



SIERRA LEONE: Trust in Elections Management Bodies

ABSTRACT

A slight majority Sierra Leoneans trust the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) 57% and the Electoral Commission (EC) (55%) a lot, while PPRC (43%) and the Police (44%) are the least trusted institutions

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Data generated: July – August 2022



Ambasáid na hÉireann
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SierraPoll Survey

Trust in Elections Management Bodies (EMBS)

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I Methodology

IGR gathered Citizen's perceptions of EMB performance in the most recent set of bye-elections held in the last 18 months in Sierra Leone between July and September 2022 in two rounds of surveys. Sixteen elections were covered during the period for both parliamentary and local councils in all five regions of the country. Questions covered included EMB performance on application of COVID-related protocols, perceptions about the way bye-elections were managed and how communities view the outcomes of those bye-elections. The charts presented in this report provide the results of the two surveys. It is our hope that this study will provide a field of learning and reflection for EMBs on the management of future elections especially in the context of a health emergency.

The same methods were used for both surveys. The survey data was collected through in-person interviews at all bye-election wards and some wards where bye-elections did not take place. IGR surveyed 1,176 individuals. This provides a margin of error at the national level of $\pm 1\%$. IGR collected 8 observations from each ward that is within the sampling frame. The total number of wards covered in the survey was 147 within 94 constituencies.

IGR assigned survey collectors (i.e., “enumerators”) to at least 6 wards in each district. The enumerators then collected data from eight households around each ward. The enumerators collected data electronically using tablet computers and smart phones. The enumerators alternated respondents' gender, used a random assignment for the member of the household to interview, and applied a “random walk” approach (usually interviewing every fifth house) to establish the distance between households.

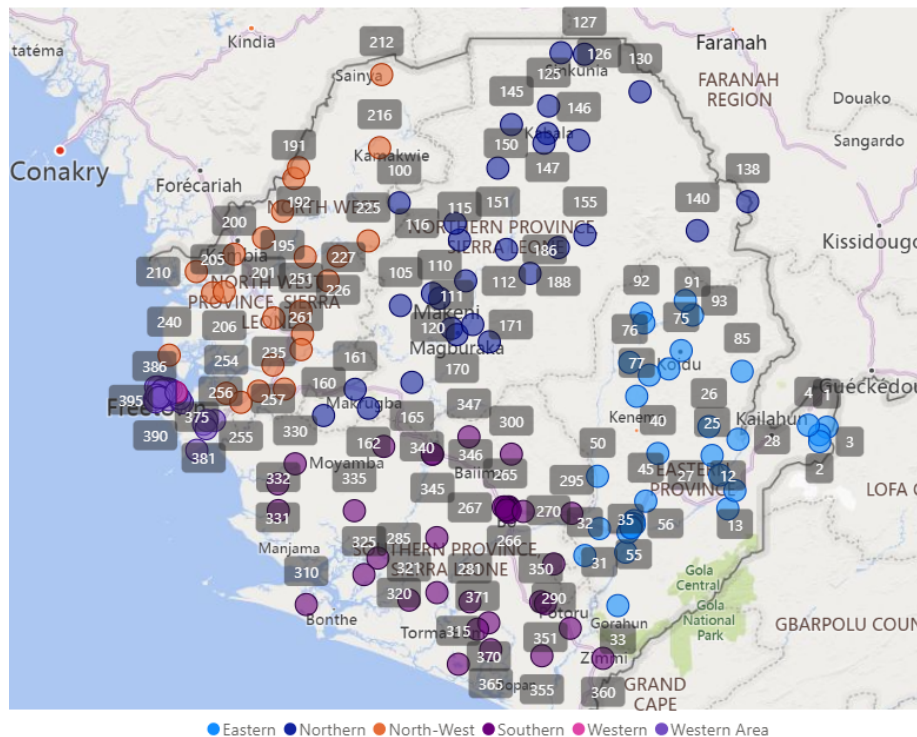


Figure 1: Locations (Wards) where IGR collected survey

2 Analysis

Overall performance of EMB performance of recent bye elections is mixed. While respondents reported sloppiness in the application of COVID-19 protocols, citizens in bye-election held communities recorded high trust in the management of elections in the last 18-24 months.

