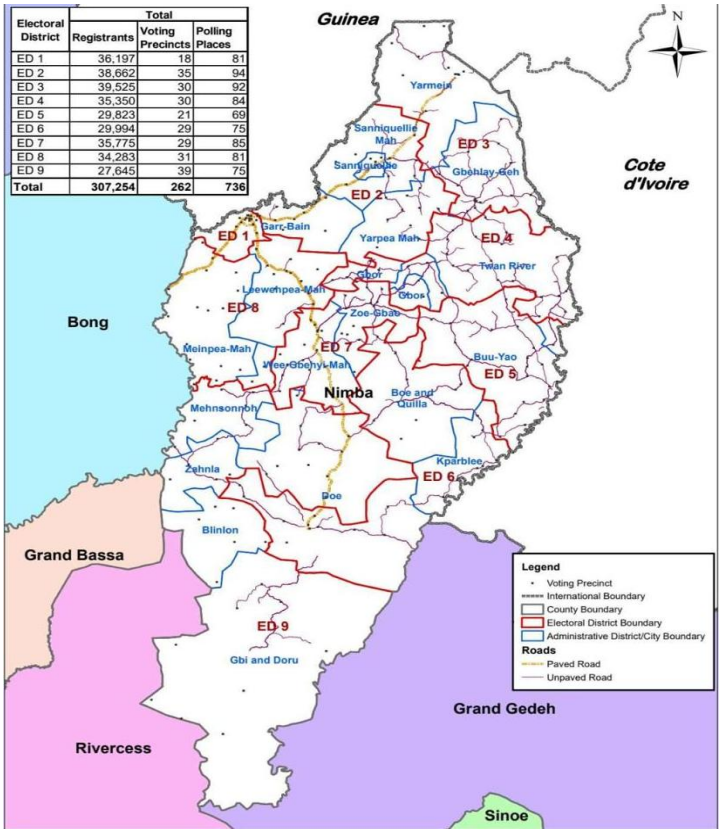
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UNITED NATIONS •

Report on the human rights situation in the context of the 2025 Senatorial and House of Representatives by-elections in Liberia's Nimba County, 22 April and 12 August 2025

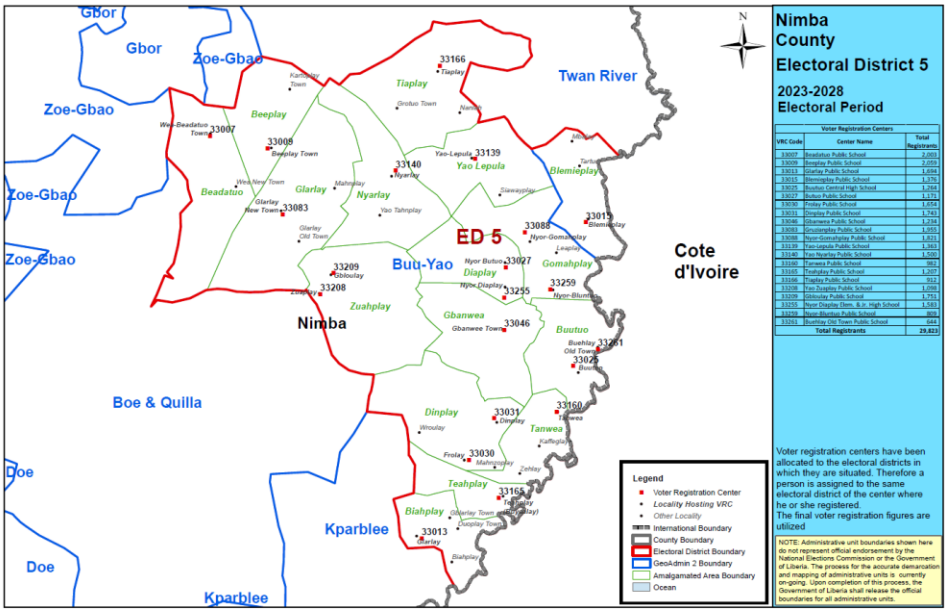
January 2026

MAP of NIMBA COUNTY



Electoral District	Total Registrants	Total Voting Precincts	Total Polling Places
ED 1	36,197	18	81
ED 2	38,662	35	94
ED 3	39,525	30	92
ED 4	35,350	30	84
ED 5	29,823	21	69
ED 6	29,994	29	75
ED 7	35,775	29	85
ED 8	34,283	31	81
ED 9	27,645	39	75
Total	307,254	262	736

MAP of NIMBA DISTRICT # 5



Voter Registration Centers		
VRC Code	Center Name	Total Registrants
33007	Beadatuo Public School	2,059
33009	Beeplay Public School	2,059
33013	Glarlay Public School	1,698
33015	Blemieplay Public School	1,376
33025	Boehai Central High School	1,068
33027	Buhai Public School	1,176
33030	Frolay Public School	1,654
33031	Dinplay Public School	1,741
33046	Gbanwea Public School	1,234
33083	Gnolaplay Public School	1,955
33088	Nyor-Gomahplay Public School	1,821
33139	Yao-Lepula Public School	1,363
33140	Yao Nyarlay Public School	1,500
33160	Tanwea Public School	982
33165	Teahplay Public School	1,207
33166	Tiaplay Public School	912
33208	Yao Zuaplay Public School	1,098
33209	Gbloulay Public School	1,751
33255	Nyor Diaplay Dem. & Jr. High School	1,583
33259	Nyor-Bluetuo Public School	805
33261	Buehlay Old Town Public School	644
	Total Registrants	29,823

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1. Summary

1. This report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Liberia summarizes and analyses the human rights situation in the context of the Nimba County Senatorial and District 5 House of Representatives by-elections that took place on 22 April and 12 August 2025, respectively.

2. Electoral violence and human rights violations in these two elections were highly anticipated considering the polarized political landscape in Liberia at the time and the competition for political legitimacy in Nimba County, particularly following the death of former Senator Prince Johnson, who served as senator for Nimba County from 2006 to 2024[1].

