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Election run-off in Liberia, as Weah vs Boakai goes into extra-time

Другий тур виборів у Ліберії: Веа проти Боакай переходить у додатковий час

Президент Ліберії Джордж Веа та віце-президент Джозеф Боакай знову зустрінуться у другому турі президентських виборів. Лідуючи з невеликою перевагою 0,39 %, Джордж Веа прагне продовжити своє президентство. На попередніх виборах Д. Веа впевнено обійшов Д. Боакая, але не виправдав довіру виборців. Корупція, ріст цін і економічні проблеми зруйнували позитивний імідж політика. Відомий у минулому футболіст Д. Веа переживає не найкращий період політичної кар'єри. Перший тур виборів мав свої проблеми. Партія «Єдність» у листі, адресованому Національній виборчій комісії Ліберії (НІК), висловила стурбованість з приводу шахрайства. Під час підрахунку голосів НІК оголосила про арешт дев'яти агентів виборчої комісії за фальсифікацію бюлетенів. Проте виборчий орган заявив: спроби зловживань було виправлено і вони жодним чином не вплинули на результат виборів.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/election-run-off-in-liberia-as-weah-vs-boakai-goes-into-extra-time-20231114>

Liberia's Weah and rival Boakai meet again in presidential run-off

Leading by a narrow 0.39% margin, George Weah seeks to extend his presidency in a runoff on Tuesday.

Career politician Joseph Boakai, in his bid, is counting on the failures of the Weah administration.

The National Elections Commission is accused of being pro-Weah.

Liberia's George Weah finds himself in familiar territory on Tuesday as Africa's oldest republic goes into an election run-off.

The 1995 Ballon d'Or winner, Weah, 57, of the ruling Congress for Democratic Change, ascended to the presidency in 2018 after beating Joseph Nyumah Boakai, of the Unity Party, who turns 79 on 30 November.

Boakai served as vice-president under Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first elected female president in Africa.

Ahead of the 2017 polls, in a twist of events, Sirleaf cut ranks and supported Weah for the presidency, instead of Boakai.

Something similar happened in Kenya, but with different results, when Uhuru Kenyatta rallied behind his long-time political rival, Raila Odinga, instead of his deputy, William Ruto.

Ruto won the presidency.

On the comeback trail

Having spent 40 years in politics, Boakai has a wealth of experience at this level.

In the first round of elections on 10 October, he got 43.44% of the votes to Weah's 43.83%.

Weah was down from the 2017 tally, where he had a clear 10 percentage point win.

About 60% of the Liberian population is under the age of 25, and Weah, at 59, is akin to their uncle or father, while Boakai is age mates with their grandparents and great-grandparents.

Boakai is counting on the failures of the Weah administration, as Liberia remains among the poorest countries in the world, according to World Bank data.

High unemployment, negative economic growth and inflation plagued Weah's first years in government.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused the GDP to shrink by 3% in 2020, but it rebounded to 5% in 2021 and 4.8% in 2022.

Liberia as a democracy

The first round of elections, like many across the continent, had its own challenges.

The Unity Party, in a letter addressed to Liberia's National Elections Commission (NEC), raised concerns about fraud.

One of the cases was that ballots exceeded the number of registered voters in some areas, such as Maryland County.

During vote counting, the NEC announced the arrest of nine polling agents for tampering with the ballots.

However, the electoral body said:

The attempted malpractices were corrected and they, in no way, affected the outcome of the elections.

West Africa has, of late, experienced an onslaught on democracy, and the Liberian polls presented a glimmer of hope.

The Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) and the African Union's (AU) joint election-observer missions "commend the government and people of Liberia for the generally peaceful elections".

According to the Institute of Security Studies (ISS), the elections will go ahead while the credibility of the NEC is in doubt and deemed to favour Weah.

"Questions about the competence and impartiality of the NEC also linger. Civil society groups and opposition parties criticised Weah's appointments of people to the board of commissioners, who they perceived as partisan. The president's refusal to allow the opposition to appoint some commissioners also drew censure, especially since Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had extended this courtesy to Weah when he was in opposition," the ISS said in its analysis.

The Unity Party's campaign spokesperson, Mo Ali, claimed in a Facebook post that the government of Liberia attempted to bribe Ecowas election observers with \$150 000 ahead of the run-off.

Ecogas strongly denied this allegation, stating that it was a "reckless statement" and urging Liberians not to be swayed by it because they had a role to "deepen the positive outcome of the 10 October elections by remaining focused in living up to their civic responsibilities".

In a statement, the chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, said he "urges the people of Liberia, once again, to display the highest the level of resilience, civic commitment via voter-turnout and voting peacefully, as well as confidence in the dividends of effective democratic governance through this second round of elections".