

*14<sup>th</sup> September 2023*

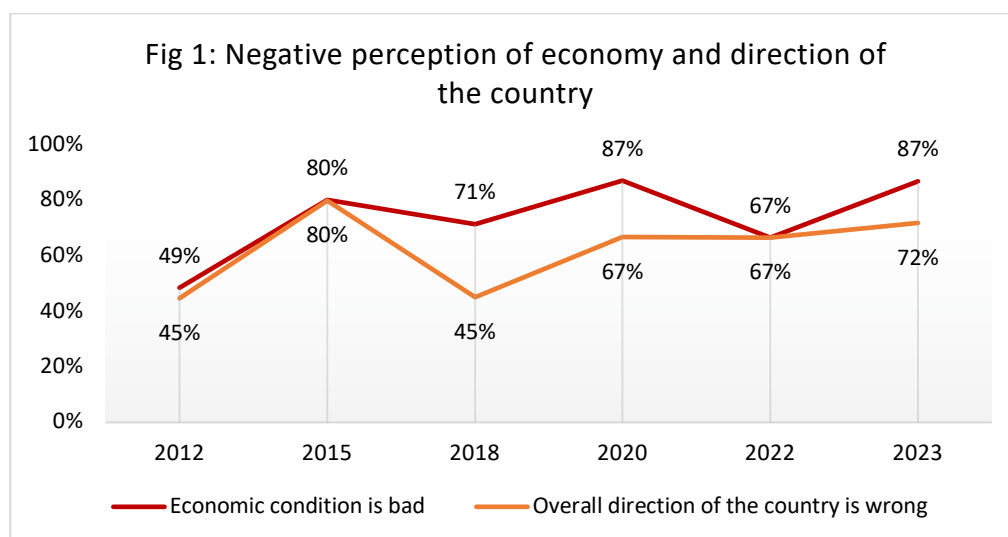
## Sierra Leoneans are increasingly worried about the declining economy, but remain firmly committed to democracy

### Executive summary

In the light of recent democratic reversals in the West and Central African region, the rising costs of living in Sierra Leone, and controversies around the results of the June 2023 general elections, IGR conducted a nationwide survey to gauge public opinion on these three defining issues. The survey found a strong demand for democratic governance with 88% of respondents preferring democracy to any other system of governance. Simultaneously, a record-high 87% of the population expressed deep concerns about the country's economic performance, with 7 in 10 (72%) believing that the country is headed in the wrong direction. Meanwhile, 62% of the citizens believe the announced June 2023 election results reflects the people's votes. Although over one-third (38%) do not share this level of trust in the last election result, an overwhelming majority (91%) of citizens still unequivocally support regular, honest, and transparent elections as the best means to select their leaders.

### Economy and overall direction of the country

Nearly 9 out of every 10 Sierra Leoneans (87%) are worried about the economy. Continuous rise in prices of food and essential commodities, coupled with the depreciation of the Leone, and more recently, a steep 40% increase in fuel prices in one month alone have eaten deep into livelihoods of almost every household. It appears that the economic condition is contributing to negative perceptions about the direction of the country as almost 3 out of 4 (72%) Sierra Leoneans say the country is going in the wrong direction. Concerns about the direction of the country is approaching the result recorded at the height of the Ebola pandemic in 2015 when 4 out of 5 (80%) people held similar apprehensions. During the early days of the Bio administration, in 2018, less than half (45%) of the population expressed such concerns. Strikingly, the latest data reveals a 27-percentage-point decline in confidence in the direction of the country since Bio assumed power in 2018.<sup>i</sup> (see figure 1 below)

