

## The June 2023 Elections: A Forecast of the Electoral Map of Sierra Leone

This edition of SierraPoll combines survey data of registered voters with the party list of candidates across all 16 districts to assess how political parties will perform in each district and project the electoral map of Sierra Leone for the 2023 elections. We asked voters, which party would they vote for, for MP and councillors if elections were held tomorrow. Based on this information we forecast the composition of the next parliament, including the percentage share of women in the House as well as the distribution of the 22 local councils among political parties and independent candidates. When the survey results are compared with official district-level results in three election cycles over the last 20 years, we see changes in voting patterns in both multi-ethnic communities in the North-Eastern areas of the country and party stronghold districts (See Maps 1, 2, 3 and 4 below).

SierraPoll conducts opinion polls to contribute to improving the quality and integrity of Sierra Leone's electoral process, support political parties with reliable data to plan their campaigns, as well as help the electorate and interest groups to manage expectations as they plan for life after the election. We believe that the upcoming elections provide a good opportunity for Sierra Leone to deepen the cultural and civic norms around the usage of scientific polling data to inform decision-making.

Before presenting the survey results, it is useful to note that accuracy of poll numbers is not only about correctly calling which party will win an election in a district, but how close the poll figures are to ECSL's final election results. For example, let us assume that two pollsters (Pollsters A & B) with the same sample size conducted polls for the 2018 election. Pollster A states that SLPP is likely to win with 62% of the vote, while Pollster B states that APC will win with 51% of the votes, with SLPP receiving 49% of votes cast. However, when the votes are all tallied, SLPP is declared the winner with 52% of the vote, while APC received 48% of the vote. Which pollster would we think is more accurate? We consider Pollster B as more accurate than Pollster A, because their numbers are closer to the final official results. Pollster A missed the results by 10 points even though he called the correct winner. In our predictions below, we have made forecasts with this in mind. We have tried to give as close estimates as possible to the actual results, bearing in mind the margin of error of  $\pm 1.98\%$ . Also it is useful to note that as the campaign unfolds, some grounds might shift. Thus, a final prediction is required at least a week before election.

### Methodology

- **Interview dates:** May 20 – 26th, 2023
- **Respondents:** Sierra Leonean adults – 18 and above (99.13% are registered voters)
- **Sampling:** This survey broadly categorized respondents into the country's 16 district blocks that form the constituencies under the new proportional representation system. A two-phase sampling approach was employed: A) In Phase One, we utilized ECSL's data base of 3,360 voter registration centers (VRCs) to randomly select 245 VRCs. A VRC serves as a polling centre on polling day. B) In Phase Two, once the VRCs were selected, the second stage involved selecting targeted respondents. We randomly selected ten voters from ten households within the VRC catchment area. The median number of voters per VRC is 691, with the majority of 2023 VRCs ranging between 181 and 4,400 voters. VRCs in urban areas tend to be larger. Within each district, individual VRCs were selected using probability proportional to size (this ensured that each registered voter had approximately the same probability of being selected).
- Number of respondents: 2,448 (2,428 registered and 19 unregistered voters)
- Margin of error  $\pm 1.98\%$  (adjusted for weighting) at 95% confidence interval
- Data collection mode: face to face interviews/ boots on the ground
- Number of questions: 17
- Number of questions not reported: 4

## Key findings

Using the threshold of 11.9% legally required to win a seat under the new district block system, we make the following predictions about the composition of the next parliament and local councils (see table 1 below):

