SIERRA LEONE: Violence Women and Elections

ABSTRACT

Although the electoral system has a greater implication of participation of women and minorities in governance, 81% of women don't know which electoral system Sierra Leone is practicing. While nearly one in four (24%) Sierra Leoneans said they heard about violence in 16 bye elections in the last 24 months, 6% saw incidences of violence, and 1% said they actually experienced violence themselves.

By Institute for Governance Reform with funding from Irish Aid

Data generated: July – August 2022

Violence, Women and Elections

@Institute for Governance Reform

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1.   Background

IGR collected opinions on Violence in Bye-Elections held within the last 18 months in Sierra Leone between July and September 2022. We utilised the experiences of citizens bye-elections over the last one year to understand the trends and patterns of electoral violence and the implications for women. While questions covered electoral violence generally, surveys also examined components in the Public Elections Act (PEA) that had potential implications for women in politics given our focus on advocating for an enabling environment for women in elections. This builds on our past SierraPolls and reports that have established a strong desirability on the part of citizens for women's political participation. We looked at citizens understanding of two electoral systems that have been discussed recently in Sierra Leone in light of the upcoming elections, the proposal for reserved seats for women that would have necessitated a constitutional amendment, and for 30% of parliamentary candidates to be women. These discussions stemming from the PEA overtook those around the GEWE Bill, and for some gender proponents, was seen as a potential mechanism to ensure that women would have 30% seats in parliament, outside of the GEWE Bill Provisions. Finally, the survey also looks at results on domestic violence and teenage pregnancy, which can also be seen as dealing with violence against women.
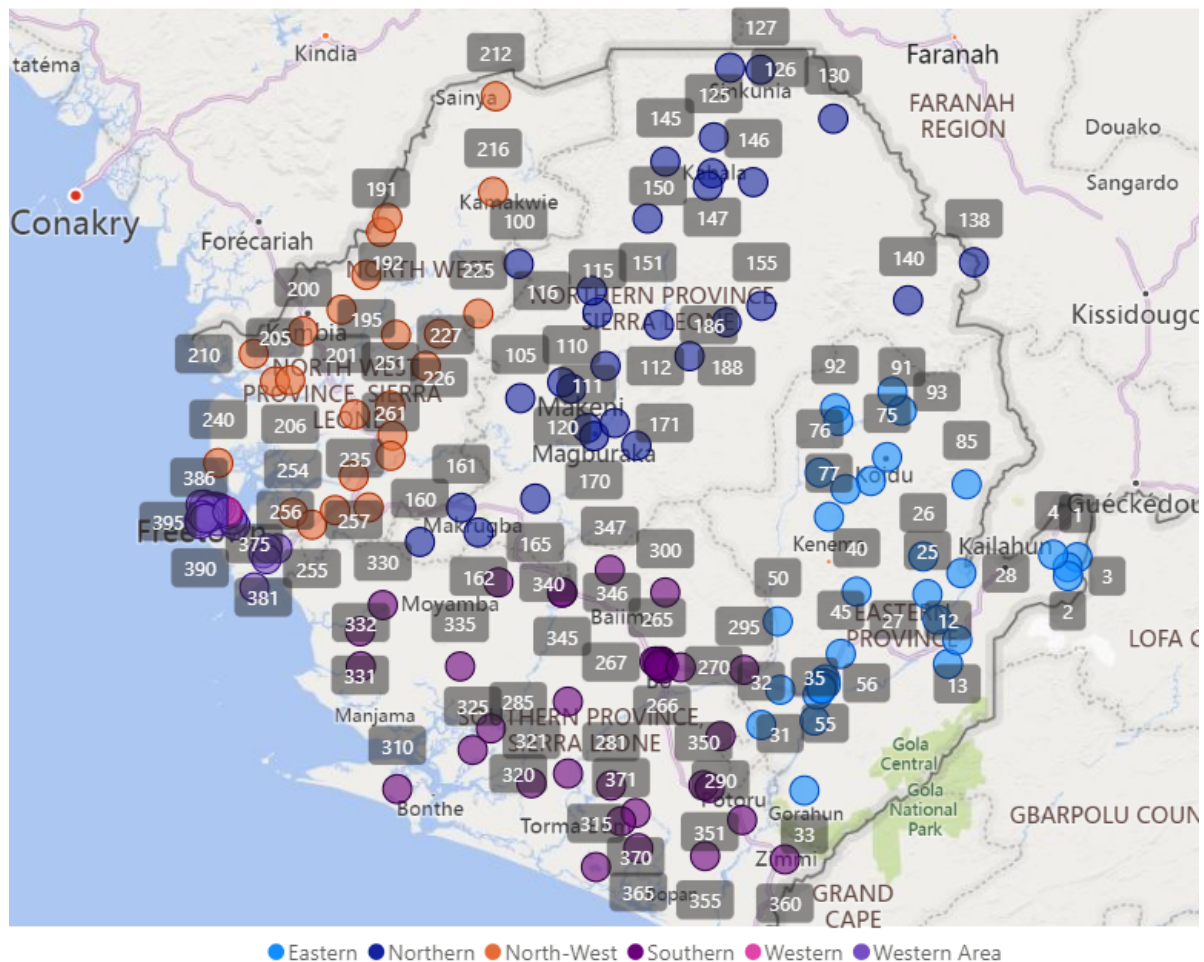

Figure 1: Locations (Wards) where IGR collected surveys

1. Analysis

1.1. Perceptions of Violence during bye-elections held 2020-2022

Violence is a typical phenomenon in elections in Sierra Leone, and women are disproportionately affected when electoral violence occur. To understand the nature, effects and implications of violence on women, the survey asked respondents generally about fears of violence, experiences of violence, and what forms this violence took, before asking whether violence was a particular concern for women running for political positions in their community. Respondents were asked to reflect on the most recent bye-elections in their community as a reference point.

Overall, concerns around violence seems low. Over 6 in 10 (64%) respondents said they were not afraid of violence when going out to vote (Figure 4). However, slightly more females expressed fear about voting than males (Figure 3).

A majority of respondents (68%) noted that the community was largely peaceful on the day of the bye-election. While nearly one in four (24%) said they heard about violence, only 6% actually saw incidences of violence, and just 1% said they actually experienced violence themselves (Figure 4). There was little difference by gender. The most common forms of violence are: people quarrelling (43%), fighting (16%), one group attacking another (16%) and arson – a house being burnt (6%) (Figure 5).

On the specific question of violence against women, the data showed that for a majority of respondents (67%), violence against women is not seen as a significant concern for the forthcoming elections. There was only a two-percentage point variation by gender – 66% of women compared to 68% of men said that violence is not an issue for women who run for political positions in their community (Figure 6).
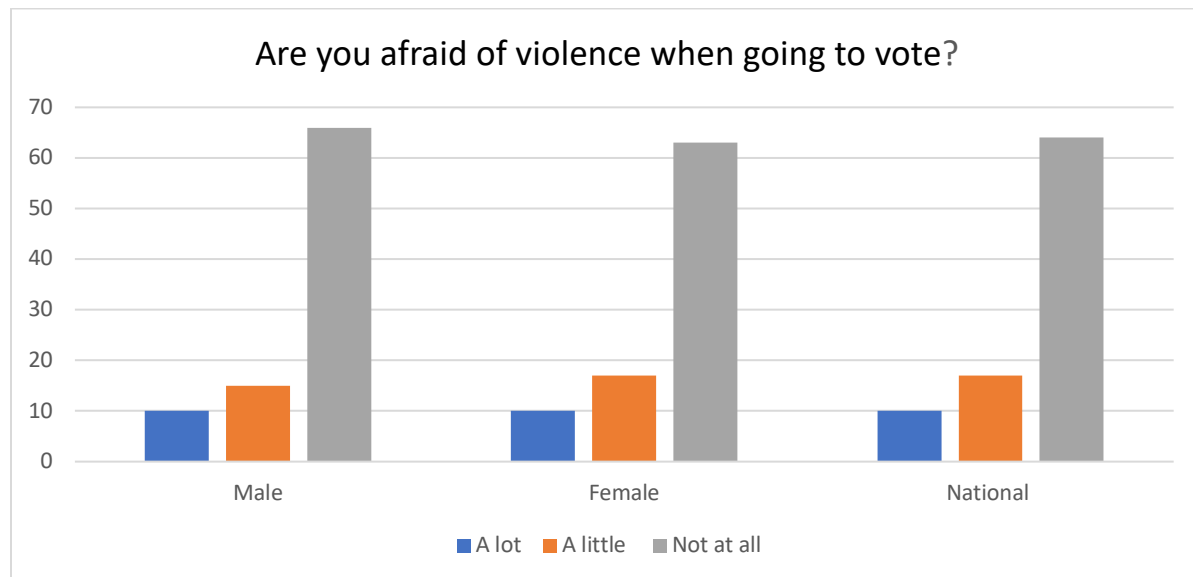

Figure 3: Respondents were asked: Were you afraid of violence when going to vote?
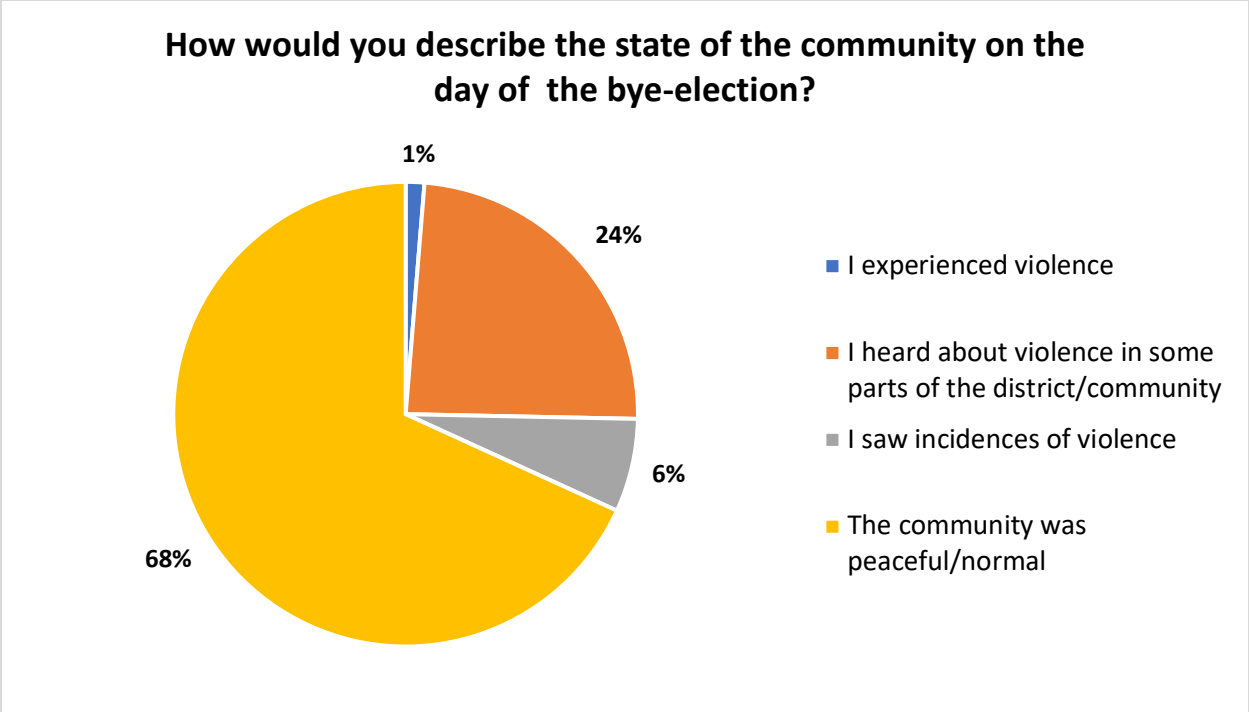
How would you describe the state of the community on the day of the bye-election?

- 1%
- 24%
- 6%
- 68%

Legend:
- I experienced violence
- I heard about violence in some parts of the district/community
- I saw incidences of violence
- The community was peaceful/normal

Figure 4: Respondents were asked: how would you describe the state of the community on the day of the bye-election?

Forms of Electoral Violence| Sierra Leone

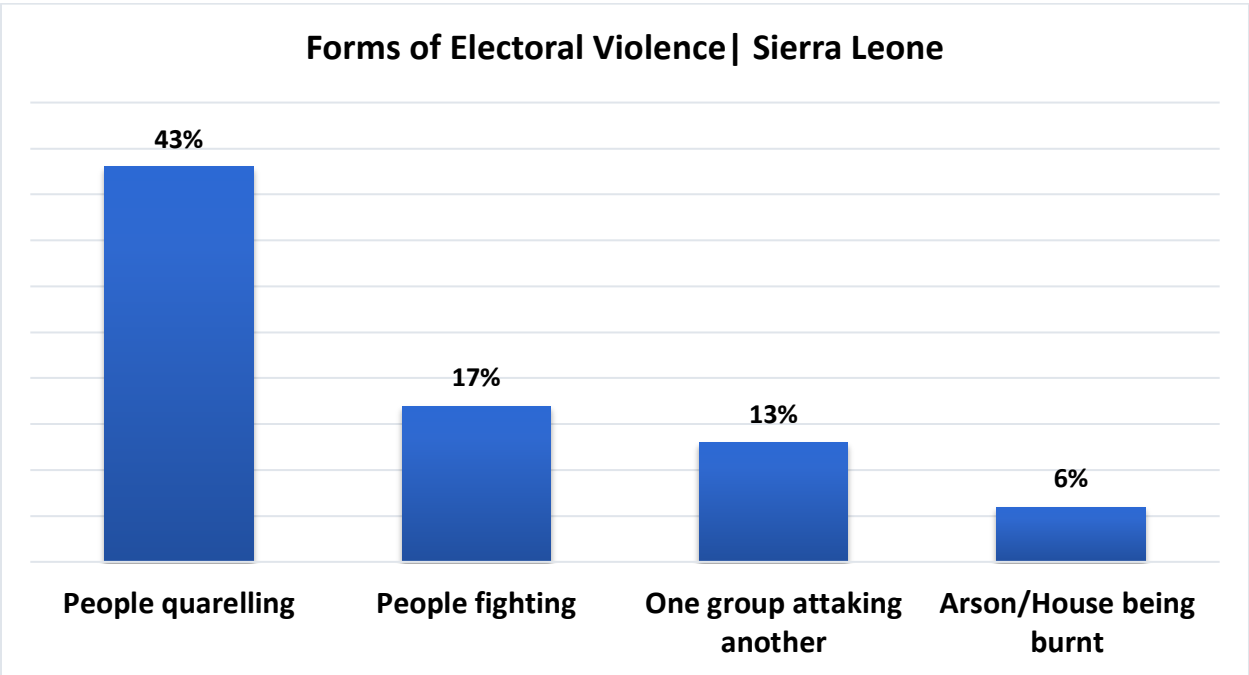| People quarelling	People fighting	One group attaking another	Arson/House being burnt
43%	17%	13%	6%

Figure 5: Respondents were asked: If you experienced or saw incidence of violence, what form did it take?