Respondents were asked about compliance with COVID-19 protocols ranging from mask wearing to social distancing, and treatment of people with special needs such as persons with disabilities, the aged and pregnant women. The results show that on mask-wearing and social distancing, just over half (53%) of the respondents felt that the Electoral Commission (EC) enforced these two protocols well (see Figure 1). Similarly, just over half (52%) felt the EC did a good job in allowing pregnant women and the elderly to vote first. The provision of accommodation for PWDs received the lowest rating, with only 4 in 10 (41%) of respondents saying that this was done well. These results are in line with the most recent EMB score card results, where COVID preparedness and inclusion received the among the lowest scores.

Similarly, citizen trust in the institutions that manage elections is mixed. When asked, “how much do you trust the following institutions in the past two years,” a slight majority reported that they trust the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) 57% and the Electoral Commission (EC)¹ (55%) a lot. PPRC (43%) and the Police (44%) were the least trusted institutions (Figure 2). However, it is important to note that trust levels in institutions was higher in communities that had recently undergone by-elections in the last two years compared to nationwide perceptions of trust more generally (Figure 3)

Specifically, when respondents in the 16 bye-election held, localities were held asked about EMB performance in the conduct of the most recent by-elections, responses were considerably more favourable. Again, the army was perceived the most favourably, with nearly nine in 10 (88%) of respondents saying that they performed well in the most recent bye-election. This was followed by EC and youth groups (84%), political parties (83%) and Paramount Chiefs (79%). Secret societies received the least favourable responses (61%) (Figure 3).

The overall high levels of satisfaction with EMB performance in conducting elections is reflected in citizen satisfaction with the results of the most recent bye-elections in their communities. Over three in four (78%) of citizens believed that the results of the last bye-election reflected the wishes of their community. More men (85%) than women (71%) trusted the elections outcome (Figure 4). Citizen perceptions of NEC illustrate this clearly. While 55% of citizens nationwide said they trusted NEC’s performance in bye elections over the past two years, this number was much higher in districts that had bye-elections. Over 8 in 10 (84%) of citizens in bye-elections communities said that NEC performed fairly well or very well in the last elections, while 78% of respondents in bye-elections areas said they trusted the results of the most recent bye-election held in the community (Figure 5)

However, there are regional variations, with higher levels of trust in electoral outcomes shown in ruling party-dominated regions. Overwhelming majorities of citizens in the East (98%) and South (95%) said they trusted electoral outcomes, compared to 70% in the North-West and 72% in the North (Figure 8). The lowest percentages were recorded in the Western Area Rural. The report disaggregated results for the Western area as there were sharp differences. Only 34% of respondents in Western rural said that the results of the last by-election reflected the wishes of voters in the community (Figure 6). It should be noted that the by-elections in Western Rural were particularly contentious. The court ordered a re-run of the election of Constituency 110 that was won by APC’s Hon Kadijatu Davis in 2018. Results of her election rerun in 2019 was also cancelled following an alleged violence in seven polling stations. Hon Davis won 51% of votes in a third election making her the only MP candidate to contest three elections in two years. It is possible that these low results reflect dissatisfaction with the process rather than the result.

¹ National Electoral Commission (NEC) and Electoral Commission (EC) are used interchangeably.