**Table 1: Survey results and a forecast of parliament and local councils**

District	Survey results: Local councils and parliament			Forecast of parliamentary seats			Forecast of next women MPs			No of 2018 MPs retained	Total MP seats
	APC	NGC	SLPP	APC	NGC	SLPP	APC	NGC	SLPP		
Bo	10%	0%	88%	0-1	0	11-12	0	0	3-4	10-11	12
Bombali	89%	0%	9%	7-8	0	0-1	2	0	0	4-5	8
Bonthe	3%	0%	94%	0	0	5	0	0	2	2	5
Falaba	46%	2%	52%	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	4
Kailahun	7%	0%	91%	0-1	0	9-10	0	0	4	7-8	10
Kambia	47%	15%	38%	3	1-2	2-3	1	0	1	2	6
Karene	73%	0%	27%	3-4	0	1-2	1	0	0	3	5
Kenema	12%	0%	88%	1	0	11	0	0	3	5-6	12
Koinadugu	51%	0%	48%	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	4
Kono	35%	0%	55%	3-4	0	6	1	0	2	4	10
Moyamba	19%	0%	80%	1	0	5	0	0	2	3	6
Port Loko	81%	0%	18%	8	0	2	2	0	0	5	10
Pujehun	6%	0%	90%	0-1	0	6-7	0	0	2	4-5	7
Tonkolili	86%	0%	14%	9	0	1	3	0	0	4	10
West/Rural	63%	1%	36%	6	0	4	2	0	1	3-4	10
West/ Urban	61%	0%	39%	9-11	0	5-7	3	0	2	7	16
<b>Total</b>				<b>50-62</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>71-80</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22-23</b>	<b>68-73</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Percentage</b>				<b>37 - 46%</b>	<b>0.7-1.5%</b>	<b>53-59%</b>	<b>Women MPs = 26%</b>			<b>50-54%</b>	

1. The survey shows that at a seat-winning threshold of 11.9%, it is difficult for smaller parties and independents to win seats. Effectively, this means that the 2023 election is essentially a two-horse race between the ruling SLPP and main opposition APC.
2. SLPP is tipped to form a parliamentary majority in the range of 53% to 59%, while APC will retain its place as the main opposition occupying around 37% to 46% of the seats. NGC could obtain 0.7% to 1.5% of seats in the next parliament.
3. Around 37 to 39 women including one female paramount chief MP will make up 25 to 26% of the next 149 MPs. About 60% of the women MPs are predicted to be from the SLPP.
4. At least half (50-54%) of the former MPs will be retained; the lowest attrition rate recorded for parliament in four election cycles over 20 years.
5. The survey reveals reduced support for the two smaller parties in parliament, the NGC and the C4C, even in districts (Kambia and Kono) that they won in 2018. Part of this could be explained by the leadership in both these parties forming new alliances with other political parties in the lead up to the June 2023 elections. It is possible that this has paved the way for their membership to return back to the two dominant parties they broke away from in 2018.
6. For local councils, SLPP is projected to take 11 to 13 of the 22 councils, while APC is projected to take 9 to 11 councils.
7. Seven local councils in six districts --- Falaba, Koinadugu, Kambia, Kono, Western Rural and Western Urban are predicted to have a significant share of opposition councillors. For effective local governance in these competitive councils, the next set of mayors and district council chairs should consider adopting cross-party and inclusive approaches in managing service delivery.