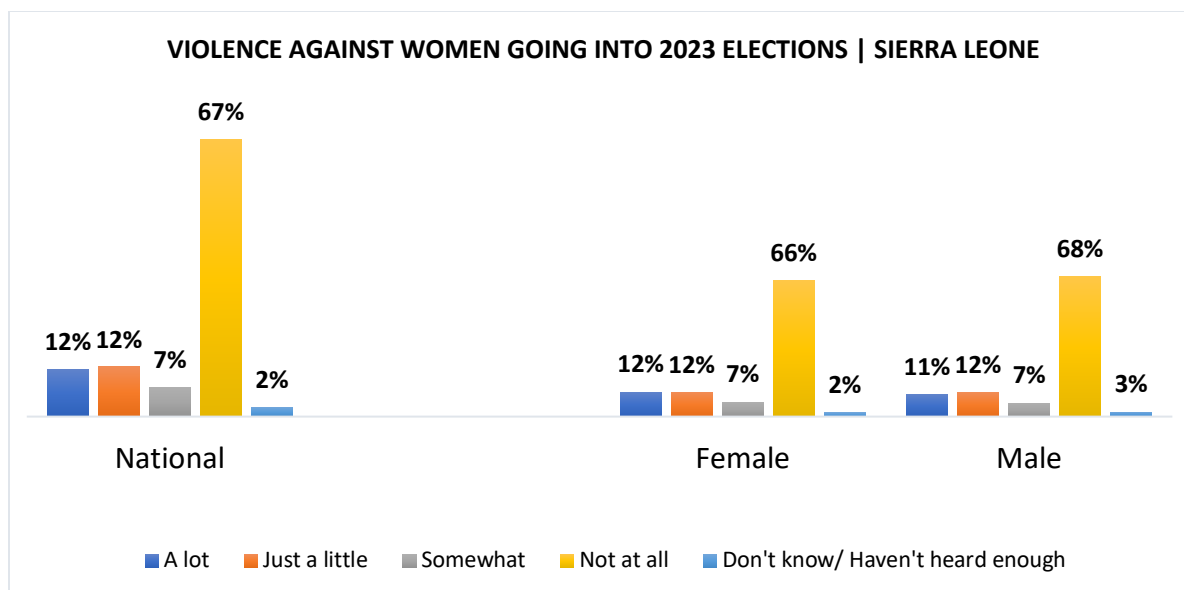**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN GOING INTO 2023 ELECTIONS | SIERRA LEONE**

Figure 6: Respondents were asked: Going into the 2023 elections, do you think violence against women is an issue for women who run for political positions in your community?

1.2. Public Elections Bill and Implications for Women's Political Participation

In addition to examining the potential of violence to impact women's political participation, survey questions also looked at the enabling environment or conditions that would increase women's political participation. In past SierraPolls, we have examined citizens' appetite to vote for women candidates,[1] as well as for legislation that would set aside reserved seats for women.[2] In a 2017 survey carried out before the elections, results showed that 72% of respondents would be willing to vote for a woman.[3] In a more recent survey focusing on citizens perceptions of components of the GEWE Bill, Citizens overwhelmingly supported a 30% quota for women in parliament and in appointed positions, with 82.4% citizens saying they agree or strongly agree. Similarly, 8 in 10 respondents said that parties should have to nominate at least 30% women in every district.[4]

While prior SierraPoll research focused on the GEWE Bill, given the debate around the Public Elections Bill presented to parliament in July 2022, we wanted to ask additional questions to citizens on key provisions that had potential implications for women's political participation to inform the parliamentary debates and our advocacy to increase women's political representation. We considered two sections of the PEA in particular: the proposed provision for reserved seats for women; and Section 59 (2) calling for at least 1/3 of MP nominations to be women (the PR system).

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[1] Institute for Governance Reform. 2017. Manifesto for Sierra Leone's 2018 Elections: Baseline Study of Citizens' Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Toward Politics.
[2] Institute for Governance Reform. 2022. Gender Bill Opinions, 7 January 2022
[3] Institute for Governance Reform. 2017. Manifesto for Sierra Leone's 2018 Elections: Baseline Study of Citizens' Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Toward Politics.
[4] Institute for Governance Reform. 2022. Gender Bill Opinions, 7 January 2022

The reserved seats clause generated intense debate in parliament and among civil society leaders about which political system would be best for Sierra Leone: First Past the Post (FPTP), or Proportional Representation (PR). However, survey results show that citizens who would be the ones voting are mostly removed from these discussions. It appears citizens are out of touch with the conversations on the electoral system reform as large majorities of citizens say they have neither heard of PR system (79%) (Figure 9) nor FPTP (82%) (Figure 7).

Although knowledge of these systems is overall low, men are more familiar with them than women (Figures 8 and 9), and older respondents than younger ones (Figure 10). At least 32% of men had heard of PR compared to just 10% of women (Figure 8). Similarly, over one quarter (26%) of men had heard of FPTP compared to only 11% of women. More citizens (34%) aged 55 and above had heard of PR compared to respondents between 35-54 years (23%) and those aged 18-34 (14%) (Figure 9).

Not only had few respondents heard about FPTP and PR, but they are also largely unaware of which electoral system Sierra Leone is using. Nearly 3 in 4 respondents (74%) said they did not know which political system Sierra Leone was using, including 81% of women and 67% of men (Figure 10). Again, there were differences by age, with older respondents more likely to know the political system compared to younger ones (Figure 11). Even for those citizens who said they knew what system Sierra Leone had, 6% did not name it correctly, suggesting that lack of knowledge is even higher than these figures suggest (Figure 12).

While the reading of the bill had led to vigorous debates around which political system the country should have, it appears that these debates were limited to just elite voices. Most (70%) citizens had not heard these debates (Figure 13), and largely appeared not to care which system the country should adopt (Figure 14). it is clear that many citizens do not know about the differences inherent in the two political systems, with more research as well as sensitization necessary before citizens can make an informed judgement about the two.

Finally, respondents were also asked about whether 30% of seats should be reserved for women in the constitution, as suggested in initial drafts of the PEA. A majority of respondents (81%) agree that 30% of seats should be reserved for women in the constitution, with more women (83%) than men (79%) agreeing (Figure 15). This is in line with best practices that suggests that women's political participation should be enshrined not just within legislation, but within the constitution representing the highest law of the land.
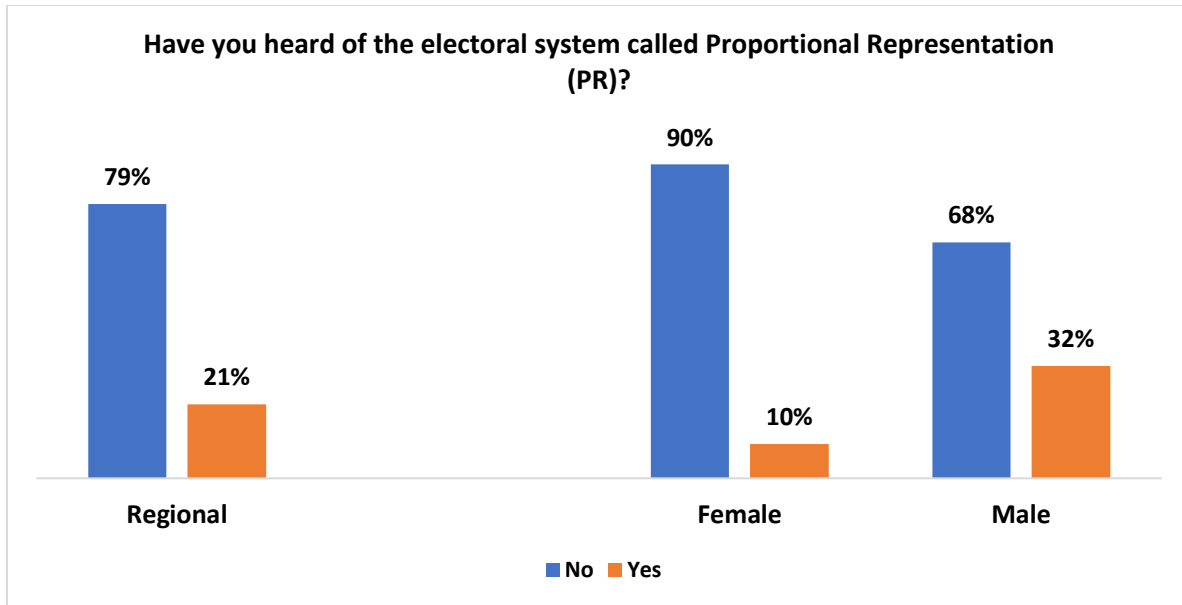
Figure 7: Respondents were asked: Have you heard of the electoral system called Proportional Representation (PR)?
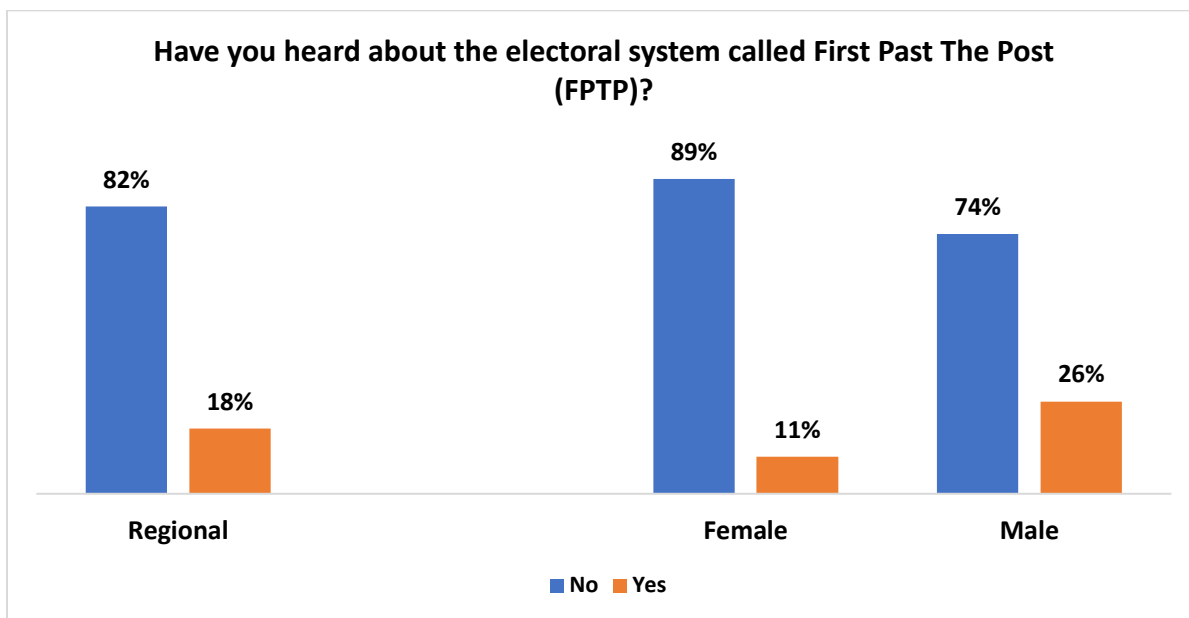

Figure 8: Respondents were asked: Have you heard about the electoral system called First Past the Post (FPTP)?

Have you heard of the electoral system called Proportional Representation (PR) | By Age

86%   77%   66%

14%   23%   34%

18-34   35-54   55+

■ No ■ Yes

Figure 9: Respondents were asked: Have you heard of the electoral system called Proportional Representation (PR)?

Do you know which electoral system Sierra Leone is using right now?

74%   81%   67%

9%   18%   10%   9%   7%   26%

Regional   Female   Male

■ Don't know ■ No ■ Yes

Figure 10: Respondents were asked: Do you know which electoral system Sierra Leone is using right now?

Do you know which electoral system Sierra Leone is using right now | By Age

- 18-34: Don't know 9%, No 78%, Yes 13%
- 35-54: Don't know 8%, No 74%, Yes 19%
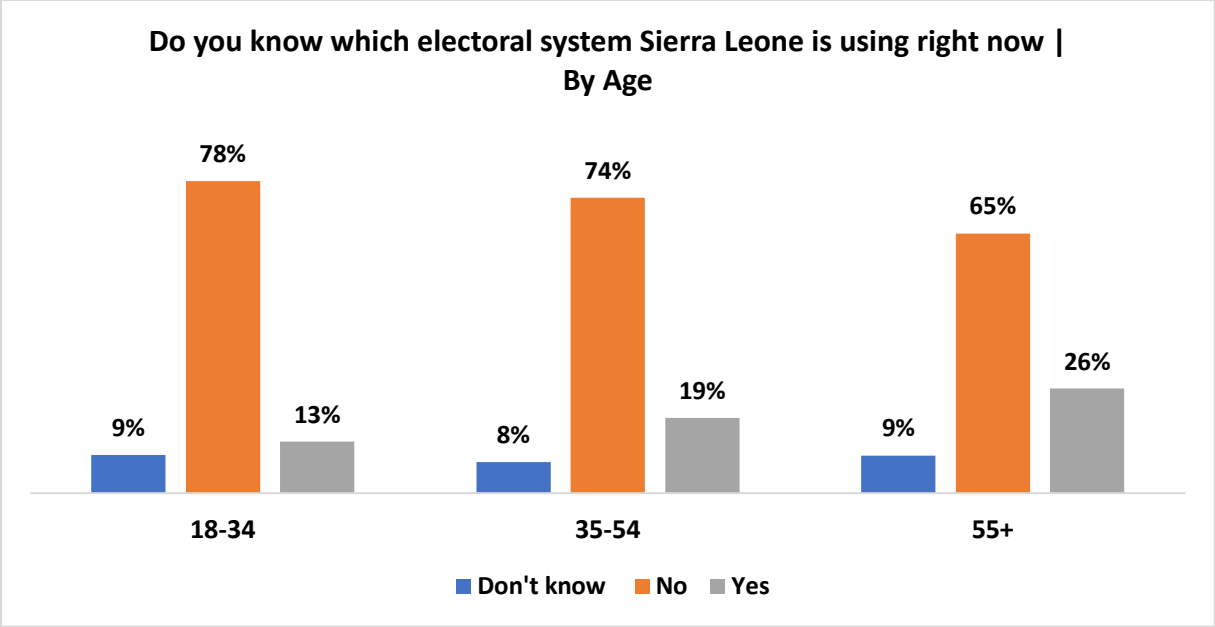- 55+: Don't know 9%, No 65%, Yes 26%

■ Don't know ■ No ■ Yes

Figure 11: Respondents were asked: Do you know which electoral system Sierra Leone is using right now?

If yes, which one is it

- FPTP: 94%
- PR: 6%

■ FPTP ■ PR

Figure 12: Respondents were asked: If yes, which one is it?

Have you heard the discussions in Sierra Leone about changing the electoral system from FPTP to PR?