3. Graphs

Fig 1: EMB Performance on COVID-19 Protocols

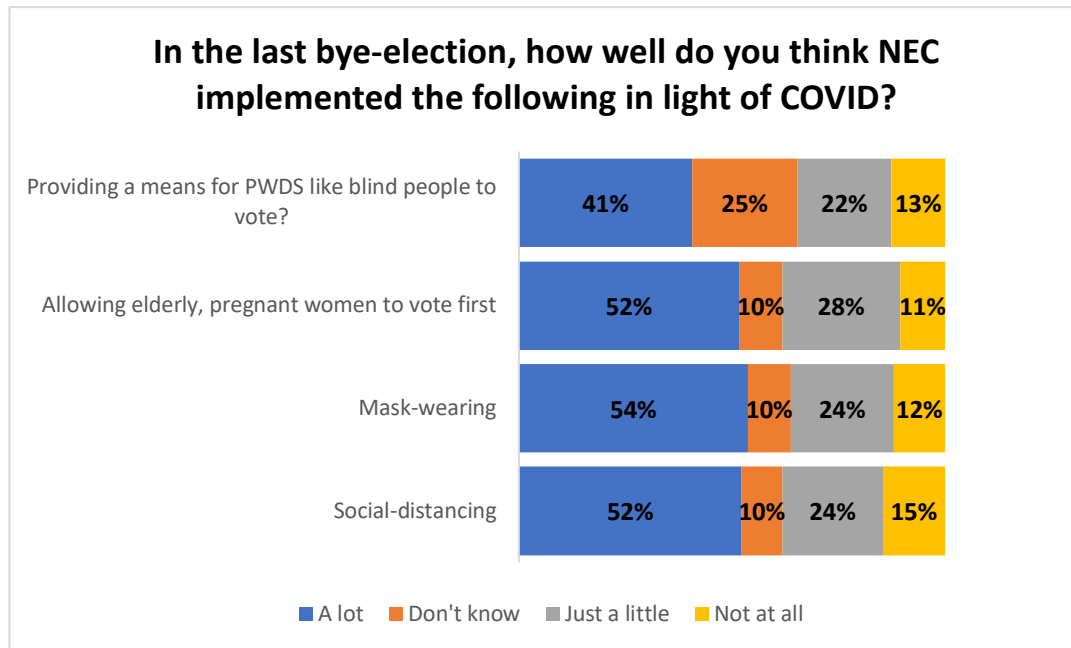


Fig 2: Trust in EMBs

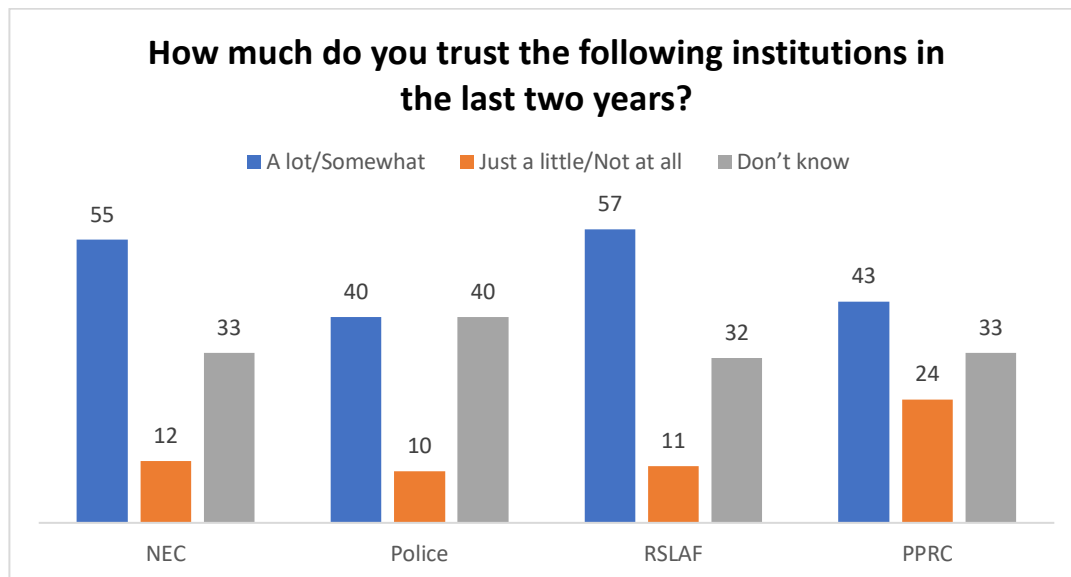


Figure 2: Respondents were asked: In the last bye-election, how well do you think NEC implemented the following in light of COVID?

Fig 3: Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the following institutions in the past two years?