3. The analytical approach of this report draws on findings and information collected during monitoring and verification activities conducted by OHCHR between March and August 2025. The report also highlights engagements by OHCHR and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) with key national institutions, notably through the UN's Liberia Electoral Support Project (2020 –2026). These institutions include the National Elections Commission (NEC), the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR), the Ministry of Justice, the National Police, and other security forces.

4. This report also reviews the implementation of recommendations from the OHCHR report on the human rights situation in the context of Liberia's General Elections and Presidential Run-Off held between 10 October and 14 November 2023[2]. Some of these recommendations could be actioned before the organization of the Nimba by-elections, including improving accessibility to polling stations and other election-related materials and infrastructure for persons with disabilities; ensuring that all cases of electoral related violence and human rights violations and abuses are promptly investigated and that perpetrators are held accountable; and guaranteeing that women participate in public affairs safely and free from gender-based violence.

5. Finally, the report provides recommendations to the Government, the NEC, and the INCHR, as well as members of the international community, urging them to take coordinated actions to contribute to strengthening respect for, and protection of human rights during elections and the rule of law. It also serves as an advocacy tool to engage various stakeholders, including the highest Liberian authorities.

[1] The two by-elections were held under heightened security, with the significant presence of security forces, including armed police in the area. This was due to the political sentiments surrounding the death and burial of the late Senator Johnson a few months earlier (on 28 November 2024), the location of the District 5 administrative headquarters during the House of Representatives by-election in the town of Buutuo, a town bordering Côte d'Ivoire known to be where the 14-year long Liberian civil war started, as well as the expected convergence of politicians and supporters in the County during the elections.

[2] *See* OHCHR, Public Report on the Human Rights Issues in the Context of General Elections and Presidential Run-Off in Liberia, 10 October and 14 November 2023, (21 August 2024), https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/liberia/OHCHR-Public-Report-HR-2023electoral-context-Liberia.pdf.

2. Scope and methodology

6. The information presented in this report was gathered in accordance with OHCHR's human rights monitoring and investigations methodology[3]. While the United Nations did not have the mandate to monitor the by-elections, OHCHR's specific focus was on monitoring the human rights situation in the context of these elections.

7. Prior to deploying teams across Nimba County, OHCHR developed a monitoring and reporting strategy that guided the Office's work. Two OHCHR teams were deployed from 20 to 24 April and from 10 to 14 August 2025 to Nimba to interact with various sources and collect information on the human rights situation in the context of these two by-elections. When in Nimba, OHCHR teams conducted interviews with local community leaders, potential victims and witnesses, authorities, NEC staff and civil society organizations (CSOs). Additionally, the team conducted media and social media monitoring. Data was verified in line with the OHCHR methodology. The report includes the findings that met the "reasonable ground to believe" standard.[4] As per usual practice, the report was shared with the Government of Liberia for factual comments.

8. For the senatorial by-election in April 2025, two OHCHR teams travelled to Nimba County where they conducted seven field missions to various locations including border areas with Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea. The teams met with various persons, including the Inspector General of the police who was visiting the area at the time, NEC staff, elections observers, CSOs, and staff of the INCHR. In addition to three group discussions with voters, one of the teams was able to conduct interviews with Edith Gongloe-Weh, the sole female of the seven Senatorial candidates. The two teams visited five elections centres in Upper Nimba and four in Lower Nimba.

9. In the context of District 5 House of Representatives by-election, the two teams made three separate field missions to 12 towns within District 5, Nimba County, on the election day[5], and met with the chair of the NEC and commissioners, CSO representatives, the local police commander, and security personnel. The teams also conducted interviews with alleged victims of human rights violations committed in the context of the by-election. Prior to and during the by-election, OHCHR also engaged with the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) and other UN agencies, the NEC, the Minister of Justice[6], the Inspector General of the National Police, and other relevant institutions.

10. Furthermore, OHCHR engaged various stakeholders before, during, and after the two by-elections with a view to ensuring a good understanding of the situation in Nimba County and its possible repercussions

[3] *See* OHCHR, Manual on Human Rights Monitoring, Chapter 23: Monitoring Human Rights in the context of Elections; Commissions of Inquiry and Fact-Finding Missions on International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law – Guidance and Practice (2015), https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Chapter23-MHRM.pdf.
[4] The 'reasonable ground to believe' standard means that based on a body of verified information, an ordinarily prudent observer would have reasonable grounds to believe that the facts took place as described, and where legal conclusions are drawn, that these facts meet all the elements of a violation.
[5] These are: Ynao-Nyarlay, Gruzianplay, Gbloulay, Buutuo, Gbanwea, Dinplay, Frolay, Glarlay, Nyarlay, Yao Lepula, Beeplay, and Nyor Butuo.
[6] The Minister of Justice oversees election security and justice-related matters. The Ministry also oversees all security services in the country, including the police, immigration service, and other security agencies.

for the rest of the country. In this regard, on 10 March 2025, OHCHR and other members of the UNCT met with the full Board of Commissioners of the NEC to discuss the preparation of the senatorial by-election. Key recommendations related to the organization of the by-election were taken during that meeting. Also, the following day, on 11 March 2025, OHCHR and other members of the UNCT met with the Minister of Justice - who oversees security forces, including during elections - to discuss the budget, logistics for the election, as well as issues related to security and human rights considerations in the context of the by-election.

11. Similarly, on 22 July 2025, OHCHR participated in a High-Level Coordination Platform on Elections (HLCPE) meeting chaired by the Minister of Justice and co-chaired by the UNRC and the Resident Representative of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to Liberia. During the meeting, the NEC briefed participants on the April 2025 Nimba County Senatorial by-election, the preparation for the House of Representatives by-election on 12 August 2025, and possible challenges. OHCHR explained its monitoring mandate, its plans to monitor the human rights situation in the context of upcoming by-election, and the possibility of releasing a public report with key recommendations to various stakeholders. The Office also emphasized the need to fully implement recommendations contained in its public report on the November 2023 presidential and legislative elections. On 5 August 2025, OHCHR attended another meeting of the HLCPE in preparation for the Nimba District 5 House of Representatives by-election. Among other things, participants recommended that the police and NEC establish a dedicated call center to allow victims to lodge complaints about violations and abuses that may occur, in a timely manner for a swift police intervention.