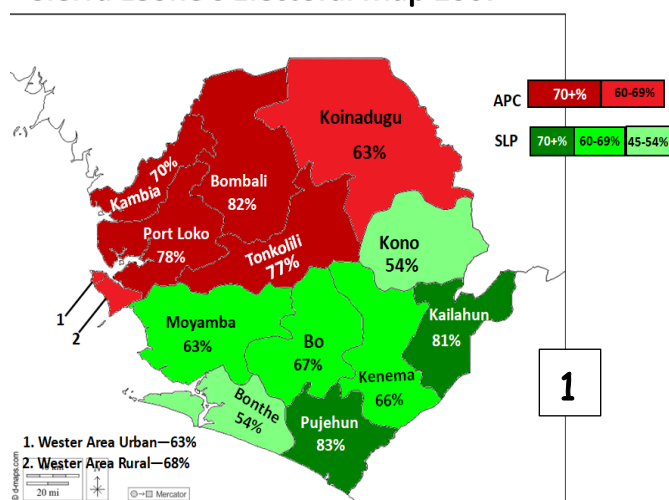
Figure 1 Ethnic Map of Sierra Leone

## Ethnicity and the changing electoral map of Sierra Leone

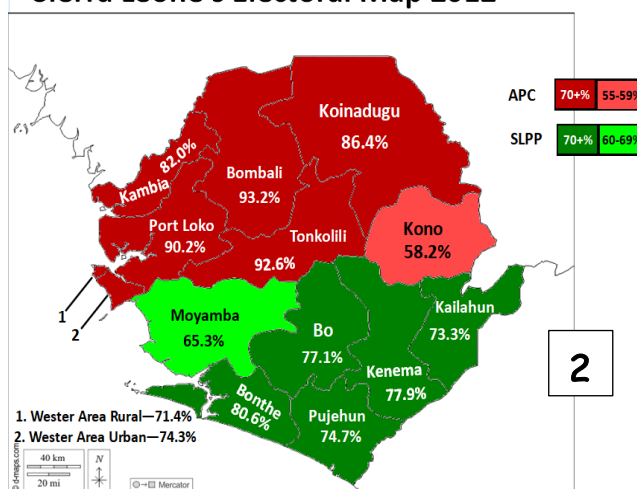
Geographically, culturally, and historically there are 16 well-defined electoral districts of Sierra Leone. Districts in the North and Western regions hosting Themne and Limba speakers are traditionally loyal to APC, while the dominant Mende speaking districts in the South and East vote for the ruling SLPP (see ethnic map of Sierra Leone above). Although it has been widely touted that sharp regional and ethnic-based voting patterns have configured the nature of politics in these districts, the fact that Sierra Leone changed government twice in the last four elections demonstrates some fluidity of voting behaviours in each district in ways that require a more nuanced understanding of voting practices.

From the three electoral maps below where a change of power occurred twice, we note two issues that helps explain electoral outcomes. When one or both issues occur a dominant party can lose its grip on its base and eventually loses election. The two issues are: a) when dominant mono-ethnic communities in a party's stronghold reduce their support for the party that controls the region over time. This was the case for the SLPP in 2007 when districts with heavy Mende presence --- Bo, Bonthe, Moyamba and Kenema switched allegiance to the PMDC party and reduced their support for the SLPP (see map 1 below); and b) when minority ethnic groups in heterogenous communities in a region reduce their support for the dominant party of that region. We saw both trends (a & b) play out in the case of the APC in 2018, particularly when the party lost votes in both dominant Themne districts of Bombali, Port Loko and Tonkolili as well as multi-ethnic areas of Western Area, Koinadugu, Kambia and Falaba (see the electoral maps 2&3). The recent SierraPoll forecast in Map 4 below shows that the APC has increased its share of votes in the Western Area since 2018; however, the party's performance in multi-ethnic areas of the East and North --- Kono, Koinadugu, Kambia and Falaba is less strong when compared to the 2007 and 2012 results. We also note that post-2018, the SLPP won a district wide council bye-election in Falaba in 2019 and has increased its share of the vote in all bye-elections in Kambia, Koinadugu and Karene over the last 18 months (ECSL bye-election results).

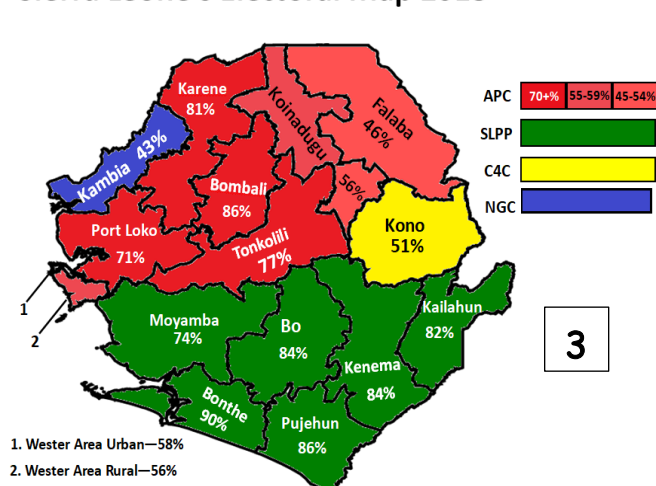
Sierra Leone's Electoral Map 2007



Sierra Leone's Electoral Map 2012



Sierra Leone's Electoral Map 2018



Forecast - Sierra Leone's Electoral Map 2023