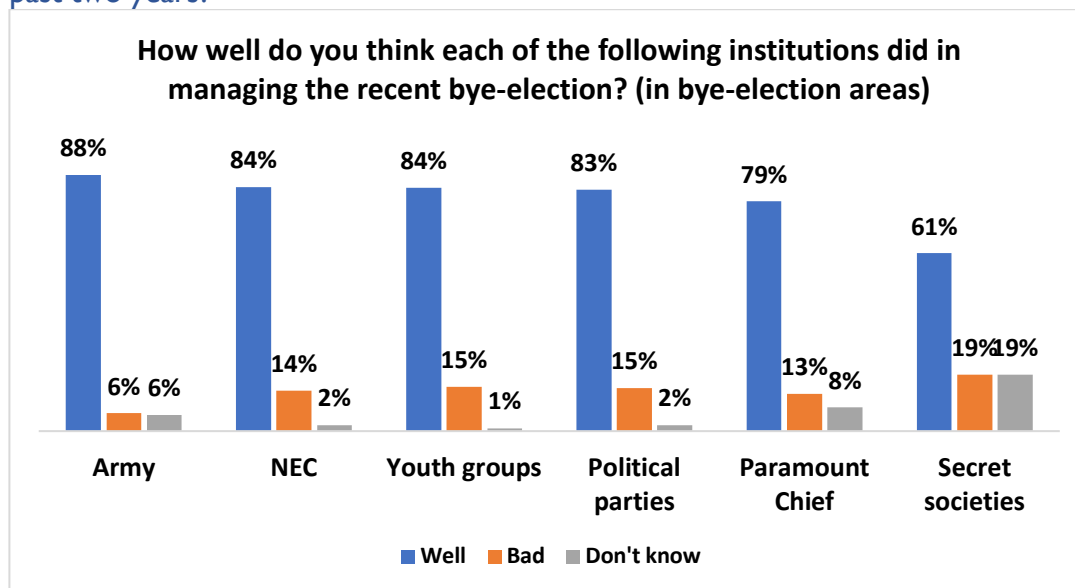


Figure 3: Respondents were asked: How well do you think each of the following institutions did in managing the recent bye-election?

Fig 4: Accuracy of Election Results

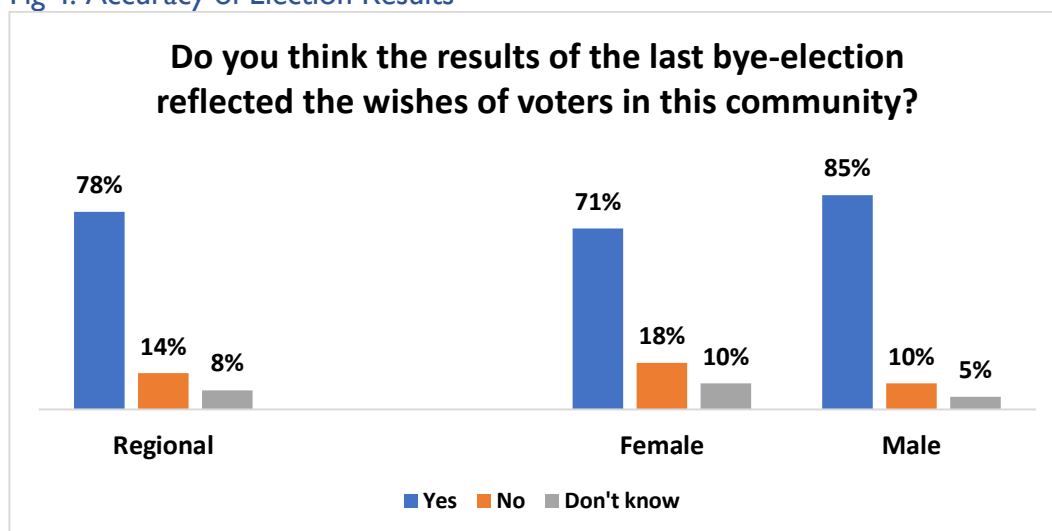


Figure 4: Respondents were asked: Do you think the results of the last bye-election reflected the wishes of voters in this community?

