MgYIARAAGEAyBggCEAAYQDIGCAMQABhAMgYIBBAAGEAyBggFEAAYQDIGCAYQABhAMgYIBxAAGEAyBggIEAAYQINIBCTE4NzcwajBqNKgCALACAA&FORM=ANAB01&PC=HCTS)

<sup>20</sup> [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017\\_Liberian\\_general\\_election#Results](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Liberian_general_election#Results)

compete in the current political climate despite the well documented bias and discrimination they face.

### 6.5 The 30% Quota

Despite the signing of the 30% quota MOU, only two parties achieved this target. Six parties did not nominate any women candidates at all while 22% of registered independent candidates were women. One female presidential candidate also registered as an independent candidate, dispelling the myth that lack of access to financial resources is one of the main reasons why women do not participate in politics. Running as an independent candidate is more expensive than running on a party ticket. EISA interviews with several male candidates also revealed that political parties were prepared to pay registration fees for aspirants which made registering on a party ticket a more viable option.



**Figure 5. Female and male candidates across political parties in 2023 elections**

Besides the financial aspect, statistics also show that female candidates were less likely to win as independent candidates. Only one of the successful representative candidates ran on an independent ticket which confirmed the common perception that parties provide other forms

of support to candidates and provide a ready-made base of supporters, especially to new candidates. Female independent candidates may also be more susceptible to harassment, as seen in the case of Wookie Dolo, a young aspirant who ran in Montserrado this year.

Additionally, there seemed to be no correlation between political parties with female standard-bearers and the number of female candidates nominated. None of the three female standard bearers achieved the 30% quota which raises questions about the roles and expectations around female candidates.

## 7. Minority groups

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Liberia is home to over 16 ethnic groups, and each group has its distinct cultural heritage and traditional practices. Despite their numerical representation, ethnic minorities have historically faced limited political representation, hindering their ability to shape policies that directly impact their communities. Challenges faced by ethnic minorities include a) Limited Access to Political Leadership: Ethnic minorities often find it difficult to access political leadership positions due to historical marginalization and limited representation within political parties. b) Cultural Barriers: Traditional norms and practices may restrict the political engagement of ethnic minority women, further exacerbating gender disparities within these communities. c) Lack of Voter Education: Ethnic minority communities may have limited access to voter education programs, leading to lower voter turnout and limited understanding of their voting rights.

Liberia is a religiously diverse nation, with Christianity and Islam being the predominant religions. The 2022 census reveals that Muslims account for 12.2% of the population.<sup>21</sup> Religious minorities, such as Muslims and adherents of indigenous beliefs, may face unique challenges in the electoral process such as discrimination and prejudice relating to their names and more thorough processes to prove their nationality. In 2017, the Carter Center reported that in Lofa, several Muslim women were prevented from registering and were accused of not being Liberians. In the same year in Lofa, Muslim women were prevented from voting when they refused to take off their headscarves<sup>22</sup>.

## 8. Youth Participation

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Youth inclusion in political processes is crucial in emerging and maturing democratic countries like Liberia. Liberia has one of the most youthful populations in Africa, where 63% of the population is less than 25 years old, and 32.8% is between the ages of 10 to 24 years, which is

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<sup>21</sup> <https://countrymeters.info/en/Liberia#religion>

<sup>22</sup> <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/politics/liberia-muslim-backed-party-with-vote-rich-appeal-looking-to-shock-in-presidential-elections/>

why the inclusion of youth cannot be underestimated in its electoral processes. Prior to the upcoming October 10th Presidential elections, EISA's LTOs observed inconsistent participation of youth in the process during the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR). Most of the staff recruited at the various BVR Centers were young people across most counties covered by the LTOs. Beyond this process, the youth continue to occupy positions within their parties' mobilization structures and serve as supporters, lacking substantial and influential positions within the formal political processes.