30%

70%

■ No ■ Yes

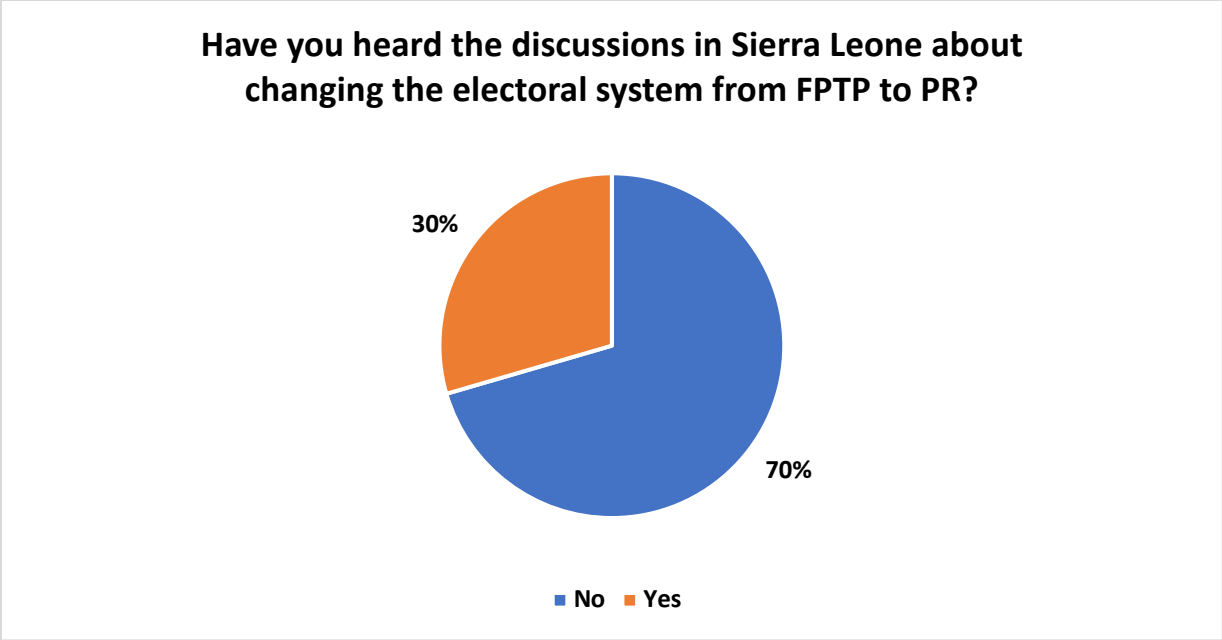*Figure 13: Respondents were asked:* *Have you heard the discussions in Sierra Leone about changing the electoral system from FPTP to PR?*

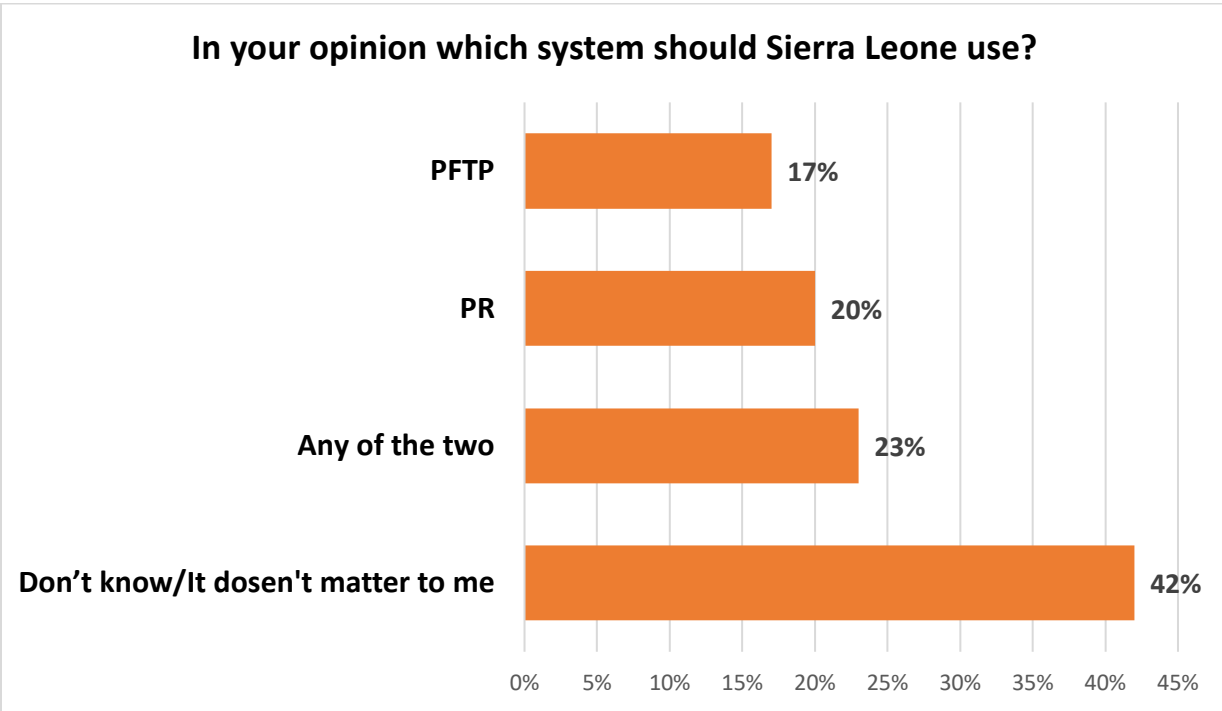**In your opinion which system should Sierra Leone use?**

System	%
PFTP	17%
PR	20%
Any of the two	23%
Don't know/It dosen't matter to me	42%

Figure 14: Respondents were asked: *In your opinion which system should SL use?*

RESERVE 30% OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS FOR WOMEN

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree ■ Don't know

NATIONAL: 81%, 12%, 3%, 4%
FEMALE: 83%, 8%, 3%, 5%
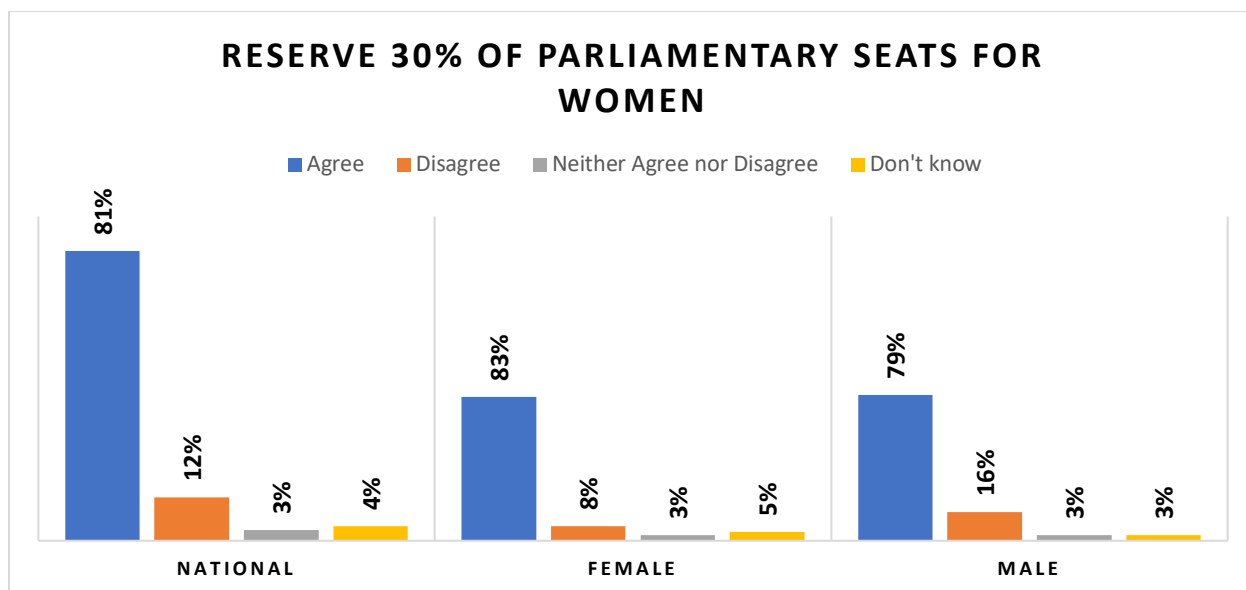**MALE:** 79%, 16%, 3%, 3%

Figure 15: Respondents were asked: *The Constitution of Sierra Leone should reserve 30%of parliamentary seats for women*

1.3. Violence against women generally

IGR has also been tracking violence against women generally as well as concerns about teenage pregnancy. We are including these results with this poll given its thematic focus on women more generally, and women and elections specifically. In line with past research, we continue to note that over ¾ (76%) of respondents largely say that the incidence of rape and gender-based violence is low (Figure 19). Just over half (54%) of respondents ranked teenage pregnancy as high (Figure 20).

INCIDENCE OF RAPE AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

■ High ■ Low ■ Moderate ■ Don't know

NATIONAL: 7%, 76%, 16%, 1%
FEMALE: 6%, 78%, 14%, 2%
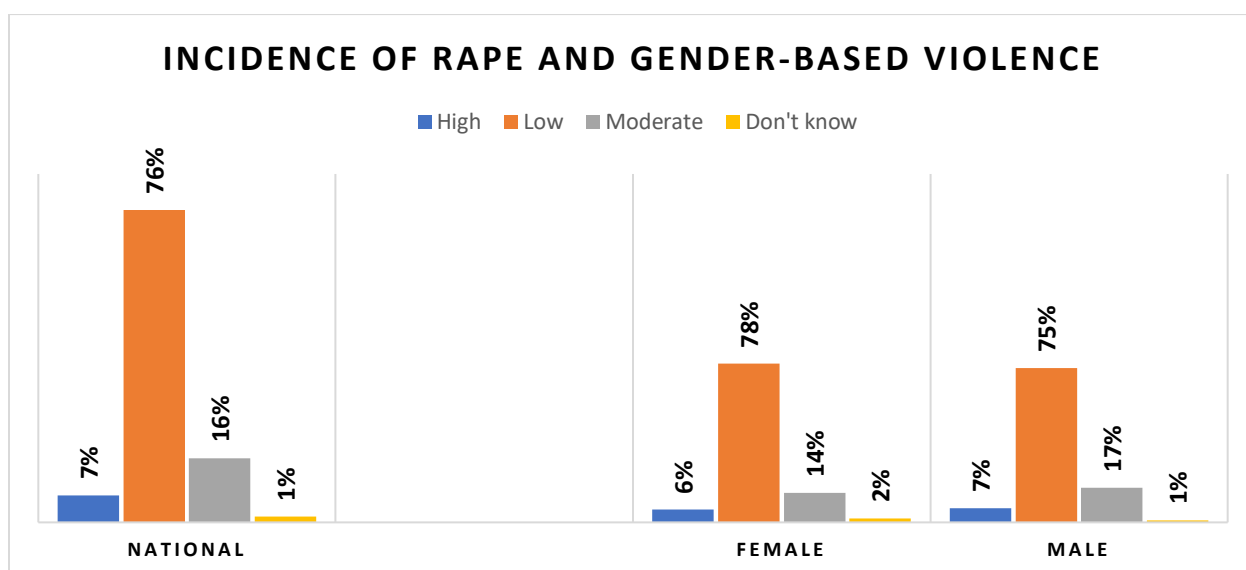**MALE:** 7%, 75%, 17%, 1%

Figure 16: Respondents were asked: *As a stakeholder in this community, how do you rate incidence of rape and gender-based violence in your community?*

As a stakeholder in this community, how do you rate the incidence of teenage pregnancy in your community?

National: Don't know 1%, Moderate 22%, High 23%, Low 54%
Female: Don't know 2%, Moderate 20%, High 24%, Low 55%
Male: Don't know 1%, Moderate 23%, High 22%, Low 54%

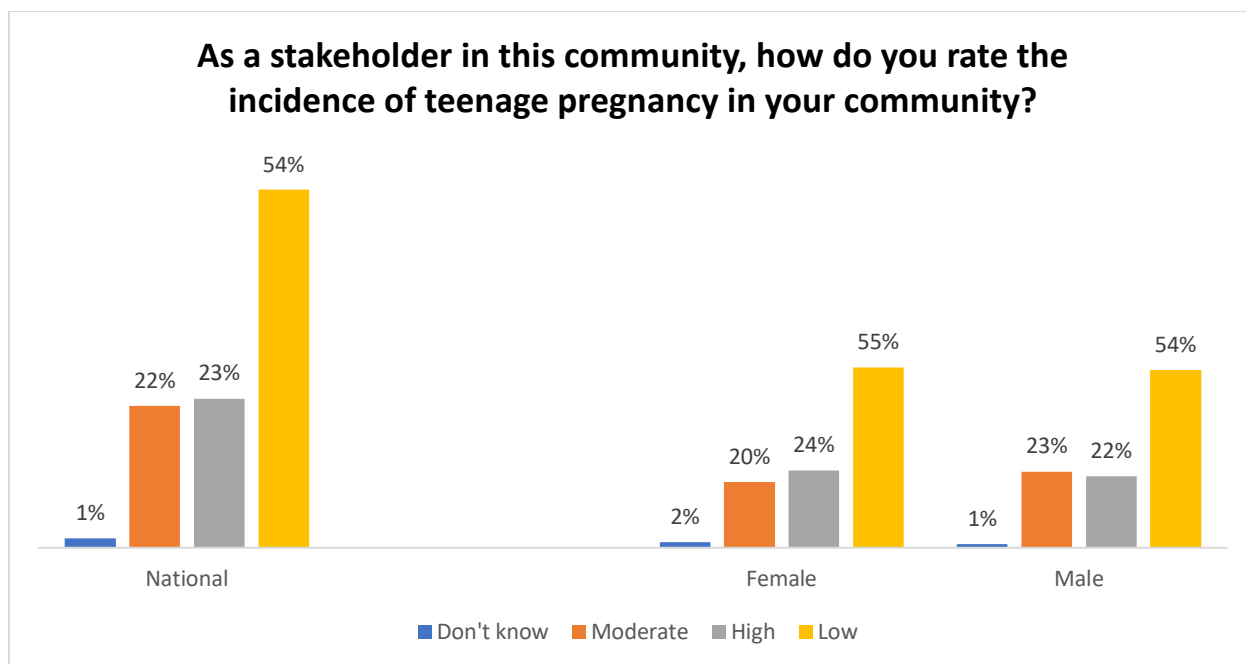Legend: Don't know | Moderate | High | Low

Figure 17: Respondents were asked: As a stakeholder in this community, how do you rate incidence of rape, gender-based violence and teenage pregnancy in your community?

2. Methodology

The survey data was collected through in-person interviews at all bye-election wards and some wards that were bye-elections did not take place. Data reported draws on two sets of surveys. In the first, conducted in July and September 2022, surveying 1,176 individuals. Both surveys provide a margin of error at the national level of ±3%. 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.

3.

SIERRA LEONE: Hate Speech and Elections.

ABSTRACT
The most prevalent platform on which Sierra Leoneans hear hate speech is social media (58%). Only two out of ten respondents say they hear hate speech on radio, while 10% mention political party meetings.

By Institute for Governance Reform with funding from Irish Aid
Data generated: July – August 2022

SierraPoll Survey
Hate Speech and Elections.

Date generated: July 2022

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1 Methodology

IGR collected opinions on Citizen's perceptions of hate speech generally, as part of efforts to understand potential hotspots or issues during election time. Hate speech has emerged as a concern in Sierra Leone politics in recent years, and as a possible driver of violence during elections. We explored hate speech in this poll, with questions covering whether citizens were familiar with hate speech and had heard it, the types of hate speech encountered and the platforms in which hate speech was heard. The charts presented in this report provide the findings of the survey on the prevalence of hate speech in communities across the country.