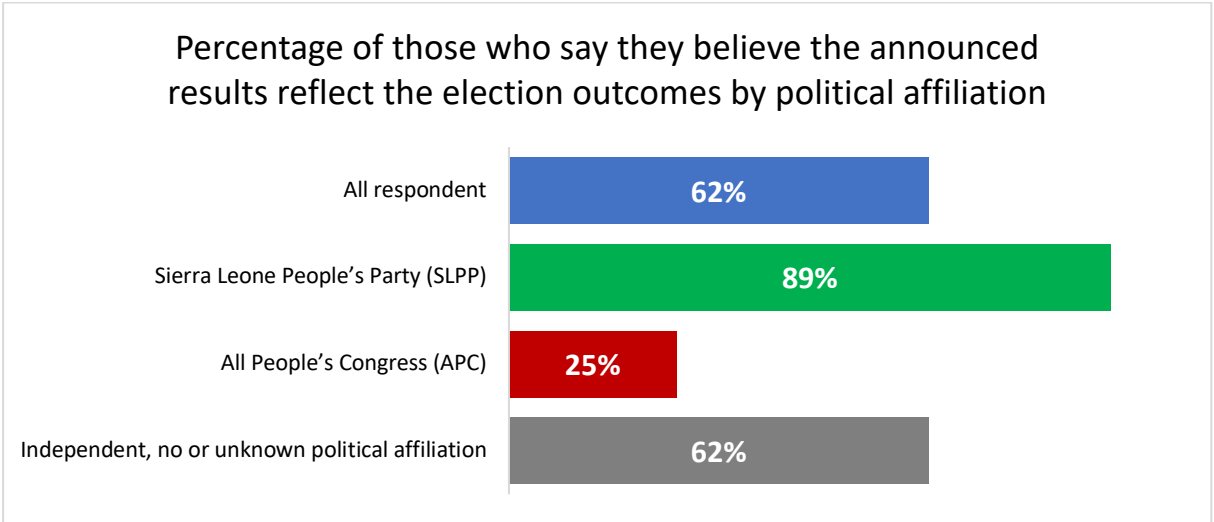
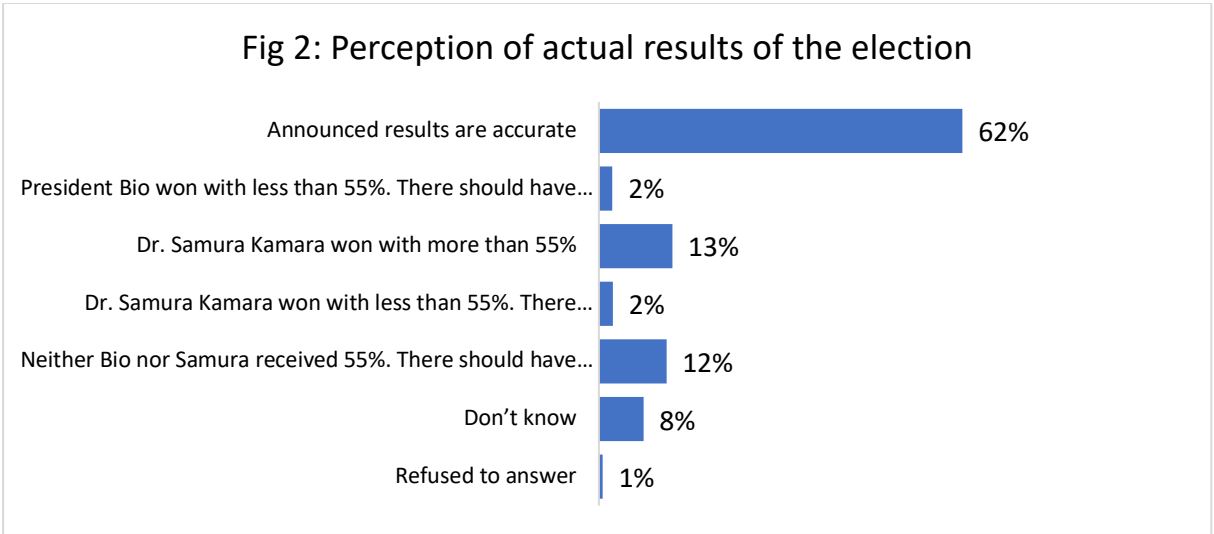