12. Previously, in the context of the November 2023 presidential and legislative elections, OHCHR conducted a series of activities, including training of approximately 3,000 members of the security forces, comprising police officers and members of other security agencies, on human rights and elections. Some of these officers were deployed to Nimba County during the two by-elections. Their timely deployment contributed to preventing occurrence of serious human rights violations during these elections.

3. Context

13. Engagements with a focus on human rights, capacity building, and monitoring of the situation prior to, during, and in the aftermath of the elections can play a role in minimizing the occurrence of human rights violations and abuses. Liberia held Nimba County Senatorial and Nimba County District 5 House of Representatives by-elections on 22 April 2025 and 12 August 2025, respectively. On 24 April 2025, the NEC announced the preliminary results for the Senatorial by-election and declared former Member of Parliament Samuel Gongbein Kogar of the Movement for Democracy and Reconstruction (MDR) party as the winner[7]. Prior to the release of the results by the NEC, Edith Gongloe-Weh[8] held a press conference,

[7] Samuel G. Kogar previously represented Nimba County Electoral District 5 in the House of Representatives. He was serving his third six-year term when elected senator, replacing the late Senator Prince Yormie Johnson, a longstanding political figure whose presence in the Liberian Senate spanned over a decade. His ascendancy to the Senate created a vacancy at the House of Representatives.
[8] Edith Gongloe-Weh was an independent candidate but received some support from some political parties and women leaders in the country, including former president Hellen Johson Sirleaf.

conceded defeat, and congratulated Kogar on his victory, replacing the late Senator Prince Y. Johnson[9]. On 15 May 2025, Senator Kogar was officially inducted into the Senate's chamber[10].

14. The Nimba County District 5 House of Representatives by-election took place on 12 August 2025[11]. On 13 August 2025, the NEC declared Kortor Sehwongbay Kwagrue of the MDR political party as the winner[12]. Borris B. Barleah, the closest contender, contested the results, claiming discrepancies and irregularities in several key precincts, and demanded an urgent recount of votes. Madee Kamah Wongbay, the only female of the 10 candidates, also contested the results, claiming tampering with votes.

15. In September 2025, OHCHR followed up with the NEC Nimba County Elections Magistrate[13] on the status of the complaints of these two candidates. OHCHR was informed that candidate Borris B. Barleah, the closest contender, withdrew his complaint through a written communication sent to the office of the Nimba County Elections Magistrate on 19 August 2025. OHCHR was also informed that the NEC organized hearings to address the complaint filed by Madee Kamah Wongbay. According to the information received from various sources, she appeared before the Elections Magistrate on 18 August 2025, her motion was reportedly denied, and the case dismissed. The candidate, however, reportedly challenged the ruling of the Elections Magistrate with the NEC Board of Commissioners, which upon review, upheld the Magistrate ruling against her. On 3 September 2025, the candidate filed a petition with the Supreme Court, challenging the decision of the NEC Board of Commissioners. In the Supreme Court ruling dated 23 September 2025, the Court reportedly upheld the NEC Board of Commissioners' ruling, confirming Kwagrue Sehwongbay as the winner.

The Senatorial by-election

16. On 21 February 2025, the NEC informed the public about the Senatorial by-election in Nimba County, scheduled to take place on 22 April 2025[14], to contest the seat of the late Senator Prince Yornie Johnson, who died in Monrovia in December 2024. Nimba is the largest and second most populous county in Liberia after Montserrado, which includes the capital, Monrovia. Nimba County shares borders with Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea.

17. Considering the high stakes in the by-election and anticipation of electoral violence prompted by early political rhetoric from some ruling and opposition politicians, the issue of security emerged as a key concern. The political history of Liberia shows that electoral violence tends to be higher in localized

[9] *See* Liberian Observer, 'Prince Y. Johnson: The Warlord-turned-politician and kingmaker who shaped Liberia's political landscape,' (28 November 2024), https://www.liberianobserver.com/prince-y-johnson-the-warlord-turned-politician-and-kingmaker-who-shaped-liberia-s-political-landscape/article_411f0f56-ad7d-11ef-8955-773accc0f19e.html.
[10] This induction caused the NEC to be notified by the House of Representatives to organize another by-election within 90 days to fill the vacant Nimba County District 5 House of Representatives seat formerly occupied by the now-Senator Kogar.
[11] *See* National Elections Commission - Republic of Liberia.
[12] He reportedly received 4,795 votes, amounting to 31.39 percent of the total valid votes cast from all 21 precincts and 69 polling places within sixty towns across the district.
[13] An Elections Magistrate is a NEC official who oversees voter registrations and election operations, as well as adjudicates election-related complaints. The decisions made by Elections Magistrates can be appealed to the NEC Board of Commissioners.
[14] Following the official launch of the nomination process on 5 March 2025, the NEC qualified seven candidates - six males and one female- to participate in the Nimba senatorial by-election. Four male candidates were affiliated with political parties, including MDR of the late Senator Prince Johnson, Vision for Liberia Transformation (VOLT), African Democratic Movement-Liberia (ADML) Party, and the Citizens Movement for Change (CMC) Party while the three other candidates, including Edith Gongloe, ran as independents.

elections than in general elections for various reasons, including the fact that politicians and supporters converge at a single identified location, unlike in general elections, where the focus may be extended across the country. To address the issue of public mistrust in the country's security institutions and to ensure a safe and peaceful by-election in Nimba, the national police and the local authorities engaged with communities on policing, specifically in communities that have experienced electoral violence in the past. The police informed OHCHR that they dispatched Police Support Unit (PSU) and Emergency Response Unit (ERU) officers to the county and assigned two police officers to each of the seven candidates in the elections for their security during the campaign period. The police also informed OHCHR that they deployed over 800 police officers in key cities and towns of the county, including in Ganta, Sanniquellie and Saclepea, to respond to issues in these areas quickly.