The survey data was collected through in-person interviews at all bye-election wards and some wards that were bye-elections did not take place. IGR surveyed 1,176 individuals. This provides a margin of error at the national level of ±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.
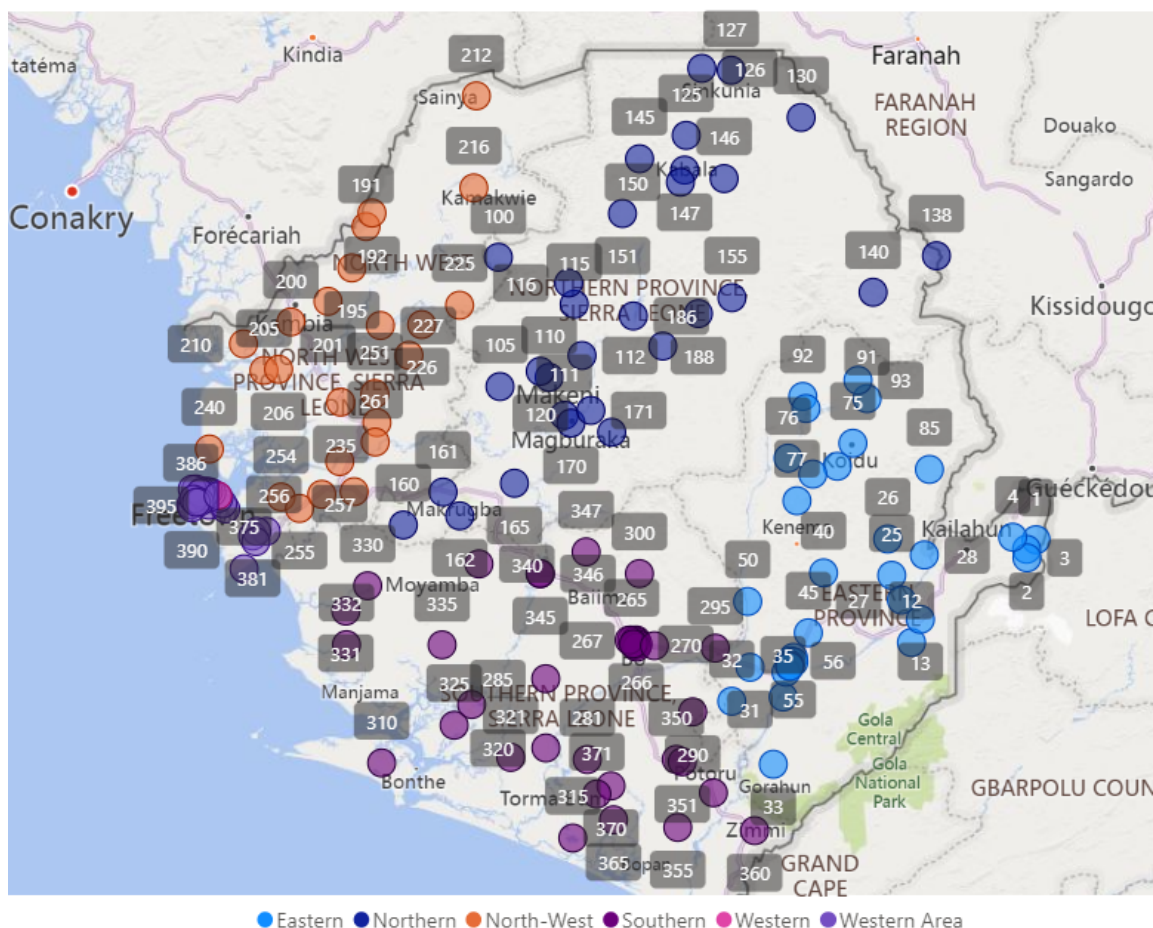

Figure 1: Locations (Wards) where IGR collected surveys 3

2   Analysis

Hate speech was noted as a concern by respondents, with at least one-third saying that they had heard hate speech uttered against a group of people because of their gender or ethnicity. However, more men (36%) than women (30%) said they had heard of hate speech (Figure 3). The most prevalent platform in which respondents had heard hate speech was social media (58%). Only two out of ten respondents said they heard hate speech on radio, while 10% mentioned political party meetings (Figure 4).

We also wanted to understand the nature of hate speech. We asked respondents to differentiate between hate speech directed toward an individual and hate speech that called people to engage in acts of violence. Respondents were more likely to say they heard hate speech against an individual (35%) (Figure 5) than speech that encouraged violence (30%) (Figure 7). In both cases however, again, social media was seen to be the most prevalent source for hate speech (Figures 6 and 8), followed by the radio.

3. Charts

Hate Speech against an Ethnic Group/Region

Have you ever heard hate speech; such as directed against any ethnic group or region?

	No	Yes	Don't know
National	63%	33%	4%
Female	65%	30%	6%
Male	61%	36%	3%

Figure 3: *Respondents were asked: Have you ever heard hate speech; such as directed against any ethnic group or region? By which we mean, abusive words directed against a group of people because of their gender or ethnicity?*

Platform for Hate Speech

If yes, on what platform?

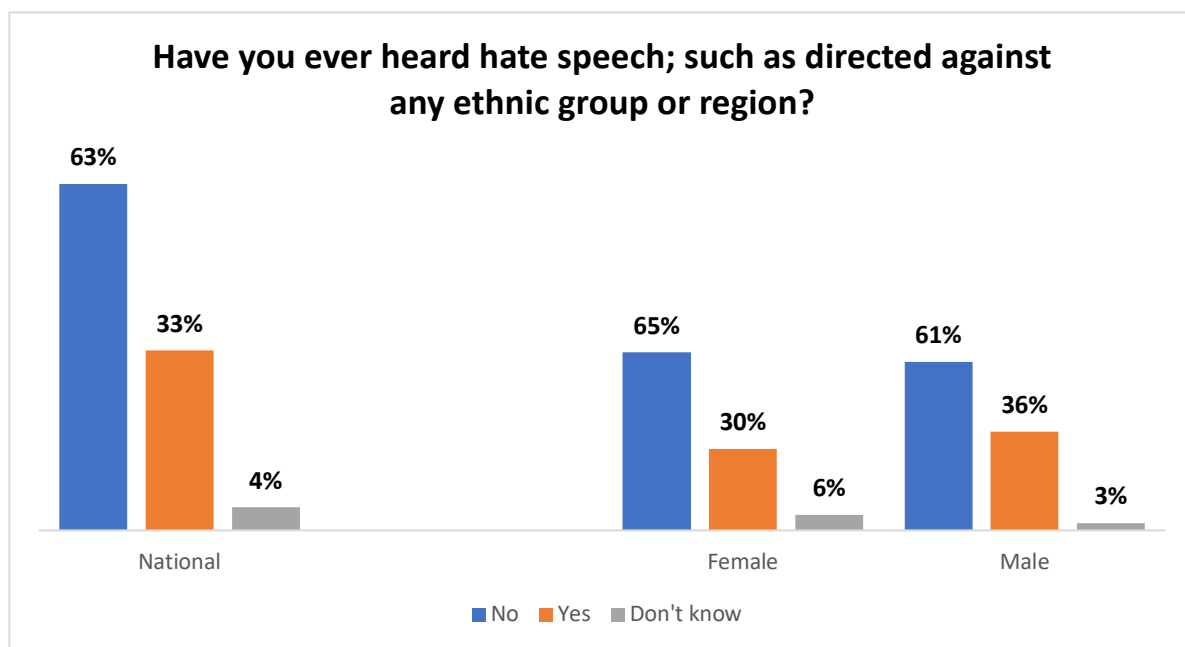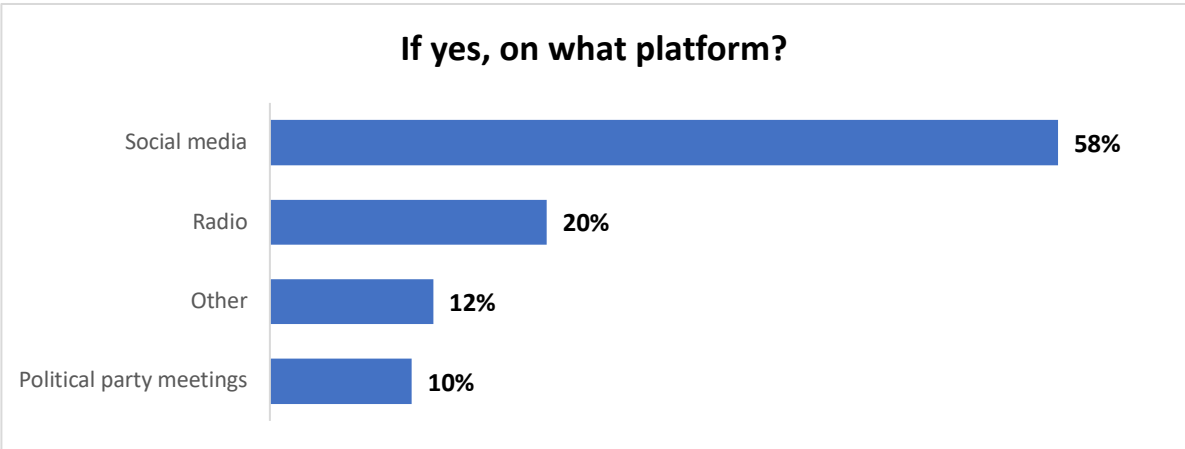| Platform	Percentage
Social media	58%
Radio	20%
Other	12%
Political party meetings	10%

Figure 4: *Respondents were asked: Have you ever heard hate speech; such as directed against any ethnic group or region? By which we mean, abusive words directed against a group of people because of their gender or ethnicity?*

Heard Hate Speech against an individual

Have you ever heard hate speech; such as directed against an individual?

	No	Yes	Don't know
National	61%	35%	4%
Female	64%	31%	5%
Male	57%	39%	4%

Figure 5: *Respondents were asked: Have you ever heard hate speech; such as directed against an individual?*

Platform: Hate Speech Against an Individual

On what platform?

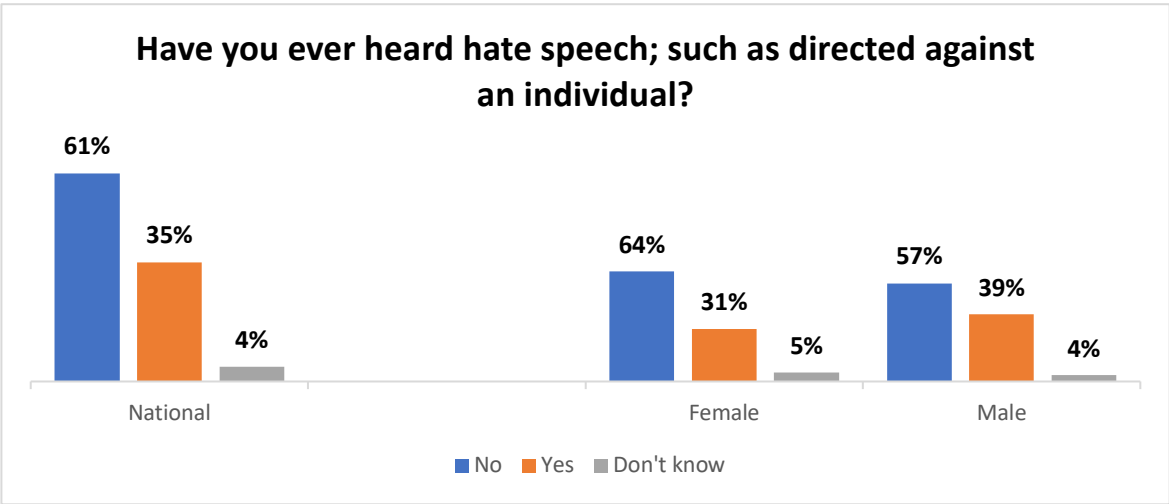| Platform	Percentage
Social media	57%
Radio	16%
Other	14%
Political party meetings	11%
TV	1%

Figure 6: *Respondents were asked: Have you ever heard hate speech; such as directed against an individual?*

Heard Hate Speech Encouraging Violence

Have you ever heard hate speech that calls people to engage in violence?

	No	Yes	Don't know
National	67%	30%	3%
Female	70%	26%	5%
Male	64%	33%	2%

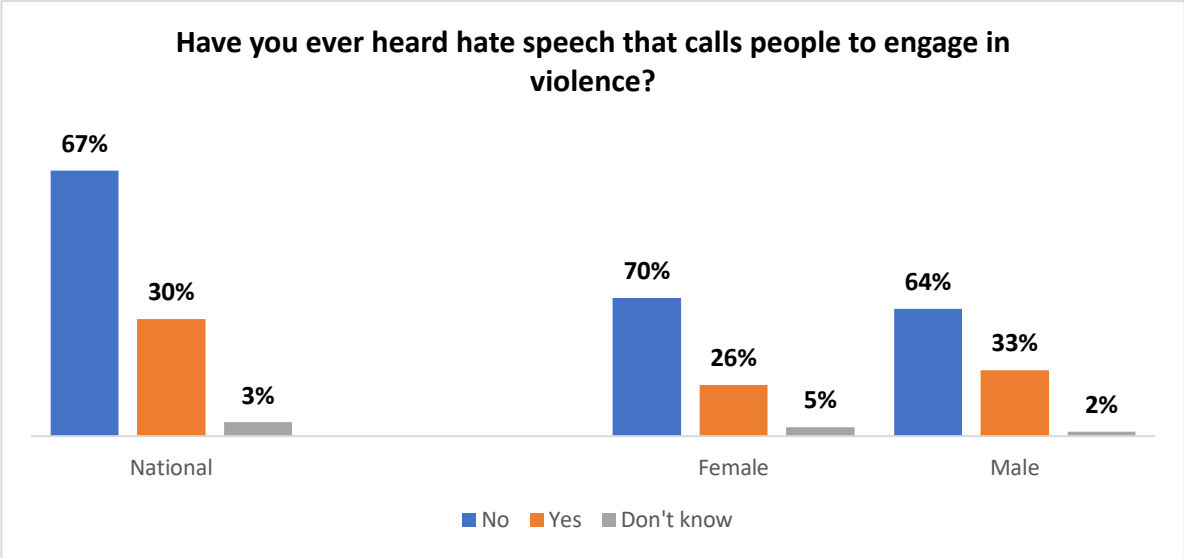**Figure 7:** *Respondents were asked: Have you ever heard hate speech that calls people to engage in violence?*

Platform: Hate Speech Encouraging Violence

On what platform?