### Election results

The recent presidential and general elections ended in controversy. The results have been contested by the main opposition All People's Congress (APC) who are yet to make their evidence of fraud public. Observer groups are somewhat split over the elections. While ECOWAS and the African Union observers approved the results, a local observer group, National Elections Watch (NEW) raised concerns about statistical inconsistencies especially in the presidential results. The EU Election Observation Mission raised concerns about transparency in the tabulation process and logistical constraints in certain areas. Britain, Ireland, Germany, and France echo these concerns and have called on the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL) to publish disaggregated results by polling station,

with the US Embassy calling for an independent investigation. Elected officials in the APC have refused to participate in governance leading to negotiations between the opposition and SLPP, coordinated by the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion. The refusal of ECSL, NEW and APC to share disaggregated election data has not helped.

Recent SierraPoll show mixed views among the Sierra Leone public about the outcome of the elections. A majority, 62% say the announced results of the general elections reflects the actual outcome, while nearly four in 10 express some doubts: 14% believe there should have been a runoff, while 13% believed that candidate Dr. Samura Kamara won a majority with over 55% of the votes in the first round (Figure 2). When disaggregated by political affiliation, 89% of respondents who say they are affiliated with the ruling SLPP believe that the announced results accurately reflect the votes, while only 25% of APC supporters say the same. Similarly, to the overall percentage, close to two thirds of respondents who claim not to be affiliated with the two main parties trusted the announced results.

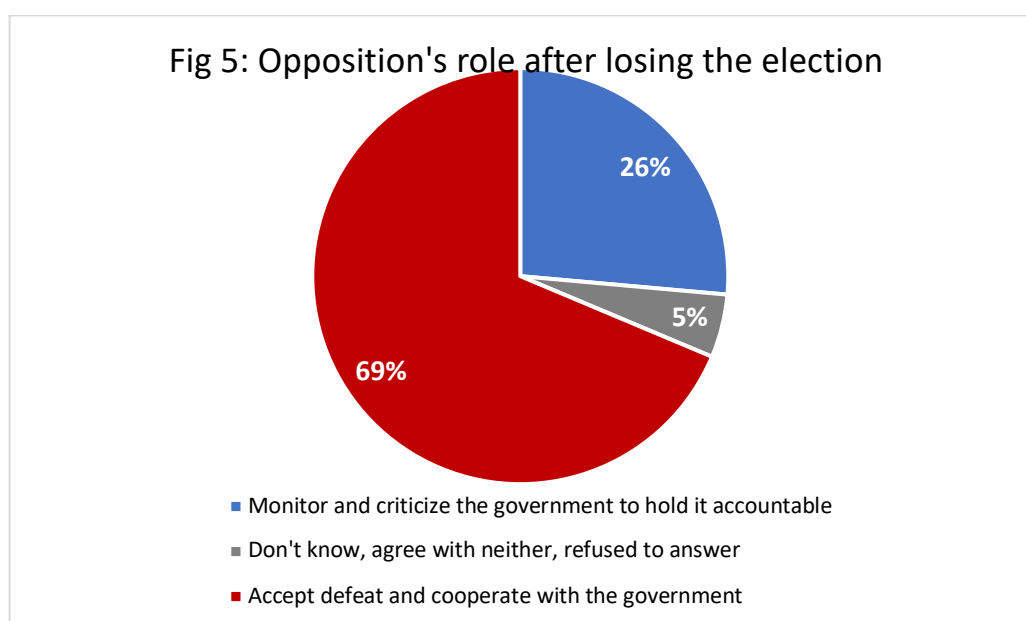
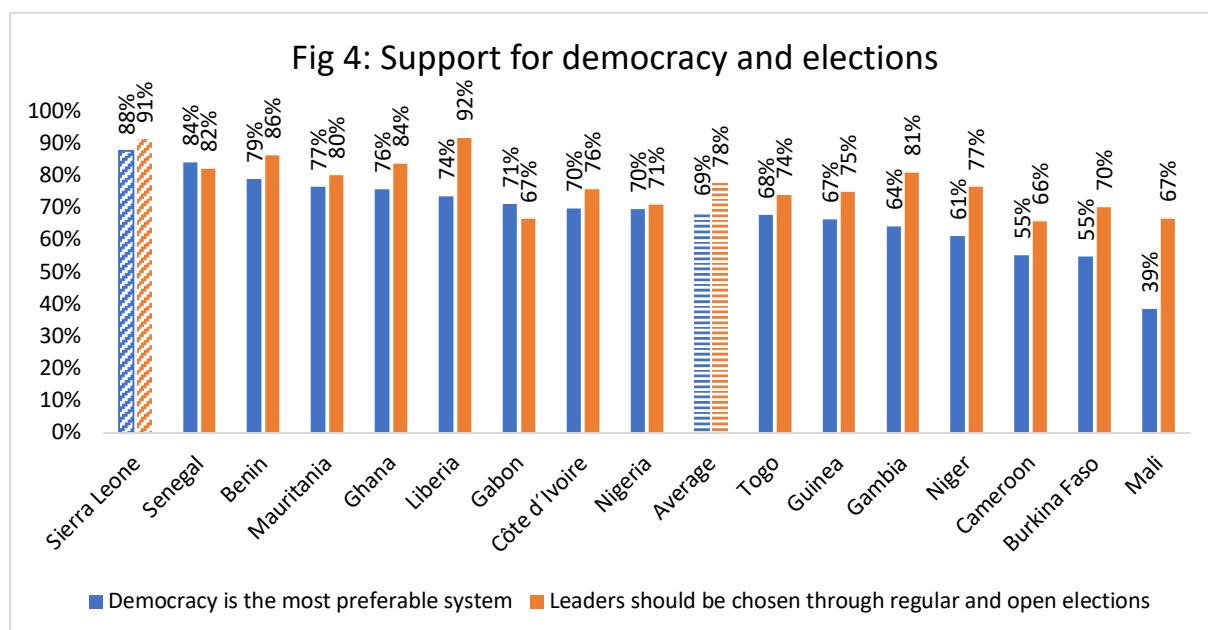