Limiting factors to youth political participation include social and cultural traditions, emphasizing seniority, and assuming that young people are less politically knowledgeable and experienced and lack the financial capabilities to contest elections. Societal and cultural values within Africa and the Liberian context have consistently associated being older with more knowledge and experience, resulting in older people dominating decision-making. This has accounted for the systematic exclusion of young people from political debates and decision-making. EISA observers have noted the need for proper political party structures to support youth participation in elections adequately. Even though political parties have a youth chair, this position, just like the women's chair, does not ensure the participation of the youth in political party decision-making. This issue hampers the meaningful engagement of young people in the political process and limits their opportunities to contribute to decision-making and national development.

In addition to this, the youth lack the financial resources needed to contest elections. Elections, as have been noted, are expensive, and with the lack of support for young people in political leadership, youth political participation has been limited to them being used for roles other than aspirants. For instance, EISA observers noted young people's use as "battle criers" by politicians and, in the worst cases, used as militias/militants. Despite the exclusion of youth in democratic institutions and processes, there have been several independently organized rallies by and for young people who want to promote peace beyond party lines. This shows that young people can be resourceful, mobilize funding, and do not need to be attached to institutions to participate in political activities.<sup>23</sup>

In this year's elections, the two youngest candidates are in their forties. We have seen in these elections that younger candidates can use their age as a bridge to the younger population who find it easier to relate to them or find that they are overlooked and mocked for personal rather than political reasons. The most recurring criticism of Clarence Moniba is focused on his marital status and the fact that he lives with his mother despite his extensive academic and work credentials. Charlyne Brumskine, the ANC vice presidential candidate who is also considered

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<sup>23</sup> [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0GpV5WryDxNHYdfZXqKFMHtTa61HEmFdNeTJcoGsEwgaRfC74Ha9hUq53XNHpYB3sl&id=100001811569221&mibextid=6aamW6](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0GpV5WryDxNHYdfZXqKFMHtTa61HEmFdNeTJcoGsEwgaRfC74Ha9hUq53XNHpYB3sl&id=100001811569221&mibextid=6aamW6)

young is criticized for being a single mother with two children. This is also despite her own academic achievements as a successful lawyer and gender advocate. This year a representative aspirant in District 8 in Montserrado has also reported several incidents of harassment by the incumbent's fans who circulated her bikini photos via social media and told her repeatedly that "politics is not for children".<sup>24</sup>

### **9. Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)**

The electoral law of Liberia guarantees the right of every eligible citizen to register on the voter roll. Moreover, the law prioritizes Persons with disabilities (PWD) at all levels of the electoral process. These provisions were fully respected during the Biometric voter registration process whereby the National Elections Commission (NEC) contracted some PWD CSOs, such as the National Union of Disabled (NUOD), to carry out civic voter education in some districts at Sinoe County. Other community-based organizations, like CIAGD, also promote and encourage PWDs to show up in the BVR phase.

PwDs' participation in political parties is very low as they are not integrated into political party structures and leadership. The National Commission on Disabilities confirms that there is one PwD (a wheelchair user) in District 8. While this is encouraging, the commission cited the need for sign language provision at polling stations to provide information and guidance to the hearing impaired. There are currently discussions concerning the provision of signing experts recommended by the Commission. This is a known limitation to the political participation of PWDs, depriving them of the space to take on political roles within political parties or as political aspirants.

The exclusion of PwDs in politics is enabled by the cultural and traditional perception that associates disability with a lack of capacity and a knowledge gap of the legal provision for PwDs. Cultural traditions were noted to be one limiting factor to the political participation of PwDs. Also noted is a knowledge gap in legal provisions on the rights enshrined in the international convention of PwDs. This gap is also found among the PwD community. As revealed by the Group of 77 Disabled Centers, there is limited knowledge of the rights to include PwDs. According to them, experiences from contexts where the PwDs community is aware of their rights as enshrined in international conventions facilitate the demand for inclusion. The PwDs are advocating for representation and inclusivity in the political process and leadership. For example, they want three PwDs in the House of Representatives and the Senate to represent their interests in Government.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/100014117089045/videos/145945588594794/>

## 10. Conclusion

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The findings of this election assessment underscore the pressing need for immediate action to address the gender and social inclusion gaps in Liberia's electoral process. Building a truly inclusive democracy requires a collective effort from all stakeholders. Building on the progress identified in previous elections, policymakers must intentionally prioritize measures that enhance political representation for women, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities. Even at the voter education stage, initiatives should be more collaborative and empower traditionally excluded citizens. Additionally, fostering an environment free from electoral violence and intimidation is essential to creating a more equitable and democratic society.

