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## **Observers Deem Congo Runoff Fair, but Vote Tally Isn't Final**

By Jeffrey Gettleman

KINSHASA, Congo — The Carter Center gave the presidential runoff in Congo its stamp of approval on Wednesday, saying that despite sporadic violence and isolated reports of voter fraud, the election had been disciplined, peaceful, free and fair.

“In most parts of the country, it was extremely orderly and well executed,” said Joe Clark, a former Canadian prime minister who has helped lead the Carter Center’s delegation of election observers in Congo.

The center, founded by former President Jimmy Carter, monitors elections worldwide.

Mr. Clark, speaking at a news conference in Kinshasa, the capital of Congo, said, “despite enormous logistical challenges and significant tensions between candidates, the administration of these elections has been a major success.”

That is no small feat for a country that is one of the poorest on earth and the size of Western Europe with only 300 miles of paved roads. The runoff, held Sunday, was the culmination of a process in which Congolese voters, for the first time in 40 years, were given the chance to pick their own leader. Millions of voters streamed to the polls, though apparently not as many as in the first round in July, to choose between Joseph Kabila, the incumbent, and Jean-Pierre Bemba, a businessman and militia leader accused of war crimes.

The results are still being tallied, and because of the logistics involved — many ballots are being transported atop people’s heads and by dugout — a final count is not expected for at least another week.

But early indications suggest it will be close. Mr. Kabila again seems to be doing very well in eastern Congo, where his family is from, while Mr. Bemba is winning heavily in Kinshasa and western Congo, where he was born. The numbers of votes cast in the east and west were basically equal. Results tacked on schoolhouse doors show a polarized nation, with support either very much for the president or very much against him, depending on the area.

For example, at a polling place in Kinshasa, Mr. Bemba won 81 percent to 19 percent, preliminary results show. But at a polling place in Goma, at the eastern edge of the country, Mr. Kabila won 97 percent to 3 percent.

“It’s tightening up, but we still believe Mr. Kabila is ahead,” said Sadin Banza, president of the League of Voters, an independent Congolese election monitoring organization with 1,650 observers across the country.

What worries many people here is what may happen when the final results are announced. In August, when the first round results were released, Mr. Kabila's troops battled with Mr. Bemba's in downtown Kinshasa, killing at least 20 people. Mr. Kabila won that round 45 percent to Mr. Bemba's 20 percent, with 31 other candidates splitting the difference. The fact that international human rights groups have accused Mr. Bemba of encouraging his soldiers to brutalize civilians does not seem to have been much of a factor in this election.

The United Nations has spent \$500 million to help Congo hold this vote and has deployed 17,600 peacekeepers to discourage violence. Still, several people were killed on election day, and thousands of ballots were destroyed.

On Tuesday, people in Bumba, in northern Congo, were allowed to cast their votes again because rioters had vandalized polling stations and burned ballots. And on Thursday, voting is scheduled to be redone near Goma, where enraged mobs burned more than three dozen polling places after a drunken army sergeant killed two election workers.

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