Fig 5: Citizens Perception of NEC and Bye-election Results in the Last Two Years

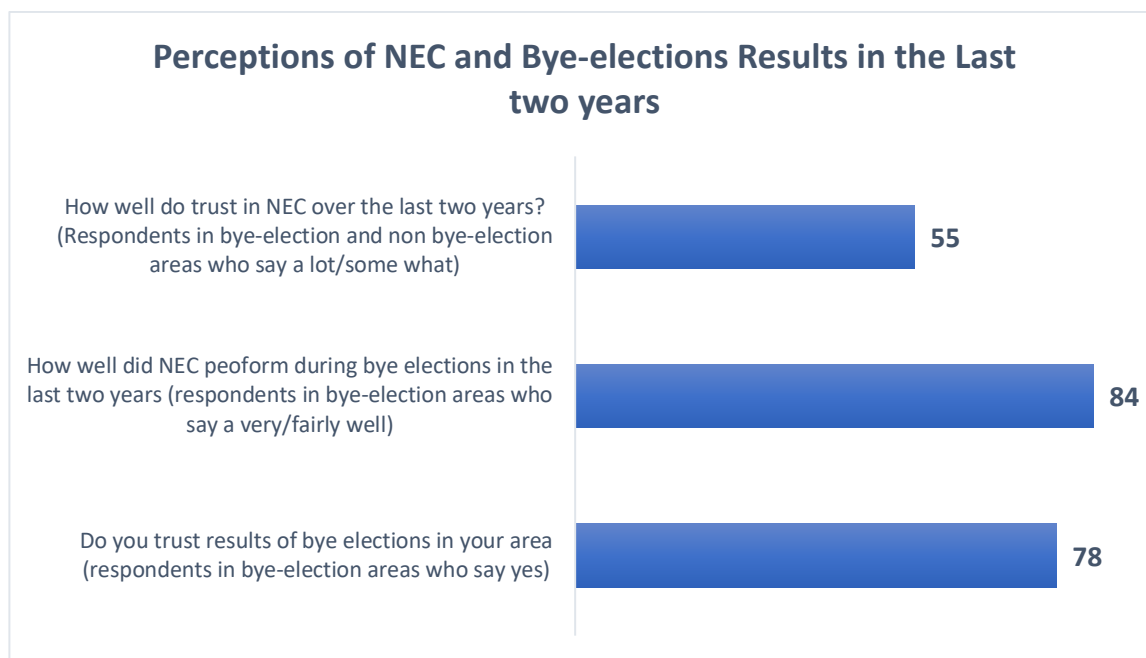


Figure 5 Respondents were asked the following questions: How much do you trust the following institutions in the past two years; How well do you think each of the following institutions [NEC] did in managing the recent bye-election; and Do you think the results of the last bye-election reflected the wishes of voters in this community?

Fig 6: Citizens Distribution of Perception of Bye-Election Results by Region

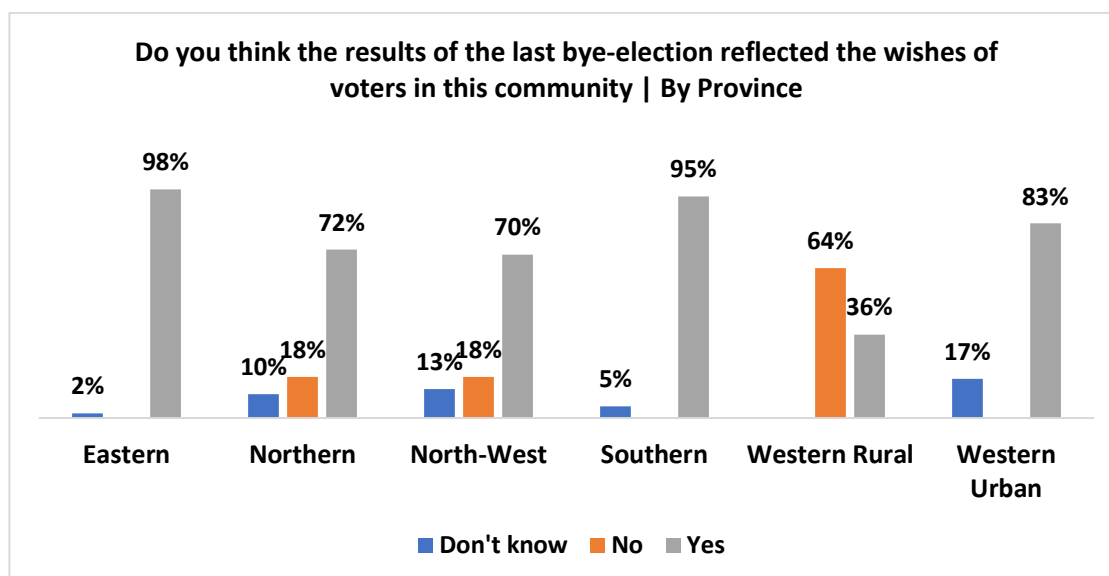


Figure 8: Respondents were asked: Do you think the results of the last bye-election reflected the wishes of voters in this community?