18. During their monitoring work, OHCHR teams met with candidates and their supporters, as well as election observers. Candidates informed OHCHR of their commitment to uphold and respect human rights and pledged to report any human rights concerns and abide by the laws. Following these interactions, OHCHR observed that the areas were calm, with an increased presence of members of the security forces, some stationed in villages and towns and others patrolling the areas in 4X4 vehicles.

19. The official campaign period opened on 31 March 2025 and concluded at midnight on 19 April 2025. NEC held meetings in Ganta from 15 to 16 April 2025, with five of the seven candidates and their representatives. According to NEC officials, the purpose of the meetings was to reinforce the Farmington River Declaration[15], which was signed by five of the seven candidates, reaffirming their commitment to peaceful, transparent, and credible elections.

20. Ahead of the by-election, NEC launched a joint civic voter education (CVE) and gender awareness campaign. Meanwhile, members of the international community, including the United Nations, released a public statement in which they urged Liberian stakeholders to uphold democratic principles[16]. Also, the Minister of Justice convened, on 5 August 2025, another High-Level Coordination Platform on Elections (HLCPE) during which participants discussed the status of the implementation of action points from a previous HLCPE meeting held on 22 July 2025. These included security preparedness, support to the police and other security agencies, and related budgets. The Ministry of Justice, the NEC, and the National Police confirmed that they were ready and that they received from the government the requested budget and material to conduct the House of Representatives by-election planned for 12 August 2025.

21. Prior to the election day, the NEC accredited international and national election observers. The international observers had unhindered access to polling sites across the County. CSOs, including the Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC), the Liberia Election Observation Network (LEON), and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Liberia), jointly deployed over 100 trained observers across the county to monitor the set-up, voting, counting, and tallying procedures at polling places across

[16] *See* 'Joint Statement by Partners on By-Election in Nimba', (21 April 2025), https://www.undp.org/liberia/press-releases/joint-statement-partners-election-nimba#:~:text=As%20Nimba%20heads%20to%20the%20by-election%20on%20April,credible%2C%20free%2C%20fair%2C%20inclusive%2C%20and%20peaceful%20electoral%20process.

all nine electoral districts[17]. They also coordinated situational updates through a Joint Election Data Center established in Ganta. The Joint Election Data Center facilitated the observation process, utilizing a database management system to gather live updates from field observers, analyzing the data, and disseminating timely public reports through the organizations' websites and social media channels[18]. Most observers noted the transparency of the by-election.

22. On 22 April 2025, voting in the Nimba Senatorial by-election started at 8:00 a.m. throughout the County in a calm and orderly manner with the presence of at least two candidates' observers at each election voting point. OHCHR teams observed that elderly persons, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities were accorded priority. Visually impaired persons were guided by a family member or NEC agents to cast their ballot, raising concerns about the lack of secret ballot.

The District 5 House of Representative by-election

23. The House of Representatives by-election in District 5 was necessitated by the election of the former member of Parliament as senator. To mitigate electoral violence previously witnessed in the area, the police and the local authorities engaged with the NEC and local communities on security and safety measures ahead of the August 2025 election. The police identified Frolay, Diarplay, and Beeplay as three hotspots noted for electoral violence in past elections, including the Senatorial by-election. However, except for the isolated incident involving supporters of two candidates, the District 5 House of Representatives by-election was peaceful.

24. On 21 July 2025, the NEC published the final list of candidates[19]. On 4 August 2025, the NEC held an engagement meeting in the by-election area with the 10 qualified candidates. During the meeting, candidates reaffirmed their commitment to respect the framework of the Farmington River Declaration, a commitment by standard bearers and their political parties to ensure that presidential and legislative elections are held within the confines of the law and other international standards pertaining to free, fair, transparent, and democratic elections. The declaration was initially signed in 2017 by 20 political parties, and a revised version was signed by 26 political parties prior to the 2023 elections[20].

25. Also, on 17-18 July 2025, the NEC hosted a two-day lessons-learned meeting in Nimba that focused on the experience of the April 2025 Senatorial by-election. Among other issues, the meeting highlighted the need to address the constant delays in the approval of the elections budget and the remittance of funds to ensure timely implementation of election operations.

26. On 12 August 2025, voting in the Nimba House of Representatives by-election started at 8:00 a.m. throughout District 5 in a calm and orderly manner, with the presence of at least three candidates' observers at each of the 21 election precincts within the sixty towns across the district. Unarmed police officers

[17] For more information on their work, please visit https://eccliberiacom.org/ecc-and-collaborating-partners-concludes-elections-observation-in-nimba-county/ (accessed on 9 June 2025).
[18] (20+) Facebook; (20+) Facebook
[19] Ten candidates -nine males and one female- registered to participate in the Nimba House of Representatives by-election. Six male candidates and the only female candidate were affiliated with political parties, while the three other male candidates ran as independents.
[20] *See* 'Farmington River Declaration 2023' (4 April 2023), https://necliberia.org/pg_img/2023_Farmington_Declaration_Signed_20230426.pdf.

provided security at each of these election precincts and at some centres, including guiding voters. At Gbloulay Public School (Precinct #33209), OHCHR observed a female police officer providing support to an elderly woman who had come to cast her vote. The officer explained the process to the elderly woman and took her to the NEC polling staff, who guided the elderly woman in casting her vote. Also, at Gbanwea Public School (Precinct # 33046) in Buutuo, the police officers provided support along with NEC staff in dismantling and reassembling the wheelchair of a person with a disability, who needed to be physically carried to enable access to the assigned polling room to cast their vote.

4. Legal framework

27. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) provides that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives, and the right to equal access to public services, and that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government.[21] Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) also expressly provides for the right to vote as a component of the right to participate in public affairs. Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) also expressly mention this right.