Social media	60%
Radio	16%
Political party meetings	13%
Other	11%

Figure 8: *Respondents were asked: Have you ever heard hate speech that calls people to engage in violence?*

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

By Institute for Governance Reform with funding from Irish Aid

Data generated: July – August 2022

QUALITY DECISIONS REQUIRE QUALITY DATA

Ambasáid na hÉireann
Embassy of Ireland

SierraPoll Survey
Trust in Elections Management Bodies (EMBS)

Date generated: July 2022

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1 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 ±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.
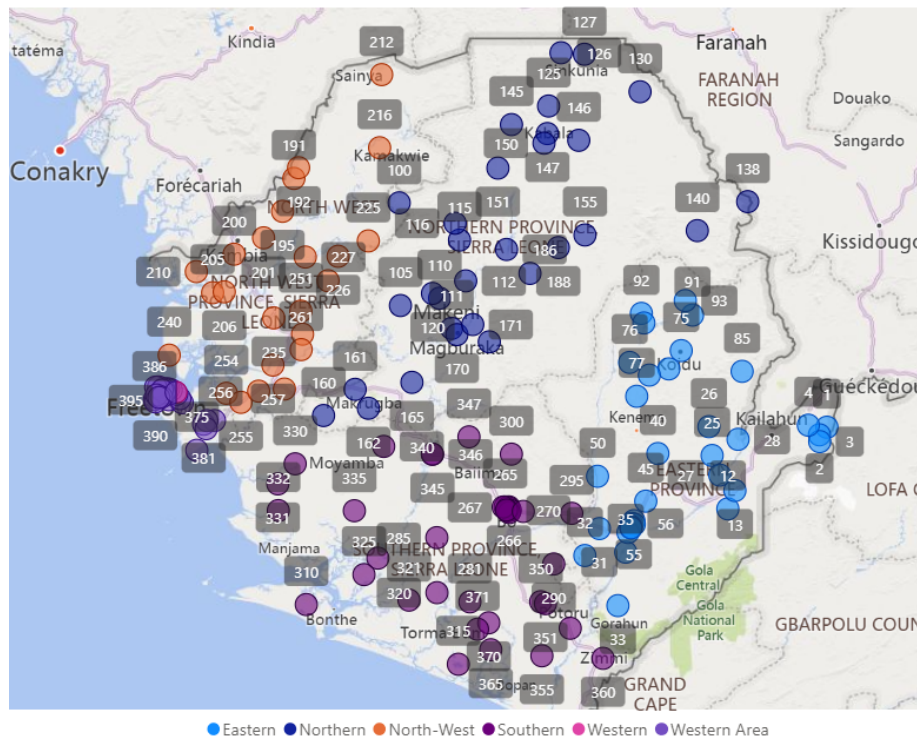

Figure 1: Locations (Wards) where IGR collected survey

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.

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

3. Graphs

In the last bye-election, how well do you think NEC implemented the following in light of COVID?

Question	A lot	Don't know	Just a little	Not at all
Providing a means for PWDS like blind people to vote?	41%	25%	22%	13%
Allowing elderly, pregnant women to vote first	52%	10%	28%	11%
Mask-wearing	54%	10%	24%	12%
Social-distancing	52%	10%	24%	15%

■ A lot   ■ Don't know   ■ Just a little   ■ Not at all

How much do you trust the following institutions in the last two years?

■ A lot/Somewhat   ■ Just a little/Not at all   ■ Don't know

Institution	A lot/Somewhat	Just a little/Not at all	Don't know
NEC	55	12	33
Police	40	10	40
RSLAF	57	11	32
PPRC	43	24	33

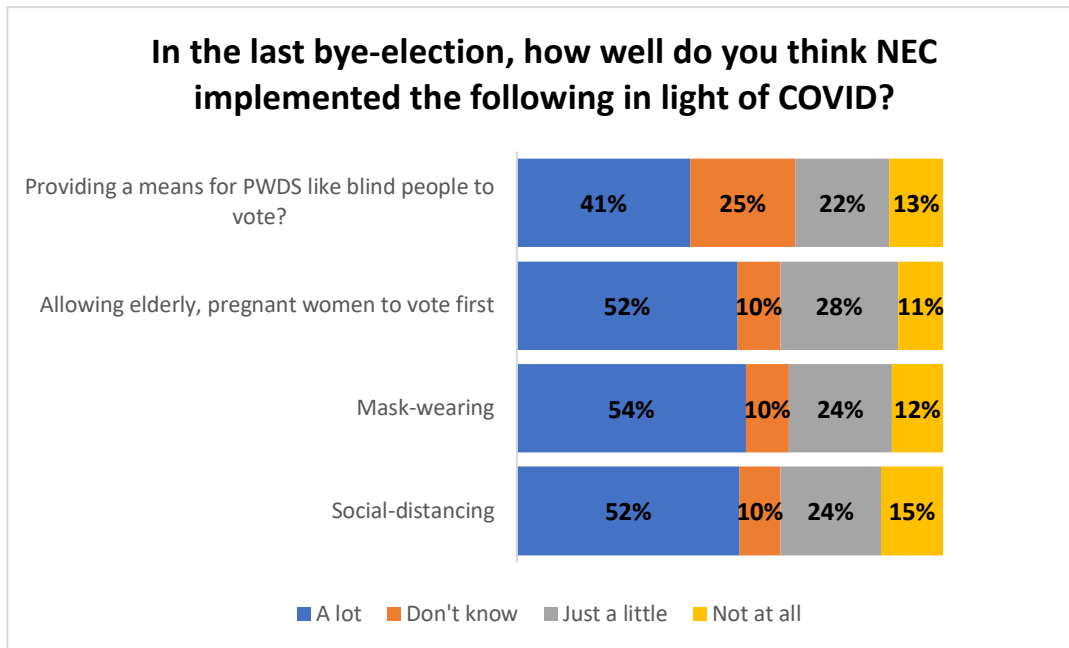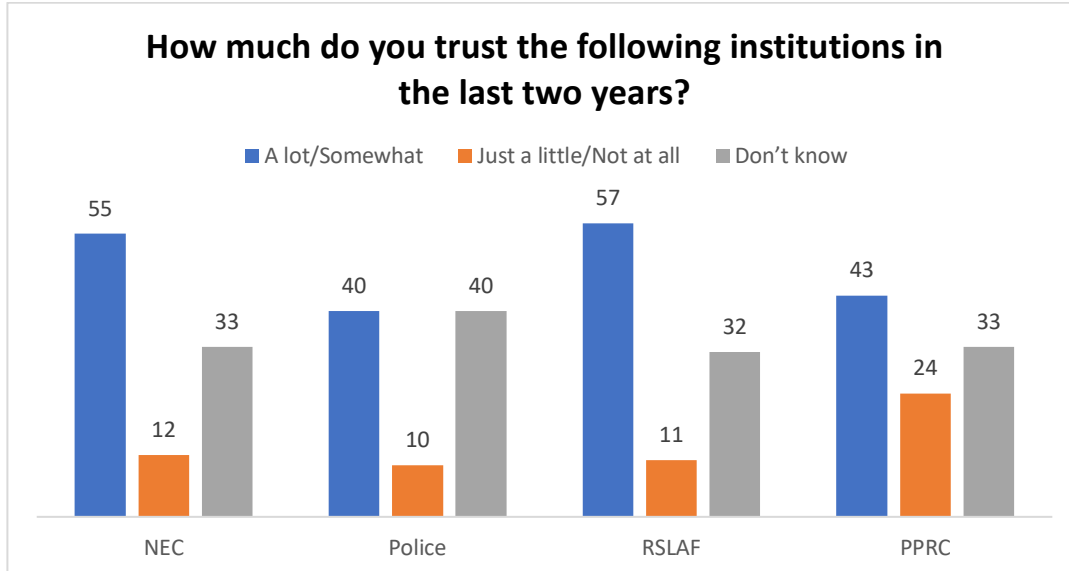*Figure 2: Respondents were asked: In the last bye-election, how well do you think NEC implemented the following in light of COVID?*

How well do you think each of the following institutions did in managing the recent bye-election? (in bye-election areas)

Institution	Well	Bad	Don't know
Army	88%	6%	6%
NEC	84%	14%	2%
Youth groups	84%	15%	1%
Political parties	83%	15%	2%
Paramount Chief	79%	13%	8%
Secret societies	61%	19%	19%

■ Well ■ Bad ■ Don't know

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

Do you think the results of the last bye-election reflected the wishes of voters in this community?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Regional	78%	14%	8%
Female	71%	18%	10%
Male	85%	10%	5%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

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

Perceptions of NEC and Bye-elections Results in the Last two years

Question	Value
How well do trust in NEC over the last two years? (Respondents in bye-election and non bye-election areas who say a lot/some what)	55
How well did NEC peoform during bye elections in the last two years (respondents in bye-election areas who say a very/fairly well)	84
Do you trust results of bye elections in your area (respondents in bye-election areas who say yes)	78

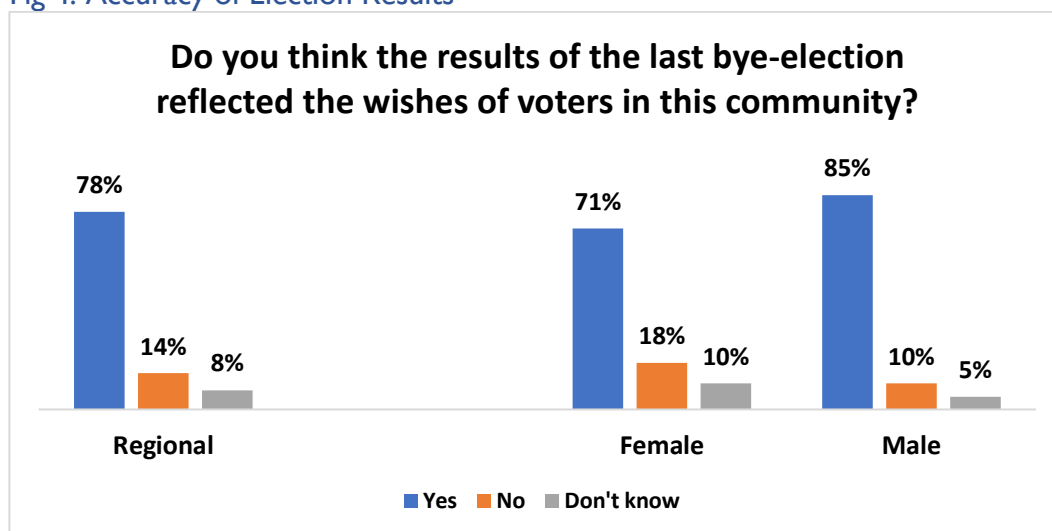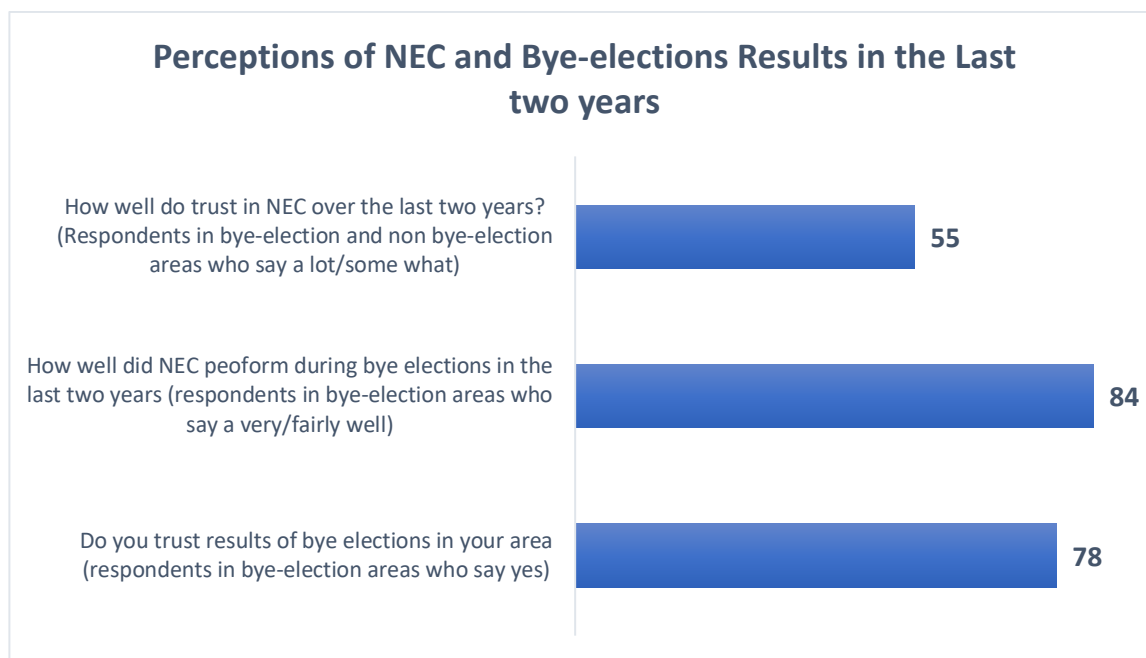*Figure 5 Respondents were asked the following questions: How much do you trust the following institutions in the past two years; How well do you think each of the following institutions [NEC] did in managing the recent bye-election; and Do you think the results of the last bye-election reflected the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

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

Do you think the results of the last bye-election reflected the wishes of voters in this community | By Province

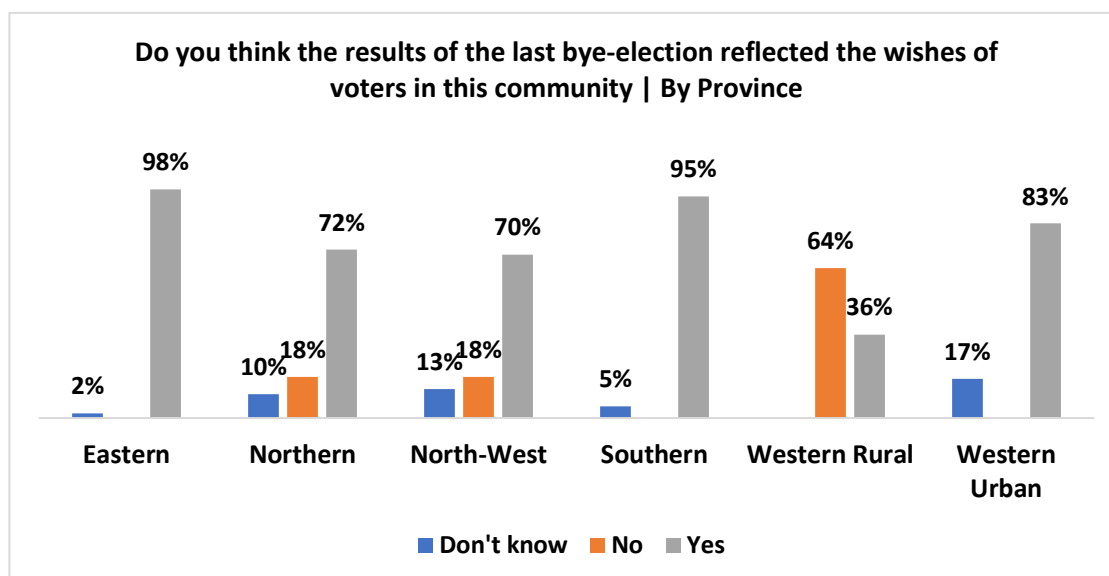| Province	Don't know	No	Yes
Eastern	2%		98%
Northern	10%	18%	72%
North-West	13%	18%	70%
Southern	5%		95%
Western Rural		64%	36%
Western Urban	17%		83%

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

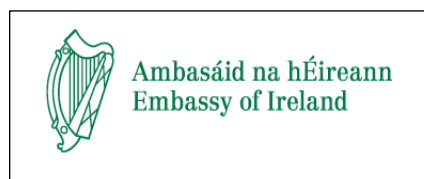# SIERRA LEONE: The Prospects for Peaceful Elections in 2023:

A Citizen's Assessment Report.

© Reuters/O. Acland

ABSTRACT

Sierra Leone's recent history of violence is raising fears that the elections in 2023 could be less peaceful. This report interrogates this claim by presenting a compilation of citizen's experiences on the frontline as well as their views on the prospects for peaceful elections in 2023. The report unravels actors and sources of electoral violence as well as the motivations, patterns of mobilization and the context in which the different forms of violence thrive. It also discusses the implications for peaceful elections in 2023.

Ambasáid na hÉireann
Embassy of Ireland

THE PROSPECTS FOR PEACEFUL ELECTIONS IN 2023:
A CITIZEN'S ASSESSMENT REPORT

"Ordinary people, without evidence that they were prodded or directed by politicians, were found to be most at fault in uncivil and troubling behaviors; including destruction of campaign posters, attempts to disrupt opponents' peaceful assembly, hateful speech and intimidation".
National Election Watch. Observation of the 2018 Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone. July, 2018.