In terms of gender, although the numbers have decreased, there is still reason to be optimistic because women are being given opportunities in traditionally biased against women. Even at the transitional governmental level, we have seen the involvement of women at the highest level. Now in the early stages of forming the new government, women have been nominated to top positions at the ministries of Gender, Health, Education and Foreign Affairs, showing some level of commitment to inclusion.

The forthcoming recommendations based on these findings aim to guide policymakers, electoral authorities, civil society organizations, and the broader public in their efforts to promote gender equality and social inclusion in Liberia's electoral process. It is through these collective endeavors that Liberia can progress toward a more inclusive, just, and representative democracy that values the diverse contributions of all its citizens.

## 11. Recommendations

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### Legislature

1. Implement temporary special measures, such as gender quotas, while actively identifying and dismantling additional structural barriers to foster gender equality within legislative bodies.
2. Domesticating regional and international legal frameworks, strengthen national policies on advancing women's political participation, and develop a National Agenda to incorporate and highlight women's specific issues.

### Political Parties

1. Enhance efforts by women's groups and political parties in promoting the quota law and agree on consequences that could be enforced by the relevant parties.
2. Identifying and breaking stereotypical thinking patterns and giving opportunities to party members with different strengths.

3. Actively work to identify, recruit, and continue to provide financial assistance to women aspirants who would not otherwise be able to afford the cost of registering with NEC.
4. Promote men's engagement in supporting their female peers, nominate key entry points and influential persons, particularly male champions, of gender equality in the party.
5. Invest in the party members by increasing technical capacities, knowledge and skills. Investing in youth and women's wings will ensure skilled politicians now and in the future.

#### **NEC**

1. Employ strategies to restore the trust of female aspirants, PwD, and minority groups in the electoral process by prioritizing requests for help.
2. Make provisions in their budgets to cover additional support provided by the Commission for Disabilities and other specialized groups during the entire election process.
3. Ensure that at least two polling stations per district are accessible by wheelchair users.
4. Facilitate the participation of PwDs, training on tactile voting should be provided, including sign language interpretation at every stage of the electoral cycle

#### **International partners**

1. Include direct support to PWD-led organizations and those that promote the inclusion of youth and minorities as part of the overall electoral support funding.
2. Given the low performance of female candidate, international partners should evaluate the level, quality and content of training being offered to aspirants to gauge value for money and appropriateness.

#### **Media**

1. Seek more training in measuring their personal bias and portrayal of female candidates.
2. Tailor training content for female aspirants to include media engagement and public imaging.



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**About EISA:** The Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) is a continental not-for-profit organization located in Johannesburg, South Africa, and Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire with field offices in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Madagascar, Niger, Liberia Chad, and Sudan. EISA has continental and sub-regional programs in the field of elections and democracy throughout Africa. EISA strives for excellence in the promotion of credible elections, citizen participation, and the strengthening of political institutions for sustainable democracy in Africa.

**About USAID Support to EISA-IEOM to Liberia:** The USAID-funded EISA International Election Observation Mission (EISA-IEOM) Activity seeks to enhance the integrity of the 2023 Liberia Presidential and Legislative elections through the deployment of an independent international election observer mission (EOM) to monitor, assess and report on all phases of the electoral process in accordance with international and regional benchmarks. The IEOM is implemented in close coordination with and the financial support of USAID/Liberia and will complement the efforts of other electoral stakeholders. EISA-IEOM has deployed international LTOs across Liberia to observe BVR Phase 2 of the registration and will compile a Phase 2 and comprehensive BVR report at the conclusion of the inspection process.

**For all resources, including EISA statements and reports from the 2017 Liberia Elections**  
<https://eisa.org/epp-liberia.php>