28. The UDHR and the ICCPR also note that the enjoyment of these rights shall be exercised equally and without discrimination of any kind, such as race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status[22]. Key enabling rights - the rights to free opinion, expression, and information[23], as well as peaceful assembly and freedom of association[24] - are safeguarded by provisions in the ICCPR.

29. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), ratified by Liberia on 04 August 1982, provides that "Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of the law".[25] Key enabling rights - the rights to free opinion, expression, and information,[26] freedom of association[27], as well as peaceful assembly[28] - are safeguarded by provisions in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

30. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG), to which Liberia acceded on 23 February 2014, provides that "State Parties re-affirm their commitment to regularly holding

[21] UDHR, Art. 21 (1-3).
[22] UDHR, Art. 2 & ICCPR, Art. 2.
[23] ICCPR, Art. 19.
[24] ICCPR, Arts. 20 & 21.
[25] ACHPR, Art. 13(1).
[26] ACHPR, Art. 9.
[27] ACHPR, Art. 10.
[28] ACHPR, Art. 11.

transparent, free, and fair elections in accordance with the Union's Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa".[29]

31. The Constitution of Liberia guarantees the right to life, liberty, and security of the person, the rights to peaceful assembly, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and freedom of movement.[30] The Elections Law further enshrines the right to vote of every citizen who is eighteen years old.[31] The Liberian elections legal framework is complemented by various rules and regulations adopted by the NEC, as well as relevant opinions of the Supreme Court of Liberia relating to electoral matters. The National Code of Conduct for All Public Officials and Employees of the Government of Liberia (Code of Conduct Law) adopted in 2014 (amended in 2022) and the Presidential Executive Order No. 117 of March 2023 also complement the electoral legal framework.[32]

32. To safeguard the process from corruption, official malfeasance, obstruction, undue influence, and other illegal practices, the Elections Law provides that anyone who engages in acts constituting elections malfeasance, and who is found guilty of an election offence, shall be punishable by a fine or a term of imprisonment, or both, depending on the gravity of the offence.

33. The elections officer representing the NEC in their area of appointment is an Elections Magistrate. The Election Law of Liberia, Section 2.9 (i), requires that the Commission shall appoint within each County/District as many Elections Magistrates as shall be necessary to serve as liaison between the Commission and the County/District they represent in respect of all election activities. The Elections Magistrates have the power and functions within their area of jurisdiction to hear and determine objections to voter registration claims and to the continuation of disqualified voters on the registration rolls, and upon a proper showing, to order the reinstatement upon the registration rolls of names of qualified voters struck off by mistakes, and to hear and determine all election offenses in the first instance in which the penalty provided is not more than five hundred dollars. In all other offenses, the Commission shall have original administrative jurisdiction, subject only to judicial review by the Supreme Court of Liberia.

5. Human rights situation

34. OHCHR noted tangible improvements in the election process since the 2023 General Elections. For instance, during the two 2025 by-elections, NEC staff exhibited professionalism, providing support to those in need of assistance, including pregnant women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, to facilitate access to voting booths. The visible presence of trained, unarmed police officers who engaged voters, observers, and other participants in addressing minor conflicts and complaints at polling centres visited was applauded by many, including independent observers. The police leadership informed OHCHR that

[29] ACDEG, Art. 17. More generally, see also Arts. 2(3), 3(4) and 17 – 22.
[30] The Constitution of Liberia, Chapter III, Art. 14
[31] The Elections Law, Section 3.1
[32] For more information on this, see https://www.necliberia.org/ (accessed on 9 June 2025).

deployment priority for the Nimba by-elections was given to police and other security officers who had undergone the human rights and elections training organized by OHCHR prior to the 2023 elections[33].

35. OHCHR observed that journalists were able to freely cover the by-elections. The NEC also endeavored to increase the transparency of the by-election processes through daily press briefings held in Nimba and updates through their social media platforms - another implementation of key recommendations from OHCHR.

36. During the District 5 House of Representatives by-election at the Nyarlay Town Precinct, the voting process was briefly interrupted due to the removal of queue markers, following protests by some party representatives. Party representatives also raised concerns over assisted voting, where individuals accompanied elderly or illiterate relatives, including persons with visual impairments, into the voting booth. Protestors questioned whether those helping were voting according to their relatives' choices or their own. The issue was promptly resolved through the joint intervention of NEC officials, police personnel, and party representatives, after they met and agreed on the way forward, allowing the voting to resume.

37. The police and justice sectors did not address some instances of violence monitored across the county during both by-elections. In several engagements, heads of security forces informed OHCHR that they were hesitant to carry out arrests and detentions during the election days to avoid further violence and disruptions to the electoral processes. This approach may have prevented victims from having access to remedies for violations observed during these by-elections. A physical confrontation arose at the Beeplay Town Precinct among some party representatives regarding the entry and re-entry of individuals into the voting centres who were not officially designated as observers. This issue was also amicably resolved after a meeting involving the NEC, the police, and party representatives was organized.

5.1. Hate speech and discrimination

38. During the Senatorial by-election in April 2025, OHCHR received information from various sources, including the INCHR, that during the campaign period, divisive messages and provocative remarks by some candidates and their supporters were aired on local radio stations. This led the NEC to urge candidates and supporters to uphold their commitment to the Farmington River Declaration, signed on 15 April 2025 in Ganta by all candidates for the senatorial by-election.