Freetown, August, 2022

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ABBREVIATIONS

- CBOs- Community-Based Organisations

- CSOs- Civil Society Organisations

- FGDs- Focus Group Discussions

- EMBs- Electoral Management Bodies

- IGR- Institute for Governance Reform

- KIIs-Key Informant Interviews

- MNDP- Medium-term National Development Plan 2019-2023

- NCPSC- National Commission for Peace and Social Cohesion

- NGOs- Non-Governmental Organisations

- ONS- Office of National Security

- SSAs- State Security Agencies

- ToR- Terms of Reference

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND APPROACH OF THE ASSESSMENT

Violence has been a recurring phenomenon in elections in Sierra Leone. High incidences of poverty, widespread youth unemployment and growing political polarisation have been cited as the key drivers of political violence.[1] Given this nexus between poverty and negative politics, many observers fear that the hardship created by COVID and the Ukraine-Russia war may heighten negative politics and be a threat to peaceful elections in 2023.

Building on an earlier Threat Assessment Study undertaken under the auspices of the Office of National Security (ONS), the objective of this study is to glean the prospects for peaceful 2023 elections from the perspectives of citizens to inform the planning of Elections Management Bodies (EMBs), Civil Society, and other interested parties in framing responses that would ensure peaceful 2023 elections.

The ONS' Threat Assessment Report dealt with numerous issues in broad terms about the problems and prospects for peaceful 2023 elections. The Citizens' Threat Assessment Report unpicks and re-packs these issues to confirm those that critically bear on the potential to cause the occurrence of violence in 2023. The report unravels actors and sources of elections violence as well as the motivations, patterns of mobilisation and the context in which the different forms of violence thrive. It also discusses the implications for peaceful elections in 2023.

FINDINGS

Actors

Political Parties and politicians: According to an IGR SierraPoll Survey, as well as responses from focus group discussions, citizens say most politicians are inclined to actions that fuel violence; including seeking to win voters on the basis of ethnic affinity, using unofficial security personnel, making unauthorized appearances at polling stations, organizing unlawful rallies, supporting destruction of opponents' campaign materials, and recruiting social media handlers to spread fake news and trolls.

Traditional Rulers: The ONS Report captured concerns about Paramount Chiefs' involvement in partisan politics. Overall, however, the conduct of Paramount Chiefs was not raised as one of the issues that citizens worry about most as a cause of violence in the 2023 elections. From the perspectives of citizens, it would appear that other actors are more of a threat to peaceful elections than traditional rulers. There are other data sources that support this claim. Since 2012, various rounds of Afrobarometer surveys have reported high citizen trust in traditional rulers.

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[1] UNDP 2018 – Drivers of Electoral Violence in Sierra Leone

State Security Agencies: In both the FGDs and key informant interviews citizen agree that some aspects of Security Agencies' conducts are unhelpful to peaceful elections. It appears however, that the perceptions of State Security Agencies, and particularly, the police are mixed. While some respondents in the survey said they trusted their conduct during the most recent bye-elections, nearly equal numbers said the contrary.

There are people who engage in politics-related violence as an economic activity: It emerged from citizens that there are individuals who make their services available to politicians to perpetuate violence, in return for some form of reward. Towards, and during the 2018 elections the names of some of these individuals were well-known in political and media circles.

Methods of communication to mobilise citizens for Violence

Traditional media is known for divisive politics: According to the ONS Report, traditional media in Sierra Leone engage in partisan representation of issues. Overall, citizens confirmed this as a challenge to a peaceful environment for elections. They note however, that within traditional news media outlets, it is rare to see hate-speech in newspapers and on television; rather, the use of radio for hate speech appears to be the most significant.

New Media is now the major platform for promoting hate speech and violence: Hate-speech on New Media is emerging as a worrying trend in Sierra Leone according to all Key Informants interviewed for this report. Consensus is broad among citizens that social media is awash with content that mainly promote hate between people of different political leanings. A total of 57% of respondents interviewed across the country say they have heard hate-speech. Among those who reported that they have heard hate speech 56% of respondents say it was on social media.

Context in which violence occurs

Identity politics devoid of ideological competition: In Sierra Leone, multiparty politics is dividing citizens along ethno-regional lines, in the absence of competing ideological offers by political parties. As recorded in a 2018 elections observation report, voters focus more on which party or candidates they should vote for rather than why they were voting.

High levels of poverty and Illiteracy: Citizens agree that in the circumstances of post-COVID, and the Ukraine-Russia war in which living conditions have deteriorated in Sierra Leone, citizens are going to be susceptible to vote buying and unscrupulous political mobilisation methods that lead to violence.

Limited enforcement of legal restraints on violent political conducts: Citizens believe that there has been very little effort on the part of the state to legally restrain individuals or politicians from engaging in violent conducts during elections or be held accountable for acts of violence. Essentially, those who plan or execute elections-related violence do so with impunity.

Lack of a complete national mechanism for dealing with identity politics: There is no effective mechanism for dealing with identity politics in Sierra Leone. Evidence gleaned from the literature suggests that in other multi-ethnic societies, the regulatory regime to address identity politics, ethnic stereotyping, and tribal privileging is spread across a number of legal instruments and institutions. Moreover, in Sierra Leone, there are concerns that independent state agencies are influenced by government, and this contributes to a decline in trust in the institutions that are supposed to build national cohesion.

A general culture of lawlessness in the country: Citizens clearly agree with the ONS' characterization that there is "general lawlessness and indiscipline" in the country; meaning that huge sections of the population are willing to involve themselves in acts of elections-related violence and misdemeanours, without being mobilized by anybody.

Gaps in Civil Society work towards peaceful elections: Although scores of CSOs have implemented activities towards peaceful elections, these have mostly sought to dissuade them from engaging in elections-related violence or settle community disputes. CSOs are yet to undertake initiatives that include educating people about social media trickery, gathering evidence to support the prosecution of those who promote elections-related violence, or shaming perpetrators of hate-rhetoric through exposing them.

Gender Dimensions of Elections-Related Violence

Those who organise or participate in elections related violence are overwhelmingly men. However, many women are very active on social media for the two big political parties as bloggers or social media television and radio anchors; often posting messages that have the potential to negatively impact social cohesion. At the same time, there is a substantive body of research that shows election-related violence impacts women; they are less likely to stand for political positions, or could be afraid to go out to vote, but this component was not covered in the survey. Rather questions sought to understand about the perpetrators of violence, with the implicit assumption that such violence will have detrimental aspects on women's political participation. Moreover, FGD informants acknowledged that women are indeed disproportionately represented as victims of electoral violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- Keep track of violence entrepreneurs with an eye to promoting accountability
- Enforce legal accountability for elections-related violence
- Establish spaces for elections-related dialogue among political parties and EMBs
- Encourage Paramount Chiefs to promote and adhere to minimum standards of behaviour that promote citizens' perception of them as peace promoters during elections.
- CSOs should innovate initiatives that promote accountability for violent conduct
- Pursue civic education to empower citizens to deal with social media trickeries

- Promote uptake of issues and ideology-based politics
- Promote State Security Agencies' capacity to stem hate speech
- Address public perceptions of State Security Agencies' work during elections

1.0 BACKGROUND

The 2023 multiparty Presidential, Local Government and Parliamentary elections will be Sierra Leone's fifth routine elections since the end of the civil war in country. Although all past elections since 2002 have been declared free and fair, elections observations reports have noted incidences of violence, and behaviours that threatened a peaceful political environment. Politically motivated incidents of violence have even occurred months after an election has ended.[2] Such behaviours on the part of both citizens and politicians, particularly in 2012 and 2018, included inclinations to engage in intolerant behaviours, hate speech, violence, and destruction of campaign materials of opposing parties. Violence has not occurred at levels that have led to declaring any overall elections outcome unfree and unfair, since 2002. However, the threats of violence, its sporadic occurrence, and the normalisation of non-ideology or non-policy-based politics means that the possibility of violence pushing Sierra Leone into graver fragility is always there around elections.

Threats to peaceful, free and fair elections in Sierra Leone occur in a context where poverty predisposes the population to political methods that utilise violence, bribery, sloganeering, and covert mobilisation of ethnic and regionalism sentiments. Given the nexus between poverty, and negative political mobilisation, the fear is justified that a post-COVID environment portends significant security challenges for the elections in 2023.

Although poverty rates in Sierra Leone have been steadily falling since 2003, it remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with an overall poverty rate estimated at 56.8%.[3] The progress the country has been making in poverty reduction has however, been adversely affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic which started in March 2020. Around the world, COVID-19 infection, treatment, and prevention measures required severe restrictions on movement, leading to the closure of social and economic activities. Nearly all countries in the world experienced varied levels of economic decline. As one of the poorest countries in the world with multiple points of economic fragility, it was inevitable that the COVID-19 shock would be more profound in Sierra Leone. The 8th round of the Afrobarometer surveys based on data collected at the start of the COVID-19 epidemic in Sierra Leone reported that 72% of the citizens said that they are experiencing poverty.[4] In the course of the pandemic the economic situation in the country generally worsened as characterised primarily by the constant depreciation of the national currency. COVID-19 has not disappeared in the world; but Sierra Leone has largely survived the pandemic's worse moments. However, the opportunities for economic rehabilitation that

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[2] See IGR Report on the Lunsar, Tombo, and Makeni incidents
[3] Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2018
[4] IGR. Terms of Reference: Citizens' Threat Assessment

impacts poverty reduction has again come to be compromised by the current economic hardship worldwide, widely attributed to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

The project being implemented by IGR and the Office of National Security (ONS) reflect accepted understandings of the nexus between poverty and disruptive politics as one of the drivers of fragility in Sierra Leone. Elections in the country are seen primarily as a fight in which access to economic resources is secured or defended. In this context, elections are often about mobilising people on basis of economic rewards; with elections typically been times of heightened and sometimes violent tensions.[5] It is against this background that the objectives and activities of the project being implemented by IGR and ONS, including this threat assessment study are established.

2.0 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to produce a reference document containing processed information availed from citizens as their assessment of the prospects for peaceful 2023 elections. The reference document builds on the Threat Assessment[6] conducted under the auspices of the ONS, to provide analytic guidance to security agencies, electoral management bodies (EMBs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and other interested parties in framing responses that ensure social cohesion for peaceful 2023 elections.

3.0 APPROACH TO THE STUDY

3.1 Methodology

Inception Activities

The study began with an Inception Phase in which the consultants held exchanges with IGR officials to affirm a common understanding of the scope of the assignment; clarify conceptual and quality assurance issues; review the list of key informants to be interviewed; and agree on any logistical and administrative assistance that may be required.

Desk Review

Two levels of literature were reviewed. First, the consultants reviewed the Threat Assessment Report produced under the auspices of ONS for the purposes of highlighting, understanding, and noting all the issues identified around electoral violence. The review of literature at this level went towards framing the questions for key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).[7] It also guided a review of other levels of literature, and the other query activities of the study.

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[5] Maya Christensen and Mats Utas. Mercenaries of Democracy: The 'politricks' of remobilised combatants in the Sierra Leone General elections.

[6] National Threat Assessment/District Risk Mapping for the 2023 General Elections. By the Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee.

[7] Key informant interviews can be found in the annex

The second level of literature that was reviewed were elections observation reports, research reports and published books on elections and political mobilisation in Sierra Leone to glean historical contexts and other perspectives for deepening understanding of the issues captured in the ONS report. This also helped shape the framing of interviews and the FGDs.

Social survey

Nation-wide SierraPoll representative surveys[8] undertaken by IGR examined electoral systems preferences and other issues relating to governance in Sierra Leone. Aspects of these reports were used in this analysis, specifically, regarding Citizens Assessment of the Prospects for Peaceful 2023 Elections. Questions of interest included the role of different actors in elections-related violence and their methods, motives behind elections violence, communication platforms for mobilising participants in violence, and gender dimensions of elections violence.

Key Informants Interviews

Consistent with the requirements of the methodology proposed in the Terms of Reference (ToR), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with selected individual CSOs involved in elections observation, security, and peace and good governance promotion. Key informants were interviewed to firstly, bring their perspectives to bear on the analyses of the issues around elections, violence, and peaceful politics. Secondly, the KIIs helped to generate the ideas that went towards making recommendations on ensuring violence-free 2023 elections.

FGDs

FGDs were held in four Districts namely: Western Area Rural, Tonkolili, Kono, and Koinadugu. In each of these Districts, FGDs were held in one constituency where bye-elections have taken place since 2018; where incidences of violence occurred; or in communities with a record of politics-related violence incidences in the last four years. In each constituency, one FGD was held for women and one for men. Focus group participants were stakeholders identified as key informants within the community and represented a cross section of prominent citizens including the Community Youth Chair, The Mammy Queen/Chair Lady, and Party Youth Leaders. Also represented were teachers, farmers, and housewives. Citizens were selected by enumerators based on community recommendations on who best fit the desired criteria. Although the participants were all adults who voted in the bye-elections, effort was also made to include persons from CSOs, and youth groups like the Bike Riders Association

The purposive selection of the constituencies was to enable an in-depth interrogation of critical issues around elections-related violence from the lived-experience of the voters. These critical issues include District-context circumstances of the violence and the drivers, actors, motivations, and triggers.

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[8] See IGR SierraPoll report on Gender, Violence and Elections, September 2022.

3.2 Analysis

The ONS report put forward dozens of issues deemed as threats to peaceful elections. This Report's approach has been to rationalise these issues into those that bear directly on the instant occurrence of elections-related violence, and those merely contributing to disaffection, displeasure, and a general sense of unfairness. Those issues rationalised or re-packed as merely contributing to disaffection, displeasure, and sense of unfairness include the "politicisation of party colors", "the marginalization of women", "impunity resulting from non-prosecution of elections violence perpetrators", and "recruitment of incompetent and unqualified ad hoc polling staff during election", among many such others.

This Report dealt with those issues that bear directly on the instant occurrence of elections-related violence through intimidation, the mobilisation of secret societies, the recruitment of thugs and unofficial security personnel for wilful attacks on political opponents or ordinary citizens, unlawful campaign rallies, the propagation of hate speech, destruction of opponents' campaign posters and materials as acts of vandalism, obstruction of lawful rallies, and disruption of polling processes on voting-day. Using citizens' views, triangulated and extrapolated with insights from literature, these issues are dealt with in such dimensions as actors or sources, motivations, patterns, the varied degrees of their pervasiveness; and the context in which they thrive. Additionally, the analysis reflects on the gender dimensions of threats to peaceful, free and fair elections as cross-cutting issues.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 The Actors

Political parties' activities that promote violence

The ONS Report raised key issues around political parties' methods and conduct that citizens perceive contributing to elections-related violence. As corroborated by this study, citizens confirmed that political parties are prone to using unofficial security personnel, making unauthorized appearances at polling stations, organizing unlawful rallies, employing social media handlers to misinform the public, and supporting the destruction of opponents' campaign posters and materials.

In Constituencies that have had bye-elections since 2018, Political parties have been ranked as one of the institutions that did not play their parts well. Overall, only 4% of respondents across the Constituencies that have had bye-elections since 2018 said political parties performed their job well. Political parties' conduct was raised as the issue citizens worry about the most as a potential cause of violence in the 2023 elections. According to SierraPoll data, political parties' conduct was the most worrying issue for 85% of respondents towards the 2023 elections.