**Demand for democracy**

Notwithstanding the current debate around the election outcomes and the recent democratic setbacks in the West and Central African region Sierra Leone continues to demonstrate a robust demand for democracy. An overwhelming 88% of respondents have indicated their preference for democracy as the preferred system of governance, which is the highest ratio in the whole region and almost 20% above the regional average. An even larger majority, comprising 91% of Sierra Leoneans, unequivocally support regular, honest, and transparent elections as the means to select their leaders, which is a close second to Liberia with 92%, and 17% above the regional average. (Figure 4) <sup>ii</sup>

Opinions about the role of the opposition parties after losing an election show higher variation. A majority (69%) of Sierra Leoneans believe that opposition parties should accept defeat and collaborate

with the government to foster the country's development. In contrast, only one in four individuals (26%) think that the role of opposition parties should be to monitor and criticize the government to hold it accountable (Figure 5). This, however, is arguably a core responsibility of the opposition in a functional democracy according to many democracy experts.



### Methodology

- Interview dates: September 07 – 11th, 2023
- Respondents: Sierra Leonean adults – 18 and above
- Sampling: Random sampling was used with a selection of EAs in proportion with the population of districts according to the National Census 2016 and a random selection of respondents one respondent of each of the 8 households in the EA with respect to a gender balance.
- Number of respondents: 1200
- Margin of error 3% at 95% confidence interval
- Data collection mode: face to face interviews/ boots on the ground

<sup>i</sup> Source of data from previous years is the Afrobarometer survey conducted by IGR [Analyse online – Afrobarometer](#)

<sup>ii</sup> Source of data for other countries is Afrobarometer survey round 9 with data published in 2023 [Analyse online – Afrobarometer](#)