39. Some media outlets accused Vice-President Jeremiah Koung of reportedly using discriminatory language when referring to some candidates while encouraging Nimbaians to vote en masse for Kogar in the 22 April Senatorial by-election "*to balance representation between the Gio and the Mano ethnic groups*

[33] See, OHCHR, 'Training police helps safeguard human rights in Liberia's elections', (23 December 2024), https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2024/12/training-police-helps-safeguard-human-rights-liberias-elections#:~:text=Latest%20Stories-,Training%20police%20helps%20safeguard%20human%20rights%20in%20Liberia's%20elections,that%20highlight%20the%20training's%20impact.%20%E2%80%9C.

in the Liberian Senate".[34] The Vice-President's remarks drew sharp reactions across traditional and social media platforms, with many accusing him of fanning the flames of tribalism for political gain. Critics argued that such appeals have the propensity to erode national cohesion and perpetuate the poisonous legacy of identity-based politics that has continued to keep Liberia's peace fragile. However, the Vice-President defended his remarks, dismissing accusations of tribalism by reportedly attributing his statement to longstanding local traditions endorsed by the elders.[35]

5.2. Right to peaceful assembly

40. During one of the Senatorial by-election campaign tours in Gborplay, District 5, Nimba County, Ms. Edith Gongloe-Weh, alleged that she and her team narrowly escaped an attack on 4 April 2025 while campaigning to engage voters.[36] The candidate claimed that she and her supporters were confronted by armed young people believed to be affiliated with rival candidates, and the police failed to intervene to protect them against the crowd. A circulated video showed that Ms. Gongloe-Weh's campaign was abruptly interrupted by an agitated mob who prevented her from speaking to the local population. The situation soon escalated, forcing Ms. Gongloe-Weh and her team to leave the town for their safety. The Town Chief of Garplay confirmed the situation to OHCHR teams deployed there but stated that she did not witness youths armed with machetes, knives, rocks, or sticks targeting Ms. Gongloe-Weh, as was claimed. The local police commander informed OHCHR that the incident did not warrant investigation, arrest, or detention. He added that the local police were able to swiftly control the situation. In a conversation with OHCHR, the candidate clarified that no official complaint was filed with the NEC nor the police, but information was shared with regional and international partners. According to the candidate, she did not file an official complaint because community members intervened following the incident and offered to mediate. Moreover, the incident was not repeated following the elders' intervention.

41. During the District 5 House of Representatives by-election campaign period, it was reported that tension erupted in Dinplay town, Buu Yao between supporters of the two leading candidates, with violent clashes that left several wounded and hospitalized.[37] OHCHR visited the Buutuo police district headquarters, where the police stated that the incident was an altercation between supporters of two candidates and that the candidates themselves were not involved. According to the police, the two groups were en-route to different locations and clashed while they passed by each other. The police added that they intervened by talking to the individuals involved in the incident to understand what happened and de-escalated the situation, with no arrests made. However, the police intimated that statements were collected

[34] *See* The Liberian Investigator, 'Koung stokes tribal tensions ahead of Nimba by-election' (24 March 2025), https://liberianinvestigator.com/news/koung-stokes-tribal-tensions-ahead-of-nimba-by-election/.
[35] *See* FrontPage Africa, 'Liberia: VP Koung Fueling Tribal Politics to Sway Nimba By-Election in Favor of Rep. Kogar', (16 April 2025), https://frontpageafricaonline.com/politics/lead-vp-koung-fueling-tribal-politics-to-sway-nimba-by-election-in-favor-of-rep-kogar/#google_vignette.
[36] *See* FrontPage Africa, 'Liberia: Gongloe-Weh's Campaign Halted By Violent Crowd As CDC Decries Attack On Female Candidate Ahead of Nimba By-Election', (10 April 2025), https://frontpageafricaonline.com/politics/liberia-gongloe-wehs-campaign-halted-by-violent-crowd-as-cdc-decries-attack-on-female-candidate-ahead-of-nimba-by-election/.
[37] *See* FrontPage Africa, 'Liberia: Tension Mounts in Nimba's District #5 Ahead of By-Election, Several Hospitalized Following Violent Clashes', (9 August 2025), https://frontpageafricaonline.com/breaking-news/liberia-tension-mounts-in-nimbas-district-5-ahead-of-by-election-several-hospitalized-following-violent-clashes/.

from individuals interviewed and that a proper investigation would be launched after the election. OHCHR is not aware of any further action taken by the police as of December 2025. On 12 August 2025, the day of voting, OHCHR visited Dinplay town, where an apparently burnt truck - said to be transporting supporters of one candidate - was seen in the middle of the road. OHCHR interviewed community dwellers who said that the truck driver fled the scene before the truck was set ablaze during the violence the same day and had not been seen since. They confirmed that several persons were injured and taken to a hospital in Tappita, but no deaths were reported. According to residents, the violence was between two political candidates' supporters who were on a campaign tour, passing through the town, and not with local community members.

5.3. Participation of women in the Nimba Senatorial and House of Representatives by-elections

42. In the voluntary Memorandum of Understanding signed in May 2023, the NEC secured from 25 political parties a 30% gender quota, although only two complied in the general elections in October 2023. With UNCT and partner support, over 225 women across all 15 counties were trained on inclusive political participation, including the establishment of a young women's political council and leadership clinics. The NEC also introduced a Violence Against Women in Elections and Politics Protocol, endorsed by most parties, helping to resolve 114 of 139 reported incidents, while over 3,000 security personnel, including 741 women were trained on human rights and electoral conduct. Under the Liberia Electoral Support Project (2020–2026), a roadmap for temporary special measures to increase women's representation is being advanced.

43. In a meeting with the coordinator of Project Accountable Safe Space (PASS) Women's Accountability Room, the OHCHR team was informed that the room was set up to monitor and report on violence against women in politics, including issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), political disenfranchisement of women, treatment and care for women living with disabilities, elderly and pregnant women, and hygiene conditions specifically for women poll workers and voters at polling centres[38].

44. There was only one female candidate running for the Nimba Senatorial seat (Edith Gongloe-Weh) and one female candidate running for the District 5 House of Representatives seat (Madee Kamah Wongbay), underscoring persistent gender disparities in political leadership. Prior to the senatorial by-election, one of the leading candidates and subsequent winner of the by-election, Nimba County District 5 Representative Samuel Kogar, was seen in a campaign video circulated on social media telling citizens of Nimba County that they should not vote for female candidates, contending that "*a woman cannot replace the man who died*".[39] This statement was widely criticized by several women groups and the National Civil Society Council,[40] who all termed the remarks as emblematic of the entrenched patriarchy that continues to hinder women's full participation in Liberia's political landscape. OHCHR notes that such discriminatory rhetoric against women in politics affects their full political participation.