Traditional Rulers' commissions and omissions that fester violence

The ONS Report captured citizens' concerns that Paramount Chiefs (PCs) involvement

in partisan politics is inimical to a peaceful environment for elections. The ONS Report gathered evidence that Paramount Chiefs support political parties during elections, thus becoming a source of tension and acrimony in the community. Due to their role as custodians of their communities representing all citizens irrespective of party orientation Paramount Chiefs should be apolitical. This commitment was formalized in the Paramount Chief Code of Ethics and Service Standards they agreed on in 2013, in which they committed to be non-partisan to avoid any conflicts of interest.

According to Focus Group participants, Paramount Chiefs' involvement in violence, however, did not appear to be pervasive. In FGDs held in communities where elections had been recently held (with some ending up in violence) many community members cited political party leaders and youth/gangs as the main drivers of violence. However, key informants did point out that there are some Paramount Chiefs who involve themselves in partisan politics during and after elections, while also noting that many Paramount Chiefs have made efforts during elections to also promote peace in their communities during elections. For instance, Chief Bomboli of Koya Chiefdom in Pork Loko is on record to have taken APC and SLPP parliamentary candidates on a community tour telling their supporters that the two candidates are brothers and both of them are good for the chiefdom. Second, the acts that some Paramount Chiefs engage in as part of partisan activism often do trigger violence. These include the wearing of party promotional clothes, appearing at party rallies, or openly endorsing one candidate. Chieftaincy quarrels were also raised as a concern in the survey. One in ten (10%) of respondents identified Chieftaincy quarrels as a source of concern about politics in their community, behind party rivalry (44%); youth and gang rivalry (18%) and ethnic rivalry (15%). While Traditional authority disputes were mentioned by relatively fewer respondents, it was nevertheless a concern expressed by citizens.

In terms of Paramount Chiefs' roles in promoting violence, it was noted that Paramount Chief-related violence was more likely to occur where Paramount Chiefs attempt to prevent a party that they do not support from campaigning in their locality. Also mentioned was impunity: in those instances where some PCs have faltered on their obligations to support peaceful elections environment, there was no evidence that these Chiefs had been rebuked by Government, or an EMB. Moreover, in cases where the actions of some PCs have been perceived as partisan, Paramount Chiefs often commonly answer that they serve the Government of the day.[9] Key informants, however, suggest that this common retort distorts the level of objectivity and neutrality required of Paramount Chiefs during elections.

State Security Agencies' (SSA) unhelpful conduct during elections

Citizens' views and opinions captured in this study are in line with the points made in the ONS's Threats Assessment report regarding how certain methods and conducts of the State Security Agencies (SSAs) are perceived as unhelpful to peaceful elections environment. These conducts and methods as highlighted in the ONS Report and affirmed by citizens include Police and Soldiers overbearing presence at Polling Stations,

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[9] This insight comes from most of the key informants interviewed.

impunity resulting from non-prosecution, and the reference to "orders from above" to explain instances of misconduct. Key informants add that SSAs appear to be more inclined to effect arrests on citizens who cause trouble or engage in violence from the opposition parties' sides, than those on the side of the ruling party.

Perceptions regarding the conduct of police in the bye-elections reflect citizens' concerns. Only 40% of respondents said they trusted the conduct of the police in the most recent bye-election, the lowest levels of trust expressed among all EMBs. Clearly, overall perceptions of the performance of the police in their duties is largely unfavourable, although the conduct of SSAs was not raised by focus group respondents as an issue that could affect the conduct of peaceful elections.

Rather, for key informants, the charges against SSAs appear more to be more of a public perception challenge, drawn mostly from the way the Police conduct law enforcement around riots, campaigns, and on polling-day. Key informants say that it is their unprofessionalism in tackling riots, complicity in petty bribes for traffic offences/criminal case processing and poor levels of public diplomacy, rather than wilful (mis)conduct that accounts for the way the security sector is perceived by sections of the public.

Secret societies' involvement in acts of intimidation

The ONS Report captured citizens' concerns that Secret Societies were caught up in partisan politics, to the detriment to a peaceful environment for elections. According to the report, Secret Societies sometimes prevent a party they do not support from campaigning in their localities. Traditional Authorities were among those specifically named as culpable in the use of secret societies for elections and political purposes.

The use of Secret Societies for elections and political purposes, however, does not appear to be pervasive, at least during the bye-elections. For key informants, only a few Districts have had well-known incidences of use of Secret Societies for elections and other politics-related purposes. These were said to be Kailahun, Kenema, Bombali, and Kono. Places like Western Area (Urban and Rural Districts), Koinadugu, Moyamba, Pujehun, Bonthe, Bo, Karene, Falaba among others have not had much experience of Secret Societies' involvement in elections-related activities. Moreover, most bye-elections held since 2018 appear to have been free of allegations of the use of secret societies by any ordinary individual, politician, or Paramount Chief. However, it is true that other research shows that secret societies have in particular, been used to intimidate female campaigns for running in the first place.

Violence entrepreneurs

While uncaptured in the ONS Report, there are individuals who make their services to perpetuate violence available to politicians and political parties in return for some form of reward, according to key informants and FGDs participants. These individuals are essentially, thugs that politicians hire. Towards, and during the 2018 elections the names of some of these individuals were well-known in political and media circles. These names included 'Arata' who allegedly worked on behalf of the then opposition SLPP in the Western Area; 'Leather Boot' who allegedly worked on behalf of the then ruling APC party;

'Yetay Yetay' a senior policy officer based in Bo who allegedly executed high handed to surpress dissenting views in Bo City; 'Adamu' who had allegedly worked for different parties in the Kono District including the former Vice President; and 'Gbosgbos' who allegedly worked for the SLPP in the Eastern Region.

As gathered from the KIIs and FGDs, hired individual thugs have not been prominent in the bye-elections since 2018. This suggests that the violence that has occurred during bye-elections since 2018 has been the work of local actors, including politicians and ordinary citizens. There were, however, report of political parties exporting thugs predominantly for Waterloo/Lumpa to other communities and from Tonkolili to Koinadugu. While there are well-known individuals engaging in elections-related violence as hired thugs, it is equally likely that the youths who perpetuate violence currently are motivated by reward or expectations of it. These rewards could be as low as assurances of daily access to food, alcohol, and stipend; and as high as appointment to a job when the party wins.

4.2 Methods of communication to mobilise citizens for violence

Traditional media

Traditional media in Sierra Leone consists of newspapers, radio and television stations. According to the ONS Report, the media in Sierra Leone engage in the propagation and promotion of rancour, divisive political messages, hate, anxieties, and misinformation. This implies that politicians misuse the media for propaganda, misinformation, and partisan representation of issues. In the key informant interviews and FGDs for this Report, citizens confirm that traditional media in Sierra Leone do indeed engage in partisan propaganda and partisan representation of facts and issues. However, according to the results of the survey for this report, the use of radio for hate-speech appears to be the most significant, among traditional media.[10] Nearly 2 in 10 (17%) respondents in the SierraPoll survey used for this report say they have heard hate-speech on radio.

According to the citizen survey, hate-speech is very rare in newspapers and on television. For instance, only 0.5% of respondents in the survey say they have heard hate speech on television. All Key Informants interviewed confirmed that tribal innuendos and caricatures, and ethnic-centered provocative statements were rare in newspapers and on television.

Using New Media Use to promote hate speech and anxieties

Hate-speech on New Media is emerging as a worrying trend in Sierra Leone; according to all Key Informants interviewed for this report.[11] All Key Informants and FGD participants

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[10] Under the Unified Framework for addressing the issues, the UN defines hate speech as "any kind of communication, in speech, writing or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor".

[11] New Media consist of facebook, whatsapp, twitter, and such other Information Communication Technology-

interviewed confirmed that social media is awash with content that promotes hate between people of different political leanings, and anxieties about politics-related insecurity, generally. In the survey for this report, 57% of respondents across the country say they have heard hate-speech. Among those who reported that they have heard hate speech, 56% of respondents say it was on social media. However, fewer respondents said they had heard speech being used to directly call people to engage in violence, although it is important to note that this survey was carried out in July, prior to the August 10 violence. In the survey for this report, 77% of respondents (interviewed pre-August 10th) across the country said they had never heard hate speech that calls on people to engage in violence. This situation may have changed after the violent protest on August 10. Nearly 3 in 4 (74%) respondents say they had never heard hate speech directed at an ethnic group or to a particular gender. However, this does not mean that the phenomenon does not exist at significant levels. For instance, nearly two in 10 (17%) respondents across the country say they have heard hate-speech that calls on people to engage in violence, while 19% say they have heard hate speech directed at an ethnic group or gender.

The misuse of social media for purposes to promote hate and anxieties about politics-related violence was confirmed by all the key informants interviewed. All key informants agreed that the misuse of social media for purposes to promote politics-related hate especially coming from interest groups living abroad and tension in the society are serious problems that should be prioritised in any agenda for mitigating elections violence in 2023.

From the submissions of some key informants, certain critical trends were highlighted around the way social media is being used to promote hate and anxieties about politics-related violence in the country. First, according to key informants, it is uncommon to see politicians from the ranks of past and present Members of Parliament, cabinet ministers, and District Council Chairpersons and Mayors promoting hate, and anxieties on social media. Second, there are known partisan publicists and propagandists who deliberately post caustic opinions and fake news that have the potential to promote hate, rancour and anxieties, without hiding their identities. Third, there are suspicions that many of the people who post caustic opinions and fake news for the purposes of promoting hate, rancour and anxieties do so using fake identities. Fourth, audio messages on WhatsApp appear to be the favoured social media platform for promoting hate, rancour and anxieties. Fifth, the preponderance of hate-speech and acrimony appear to be the wilful and purposive work of professional hate and anxiety peddlers, and stalkers. Among the tools of their trade sometimes known as trolling, hate and anxiety, peddlers post or share fake news and opinions that seek to divide the population through anger.[12]

4.3 Context in which Elections Violence Occurs
Voters and politicians' good and bad political behaviours in any country are facilitated or festered by certain existing conditions; referred here to as context. In the Sierra Leone context as gleaned from review of literature and confirmed by the KIIs and FGDs, the

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anchored outlets through which people exchange news and views; collectively known also as Social media.

[12] Online trolling deliberately and purposefully tries to offend, cause trouble, or directly attack people by posting derogatory comments on facebook post, blogs, twitter, instagram, and other social media platforms.

conditions that are facilitating elections-related violence are as follow:

Identity politics devoid of ideological competition: Multiparty politics inevitably divide people along competing identities. Ideally, the divide should only be along competing ideologies of the different political parties. However, in Sierra Leone, multiparty politics is dividing citizens along ethno-regional lines; in the absence of competing ideological offers by political parties. Elections are thus often seen as defending one's ethnic interest at all costs. With a very short history of multiparty democracy, political parties in Sierra Leone have not established their different ideological identities; and thus citizens are not being mobilized along ideological lines. As recorded in a 2018 elections observation report, voters focus more on the identity of the party or candidates they should vote for rather than the ideology or platform of the party or candidate[13].

High levels of poverty and Illiteracy
Poverty and Illiteracy are leaving many Sierra Leoneans vulnerable and susceptible to unscrupulous political mobilisation methods, including misinformation, hate-mongering, and offer of incentives to engage in violence and thuggery. As one of the poorest counties in the world, the nexus between poverty, illiteracy and unscrupulous political mobilization has always been there in politics in Sierra Leone, often leading to violence, as many commentators of politics in the country have noted. Key informants agreed in interviews for this study that in the circumstances of post-COVID, and the Ukraine-Russia war in which living conditions have deteriorated in Sierra Leone as in many other poor countries, citizens are going to be susceptible to unscrupulous political mobilisation methods that instigates or lead sto violence.

Challenges in the enforcement of legal restraints on violent political conducts
It is the opinion of key informants that there has been very little effort on the part of the state to legally restrain groups, individuals or political parties from engaging in violent conducts during elections; or be held accountable for acts of violence. Essentially, those who plan or execute elections-related violence; do so with impunity, save for instances when they are confronted by the security forces.

Corroborating the views of key informants: there is evidence from review of literature on recent past elections in the country that people are rarely ever tried for their roles in planning and executing acts of elections-related violence. Arrests would be made during an unfolding incident of elections-related violence; but only for the purposes of quelling the situation rather than to hold people accountable. The issue of accountability for elections-related violence has itself not featured significantly in the considerations of government, political parties, and CSOs. For instance, no elections observations report since 2002 has ever significantly raised the issue of prosecution of people for their roles in planning and executing acts of elections-related violence.

Lack of a fully functioning national mechanism for dealing with identity politics
A national mechanism for dealing with identity politics and social cohesion is still in

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[13] National Elections Watch. Observation of the 2018 Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone. July, 2018.

formation in Sierra Leone.[14] It was not until 2021 that a National Commission for Peace and Social Cohesion (NCPSC) was established. Before that there was no purposive State-supplied institutional response to dealing with identity politics, peace promotion and social cohesion. While the establishment of NCPSC amounts to some progress, the challenge still remains firstly, that the regulatory framework for dealing with identity politics is weak; consisting mainly of affirmation of equality rights of citizens and non-discrimination provisions in the Sierra Leone Constitution. Evidence has been gleaned from literature that in other multi-ethnic or multi-religious countries, the regulatory provisions regime for dealing with identity politics and social cohesion is spread across a number of legal instruments; to purposively address identity politics, ethnic stereotyping, and tribal privileging.

A general culture of lawlessness in the country

The ONS Report made the point that "the general indiscipline and lawlessness which defines the Sierra Leonean society today is a worrisome trend and could potentially affect the 2023 elections".[15] In the engagements with them for this report, citizens clearly agreed with the ONS' characterization of Sierra Leone. The "general lawlessness and indiscipline" characterisation means that sections of the population are willing to involve themselves in acts of elections-related violence and misdemeanors, without being mobilized or instigated by anybody.

As one 2018 elections observation report noted, "Ordinary people, without evidence that they were prodded or directed by politicians, were found to be most at fault in uncivil and troubling behaviors; including destruction of campaign posters, attempts to disrupt opponents' peaceful assembly, hateful speech and intimidation".[16]

Gaps in Civil Society work towards peaceful elections

Civil Society has worked towards ensuring a peaceful environment for elections since 2002. A review of their project activities, however, suggests that CSOs in Sierra Leone have been slow to innovate or experiment with new initiatives. The scores of project activities that CSOs have implemented towards peaceful elections; mostly sought to educate citizens to dissuade them from engaging in elections-related violence, or settle community disputes that had the potential to ignite elections-related violence. A review of international comparative literature, however, shows that Civil Society work in other countries with contexts similar to Sierra Leone, have taken onboard newer initiatives beyond educating citizens to dissuade them from engaging in politics-related violence. In such initiatives, CSOs are educating people about fake news, and social media trickery including trolls that seek to influence public opinion, or poison minds. CSOs are also taking actions to address falsehoods peddled by politicians and their supporters, through fact-checking and fact-reporting to the populace. In other initiatives in countries with contexts similar to Sierra Leone, CSOs are now emphasising promotion of accountability

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[14] The term national mechanism and the emphasis that states should have it is borrowed from Alice Nderitu, the Special Adviser of the UN Secretary General on the Prevention of Genocide.