[38] *See* PASS Final Report 'Observing, Monitoring, and Providing Legal Aid and Legal Response to Violence Against Women in Politics on the Nimba By-Elections', https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vYSGx0h73Sw4jjDTL9B9eZHaJlUEqg7f/view.
[39] (20+) Video | Facebook
[40] *See* Verity News,' Senatorial Aspirant Kogar under Fire for Stereotyping Women', (10 march 2025), https://verityonlinenews.com/senatorial-aspirant-kogar-under-fire-for-stereotyping-women/.

45. Also, prior to the House of Representatives by-election, the female candidate, Madee Kamah Wongbay of the Liberia Rebuilding Party, raised alarms over targeted violence against her campaign, reportedly because of her gender. Madee Kamah Wongbay reported physical attacks on her team, with no police intervention to stop the attacks. She also stated that her campaign equipment was allegedly damaged by rival candidates' supporters, and the police did nothing to stop them. Ms. Wongbay, who was formally a Nimba County Police Superintendent at the time of the election, was reportedly reassigned to the capital, Monrovia, in July 2025 but refused to leave Nimba. The police claimed that her transfer was not linked to her candidacy, as it happened before she announced her candidacy, and that some police officers in past elections had resigned to run for elected offices and were reinstated afterward whenever they were unsuccessful in the elections. Ms. Wongbay informed OHCHR in December 2025 that she had received no dismissal or suspension letter, nor any call from the Liberia National Police about her situation.

5.4. Participation of persons with disabilities, elderly persons, and pregnant women

46. Accessibility challenges observed in the November 2023 elections and highlight in OHCHR's August 2024 report, remained. Many polling centres were observed during the by-elections to be inaccessible for persons with disabilities. Nonetheless, visually impaired persons were able to vote using tactile ballot sheets, while staff at other polling centres were generally reported to be supportive of persons with disabilities and others needing assistance. For example, on voting day, 22 April 2025, OHCHR observed that elderly persons, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities were given priority to vote. In District 9, the team visited Varmie Elementary and Junior High School (VRC #33090) in Graie Township and Mehnla Palava Hut (VRC #33126) in Mehnla Town. At both locations, the team observed the consistent practice of prioritizing elderly persons, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities[41]. The presence of unarmed and gender-balanced police officers helped maintain a safe environment.

47. During the Senatorial by-election, OHCHR teams observed a visually impaired person trying to use the tactile ballot guide to cast his vote with support from NEC staff at the Geolanda Community High School in District 1. In another example, a person with disabilities had to be escorted by a relative to cast her vote at the St. Martin High School in the Old Yekepa community, District 3. Although the support provided by NEC staff and relatives identified by persons with disabilities was deemed acceptable under NEC regulations, these barriers experienced by persons with disabilities raise concerns over the lack of secret ballot, as required under Article 77b of the Liberia Constitution and international human rights law and standards.

48. During the District 5 House of Representatives by-election, at the Gbloulay Public School (Precinct #33209), party observers reported to OHCHR that a voter with visual impairment who initially needed

[41] Similar situations were observed in various other polling stations monitored by OHCHR, including in District 7, at Gbanquoi Public School (VRC #33045) in Gbanquoi Town, Garwonpa Public School (VRC #33037) in Garwonpa Town, Saclepea Johnny Volker School (VRC #33151) in Saclepea City, Fleedin Townhall (VRC #33233) in Fleedin, and Saclepea Civil Compound (VRC #33152) in Saclepea City.

assistance was denied entry to the voting booth with an assistant who accompanied him. OHCHR follow-up with the NEC staff revealed that the individual who accompanied the visually impaired voter had previously accompanied another elderly, illiterate female voter and supported that voter in casting her vote. As per the NEC, no single individual should be permitted to accompany more than one voter to cast their vote. Based on this mandate, the visually impaired voter used the tactile ballot guide to cast her vote without aid, after being explained the process by NEC staff.

49. In District 8, at the Karnwee Public School, a wheelchair user had to leave the wheelchair outside the voting hall and literally crawl for several meters to reach the voting booth to cast her ballot. In another incident at the Gbanwea Public School (Precinct # 33046), OHCHR encountered a man in a wheelchair who reported that, although registered to vote, he could not access the polling station due to its inaccessibility for persons with disabilities. Other voters and NEC officials present had to lift him out of his wheelchair, place him on the floor, and carry him inside. The man described the process as degrading, emphasizing that persons with disabilities should be treated as human beings and allowed to access voting centers in dignity. OHCHR observed that the polling station was located on top of a steep hill, with a single entrance consisting of a high stair and a very narrow makeshift wooden door. OHCHR was also informed that several persons with disabilities refrain from voting due to such conditions and other challenges that they may face in casting their vote.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

50. The 22 April Senatorial and 12 August House of Representatives by-elections in Nimba County were peaceful. Although some instances raised human rights concerns, they were limited. The experience in the two by-elections in Nimba showed how well-trained security forces can prevent serious human rights violations in electoral contexts. It underscores the role that regular political engagements with a focus on human rights, capacity building, and monitoring of the situation prior to, during, and in the aftermath of the elections can play in minimizing the occurrence of human rights violations and abuses, and in contributing to peaceful elections and the transition of political power. For instance, the strong presence of members of security forces, many of whom were beneficiaries of the series of trainings conducted by OHCHR in the context of the November 2023 General Elections,[42] contributed to the success of the April and August 2025 by-elections in Nimba. Patrols led by unarmed officers and the presence of gender-sensitive and female police officers may also have contributed to the overall participation of women as voters. OHCHR observed more women voters in the queues compared to men in most of the elections' centres visited on the two vote days.

51. Voting procedures largely respected the rights and dignity of voters. Prioritization of groups in vulnerable and marginalized situations including persons with disabilities, the elderly and visibly pregnant women was observed at most of elections polling centres that OHCHR teams visited. However, persons

[42] *See* The Inquirer Newspaper, 'Elections Security Management Training Gets Underway', https://inquirernewspaper.com/elections-security-management-training-gets-underway/ ; OHCHR trained more than 3000 members of security forces including male and female police officers on human rights in the context of elections.

with disabilities continue to experience issues in accessing polling stations and voting centres, mainly due to a lack of facilities adapted to their needs, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive infrastructure to ensure that all individuals can fully enjoy their right to participate in electoral processes with no impediments.

52. Hate speech continues to be present in Liberia's electoral processes, especially during the campaign period. Such hate speech, directed at the NEC, political opponents, and the lone female candidate in the case of the Nimba Senatorial by-election, risks amplifying tensions and divisions, and exacerbating political violence, which could lead to serious human rights violations and abuses.

53. Participation of other groups also remains a concern. Despite Liberia's support for these recommendations, detainees and hospitalized citizens[43] were still excluded from voting in the last elections, underscoring persistent challenges.

54. Several recommendations formulated by OHCHR in the public report released in 2024, following the monitoring of the human rights situation in the context of the 2023 elections, were also not addressed before the conduct of the April and August 2025 by-elections. This report reiterates some of these recommendations and proposes others for the improvement of human rights in the Liberian electoral context and stresses the importance of ensuring that there is no impunity for human rights violations documented during elections.[44] Other systemic issues related to the promotion and protection of human rights during elections in Liberia remained unaddressed.[45] Also, some of the recommendations from the 2023 NEC Election Lessons Learned Review done by the NEC following the completion of stakeholder engagements to review its operations during the conduct of the 2023 general elections were not implemented prior to the 2025 by-elections. The latter highlights key findings from various thematic areas within the recently completed six-year strategic plan and offers recommendations that will inform the development of a new six-year strategic plan aimed at further strengthening the effectiveness of future election operations. Finally, some other important recommendations that are connected to human rights were formulated by some key 2023 election observers.[46]

55. In its national report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolutions 5/1 and 16/21,[47] in the context of the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Liberia highlighted actions taken to ensure the exercise of the right to participate in public affairs and voting following recommendations from its third UPR cycle review. Following the fourth review on 3 November 2025, Liberia received 245 recommendations from 78 countries, mainly related to strengthening the human rights systems in the

[43] Ibid, footnote 2 especially, recommendation: 103.140.
[44] The report, focused on arbitrary arrests and detentions, violations of freedom of opinion and expression, hate speech and incitement to violence, and violations of the rights to peaceful assembly and to freedom of movement, also highlighted the catalytic role that OHCHR played within the UNCT to ensure that a human rights-based approach was applied throughout the electoral process and provided recommendations to the Liberian Government and the international community to strengthen electoral processes and ensure accountability for human rights violations.
[45] See OHCHR's report on the human rights issues in the context of General Elections and Presidential run-off in Liberia, 10 October and 14 November 2023.
[46] *See for instance*, European Union Election Observation Mission LIBERIA, 2023 Final Report General Elections and presidential run-off 10 October and 14 November 2023, https://www.eods.eu/library/EU%20EOM%20LIB%202023%20FR.pdf.
[47] Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Fiftieth session Geneva, 3–14 November 2025, A/HRC/WG.6/50/LBR/1, 21 August 2025, https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/WG.6/50/LBR/1.

country, including introducing effective measures to ensure equal opportunities for all eligible voters to register and exercise the right to vote. The final report will be considered at the 61st session of the Human Rights Council which will hold from February to April 2026 after allowing Liberia to indicate which recommendations it supports or noted, and clarify issues not fully addressed during the November 2025 interactive dialogue.

56. Previously, during the 3rd cycle of the UPR in November 2020 at the 36th session, Liberia received 218 recommendations, of which 166 were supported.[48] Several of these related to the right to participate in public affairs and elections, including calls to implement the recommendations of the European Union Election Observation Mission of 2017 on access to voting rights for convicted detainees and hospitalized citizens, to intensify efforts to address gender-based violence and empower women, to adopt strategies and special measures promoting women's participation in public affairs, to enhance women's economic participation, and to adopt affirmative action measures to strengthen women's political representation.[49] Member States urged Liberia to ensure greater inclusion of women and vulnerable groups, in line with CEDAW and the Sustainable Development Goals.

57. OHCHR reiterates its previous recommendations, which have not been fully implemented, and proposes the following additional recommendations to enhance the respect and protection of human rights in the context of elections in Liberia:

To the Government of Liberia

- Continue to build the capacity of all State institutions, including the Parliament and the NEC, to guarantee that women participate in public affairs free from undue political or other forms of pressure;
- Ensure that all allegations of human rights violations are investigated, and perpetrators are held accountable, and ensure appropriate compensation or redress for victims or affected candidates and supporters;
- Strengthen complaint mechanisms and response protocols within electoral-related institutions and political parties in line with international and regional standards;
- Speed up the process of amending the New Elections Law to remove vague provisions and address concerns related to elections rights and strengthen electoral accountability, integrity, and transparency;
- Clarify the role of the NEC staff appointed as Elections Magistrates and consider transferring this role to courts and tribunals to ensure the independence of the complaint procedures and to adjudicate elections-related cases promptly;
- Ensure polling stations and relevant material are appropriate for all persons with disabilities desirous to exercise their right to vote;

[48] *See* Liberia UPR infographic, available in: LIBERIA_Infographic.pdf (accessed 19 September 2025).
[49] See recommendations: 103.140,103.186,103.191, 103.196, 103.198,103.184, 103.188, and 103.189, available in: UPR36_Liberia_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.docx (accessed 19 September 2025).

- Adopt a wide range of measures to tackle the root causes of hate speech, ensure accountability for any act of incitement and discrimination, in line with international standards, including the Rabat Plan of Action.

To members of the international community

- Continue to provide technical and financial support and ensure that human rights remain at the heart of election processes in Liberia, and provide support to various actors, including the NEC, CSOs, and INCHR, working to prevent human rights violations in the context of the elections and beyond;
- Support the promotion of active participation, representation, and empowerment of women and marginalized groups in future electoral processes.