[15] National Elections Threat Assessment/District Risk Mapping for the 2023 General Elections. By the Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee. Page 18.

[16] National Elections Watch. Observation of the 2018 Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone. July, 2018.

for elections-related violence. In this regard, there are examples of CSOs seeking to gather evidence to support prosecution, or shame perpetrators of hate-rhetoric through exposing and naming them. These kinds of initiatives are yet to be undertaken by CSOs in Sierra Leone.

4.4 Gender Dimensions of Elections-Related Violence

The people who organise, lead, and participate in elections-related violence are overwhelmingly men. From the suggestions of Key Informants and FGD participants engaged for this report, extremely few women have taken part in organising, leading, and participating in elections-related violence. Women politicians are hardly known to rely on unofficial security personnel who may be prone to wilful attacks on political opponents or ordinary citizens; destruction of opponents' campaign posters and materials as acts of vandalism; obstruction of lawful rallies; and disruption of polling processes on voting-day. However, from the submissions of key informants there are many women who are very active on social media for the two big political parties. These women who are bloggers or social media television and radio anchors, often post messages on social media that have potentials to negatively impact social cohesion.

Women are also significant recipients of caustic political messages. For instance, according to the results of the survey for this report, 34% of those who reported that they have heard hate speech were women. Going into elections in 2023 however, 85% of respondents in the survey for this report believe that violence against women will not be an issue.

4.5 Where incidents of violence are likely to occur

The indication of places where violence is likely to occur is based on analyses of trends gleaned from the survey of citizens, KIIs, and FGDs. Six themes have been used here to explain the focus on these places. These themes largely echo the findings of the ONS report, particularly, around the key roles played by disenfranchised youth, political party actors, and select paramount chiefs, although our research also had more focus on sociological issues and the implications of these on security. Key themes included:

- An abundance of prospective commercial thugs to recruit
- the big parties confidence to clinch victory   a swing constituency
- the activities of the local Godfathers of big political parties as a source of frictions
- inclination to use secret societies during elections as evidenced from the past
- where competition between political families is significant
- Chieftaincy squabbles arising from Paramount Chieftaincy elections since 2018

The Western Area (Rural and Urban):
- Where prospective commercial thugs abound
- where the big parties have high confidence to clinch swing votes.

Port Loko District:
- where the big parties have high confidence to clinch swing victory

- where the activities of the local Godfathers of big political parties and competition between political families are often a source of political friction
- where prospective commercial thugs abound

Koinadugu District:
- where the big parties have high confidence to clinch swing victory
- where the activities of the local Godfathers of big political parties are often a source of political friction
- where there is an environment of different ethnicities' political party preferences.

Karene:
- where the big parties have high confidence to clinch swing victory
- where there are inadequate security personnel.

Falaba:
- where the big parties have high confidence to clinch swing victory
- where there are inadequate security personnel.

Parts of Tonkolili:
- where the big parties have high confidence to clinch swing victory
- where 2023 may be used to settle squabbles over recent or past chieftaincy elections.

Kono District:
- where Paramount Chiefs have a stronger sway over voters
- where the big parties have high confidence to clinch swing victory
- where the activities of the local Godfathers of big political parties are often a source of political friction
- where the inclination to use secret societies during elections is known.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions
The ONS' Threat Assessment Report dealt with numerous issues in broad terms about the problems and prospects for peaceful 2023 elections. The Citizens' Threat Assessment Report unpicks and re-packs these numerous issues to confirm those that are really critical to considerations about peaceful elections in Sierra Leone in 2023; from the perspectives of citizens. In the unpicking and re-packing towards specificity and clarity, this report narrates what is happening, who the actors are, why it is happening; how it is happening; and the pervasiveness of what happens in different locations.

Additionally, the report notes the rise of hate-speech as a dominant political mobilization tool is not missed. Social Media misuse for political purposes is a challenge being faced in countries all over the world; including stable democracies. In Sierra Leone, the reality of the danger that Social Media misuse poses to stability and cohesion is unfolding. Hate-speech in Sierra Leone appears to be significantly calling on people to engage in violence, or directed at ethnic identities. Hate-speech is thus, carrying a high risk of being a major promoter of violence around elections in the country. Consequently, promoting learning around Social Media misuse and tackling the challenge, is reflected on significantly in this report.

In summary, the prospects for elections-related violence rests with:
- ***most politicians*** who are more inclined to win voters on the basis of ethnic and regional affinity and divisive tactics, and encourage or facilitate the use of thugs and secret societies to intimidate opponents

- ***a handful of commercial thugs*** whose services are bought by politicians to cause violence during elections

- ***very few Paramount Chiefs who exploit general elections to settle local chieftaincy or family scores, allow themselves to be courted by politicians, or indulge in partisan posturing***;

- ***traditional media houses*** that are more inclined to cover political issues and events with partisan biases.

- ***a high number of ordinary citizens***, who without evidence that they were directed by politicians, destroy campaign posters, disrupt opponents' peaceful assemblies and rallies, send hateful speech on social media, and intimidate their fellow citizens perceived as opponents.

5.2 Recommendations

Keep track of known and emerging violence entrepreneurs
As captured earlier, there are persons who see economic and livelihood opportunities in serving as thugs for elections-related violence. CSOs and State Security agencies should keep track of the known and emerging individuals who make their services available to politicians and political parties, to perpetuate violence for economic rewards. This will be done to hold any one accountable for involvement in violent acts.
Enforce legal accountability for elections-related violence

Civil Society should take onboard an agenda to promote accountability for elections-related violence. While this comes with its own risks, particularly given the current polarised climate where CSOs are seen as partisan, and there are concerns that such

actions can be manipulated and presented as partisan behaviour, it is nevertheless important for them to engage in holding government accountable. The agenda would include raising awareness about the challenge of lack of accountability for promoters of violence, advocacy for increased prosecution, and obtaining a baseline on prosecutorial accountability for elections-related violence. After the elections, elections observations reports should significantly raise the issue of prosecution of people for their roles in planning and executing acts of elections-related violence. A separate report that conveys thorough evidence to support prosecution of people should also be considered. An annulment of a Parliamentary elections results in a Constituency in the Western Area by a sitting Judge in 2018, should be a pointer as to the possibilities around the enforcement of accountability for violence.

As one report noted and with which key informants agreed, "Impunity around elections offences is gradually becoming entrenched because even though elections offences court are set up for the purpose of addressing issues of electoral offences, these offences are mostly not prosecuted."[17]

Establish spaces for elections-related dialogue among political parties and EMB
Spaces should be established that bring together politicians, EMBs, and Civil Society for elections-related dialogue. Such spaces in the form of periodic meetings could make provision to have local and international organisations working on elections in attendance as observers. The space may be facilitated and superintended by the NCPSC and the Inter-Religious Council; as an addition to broadening a national mechanism for dealing with adversarial politics in Sierra Leone.

A critical challenge faced around elections contestations in Sierra Leone is that political parties are more inclined to talk past each other or talk at each other, rather than seek engagement to co-create answers and solutions to issues as they arise.

Get Paramount Chiefs to promote minimum standards of behaviour that promote citizens perception of them as peace promoters during elections.
Paramount Chiefs' partisan activism must also be addressed, particularly as it shows a pattern of prominence in certain parts of the country. ONS and Civil Society can work with the National Council of Paramount Chiefs to articulate minimum standards of Paramount Chiefs' behaviour that promote citizens' perception of them as peace promoters during elections. Political parties can also work with Paramount Chiefs to encourage them to be non-partisan and to work in the interests of all citizens.

CSOs should innovate initiatives that promote accountability for violent conduct
Civil Society should innovate and take onboard new and innovative approaches to stem hate-speech and violence rhetoric, beyond voter education and awareness-raising; to include activities that seek to identify and unmask hate-speech peddlers and wilful promoters of violence on social media and any other media. Identifying and unmasking hate-speech peddlers and wilful promoters of violence on social media will be done not only as a deterrent, but also as evidence gathering towards accountability. Here, CSOs

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[17] National Elections Watch. Observation of the 2018 Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone.

can seek support to acquire capacities for computational tools that harvest and interpret or analyse toxic social media contents that negatively impact social cohesion, and peaceful elections.

Pursue civic education with added emphasis on empowering citizens to reject fake news and internet trolls

While other tools like increased enforcement of accountability for violence would bear their own contributions, the pursuit of peaceful elections should continue to utilise civic education. "The 2018 elections clearly pointed to the fact that citizens should imbibe civic competencies and habits for multi-party politics and election".[18] Civic education, however, should not only seek to dissuade citizens from engaging in elections-related violence, but must significantly focus on empowering them to reject Social Media trickeries, including fake news and trolls. Social Media and its threat to democracy is a challenge being faced in countries all over the world. In other countries however, there is an emerging civic education practice that seeks to educate citizens on how to tackle the challenge.

Promote uptake of issues and ideology-based politics

Civil Society and the relevant State institutions should endeavour to promote uptake of issues and ideology-based politics in Sierra Leone. The relevant State institutions for this agenda would include NCPSC, the National Commission for Democracy, the National Council for Civic Education and Development; and the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone.

The work on the Citizens Manifesto by CSOs in the run-up to the 2018 illustrates the kinds of initiatives that could feed into issues and ideology-based politics in Sierra Leone. Another initiative that could be considered would be to get political parties to write easily accessible and easily understandable manifestos that must reach every voter through different media. The promoters of uptake of issues and ideology-based politics in Sierra Leone should consider a call for a ban on rallies, which are largely street carnivals.

Promote State security agencies' capacity to stem hate speech peddlers' social media means

State security agencies should take up methods to reduce misuse of social media for promoting hate and violence. Within the ambit of the laws of Sierra Leone and international human rights obligations, State security agencies should start to monitor and track hate speech, violence rhetoric, and fake news peddlers on social media, with a purpose to disrupt their means when necessary. In this, they can be assisted by Civil Society Organisations as well as media watch dog institutions such as the Independent Media Commission (IMC) However, it is important to have a clearly defined and agreed understanding of what constitutes a breach of freedom of speech, crossing the line into hate speech territory as this could be mis-used and have a chilling effect on free speech. However, once this is defined, it would be important to monitor and act swiftly against hate speech. Learning may be obtained in this regard from the National Telecommunications Commission, which was able to stem prank calls on the Emergency 117 phone line during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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[18] National Election Watch. Observation of the 2018 Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone. July 2018.

Address the public perceptions of Security Agencies work during elections
Citizens' perceptions that Security Agencies are often politically motivated are unhelpful to peaceful elections environment and should be countered. Any agenda towards curtailing elections-related violence in 2023 should take onboard initiatives that seek to promote the security agencies' good public image; specifically relating to elections policing. Among ideas that may be taken onboard, the public image enhancing could include pro-active co-creation of security arrangements for rallies, protection of Presidential candidates, and observation of polling. This is also important for other EMBs such as NEC as it would appear that while citizens were overall satisfied with the conduct of elections, the numbers of citizens who believed that NEC performed well, and that also expressed trust in NEC's performance were still quite low, despite NEC having the majority of favourable responses.

6.0 ANNEXES

6.1 List of Key Informants Interviewed

Key Informant	Organisation	Designation
Marcella Samba-Sesay	Campaign for Good Governance	Executive Director
Haja Alimatu Abdullah	Fifty-Fifty Group	The President
Dr. Isata. Mahoi	West African Network for Peace Building	Coordinator
James Lahai	National Elections Watch	National Coordinator
Abu Brima	Network Movement for Justice and Development	Executive Director
Madame Rosalind McCarthy	Mano River Women's Peace Network	Mano River Union National focal person (SL)
Ansumana Soko	Youth for Peace and Development	Executive Director
Abdul Fatouma	CHRDI	Executive Director
Ransford Wright	Independent Radio Network	National coordinator
John Caulker	Civil Society Platform on non-violence Elections	Chairman
Abdul Rashid	FAMBUL Tok	Programme Officer
Prince Mansaray	Movement for the Restoration of Democracy	Executive Director
Maxwell Kemokai	Partners In Conflict Transformation	Southern Region Manager

6.2 List of Literature Reviewed

- ActionAid. A new Social Compact Post-COVID

- European Union Elections Observation Mission. Final Report Republic of Sierra Leone Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Council Elections 2018.

- National Elections Threats Assessment/District Risk Mapping for the 2023 Elections. By the Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee. C/O of Office of National Security

- Government of Sierra Leone. Government Budget and Statement of Economic and Financial Policy for the Financial Year 2020, 2021, and 2022

- National Elections Watch. Observation of the 2018 Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone. July, 2018.

- Report of the review conference of the Public Elections Act organized by European Commission –Sierra Leone

- The Commitment to Reduce Inequality: Sierra Leone at the Crossroads. A report by IGR for OXFAM

- The Cybercrime Act, 2020

- The Political Parties Act, 2002

- The Public Elections Act, 2012

- The Public Elections Bill, 2022

- The Electoral Laws Act, 2002

- UNDP 2018 – Drivers of Electoral Violence in Sierra Leone

1. Did this community/district or ward experience any form of violence in the last by-election? (Probe: who heard about it? Who experienced it?)
   a) What do you think was the cause of the violence?
   b) Can you tell me how it was done?

2. As we approach the next election, is there anything, tensions, or trouble you worry about that could lead to violence? (tell me more about it?)

3. Now lets talk about hate speech. Hate speech this are offensive words/says/songs/slogans targeting a group or an individual based on the way they are e.g. their tribe, religion or gender - and that may threaten social peace.

   a. Have you heard hate speech around?
   b. What forms of hate speeches are you aware of?
   c. Which group of people are involved in this?
   d. Which mediums do they use: Probe – music/songs/ slogans/ social media/ radio/ gossip?
   e. Who are the target of hate messages?
   f. Have there been incidences of quarrels or violence because of hate messages?
   g. Are authorities doing anything to prevent violence?

4. Now lets talk about women and violence:

   a. A lot of people say that women are the victims of violence. Do you agree? (Probe, in what ways are women the victims)
   b. Did you see women participating in violence? Probe for how do women participate: do they lead violence? Do they support perpetuators?
   c. Do you see women playing a role to stop violence?

SIERRA LEONE: 10 Key Results from 3 latest SierraPolls – Oct 4th, 2022.

SierraPoll
QUALITY DECISIONS REQUIRE QUALITY DATA

Results based on four rounds of data collection. Feb-Aug 2022. In each round, 1,176 respondents were interviewed nationwide.

HATE SPEECH

1. Hate speech is a growing concern in Sierra Leone: One in three Sierra Leoneans say they had heard hate speech uttered against a group of people because of their gender or ethnicity.
2. Prevalent platforms for spread of hate speech: social media (58%); radio (20%); political party meetings (11%).

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM, WOMEN & VIOLENCE

Most citizens (especially women) know very little about Sierra Leone's electoral system.

3. On average, 80% of Sierra Leoneans have never heard about the Proportional Representation (PR) system and the constituency based First Past the Post (FPTP) system practiced in Sierra Leone.
4. Most (74%) citizens can't name which electoral system we have in Sierra Leone including 81% of women and 67% of men.
5. 65% of Sierra Leoneans do not know or even care about which electoral system we should use in Sierra Leone
6. 81% of Citizens think it's a good idea to have a 30% quota for women's political participation in the constitution.
7. In 16 bye-elections in the last 24 months, nearly 1 in 4 Sierra Leoneans said they heard about violence, while 6% saw incidences of violence. Most (68%) people said their communities were largely peaceful on the day of bye-elections.

CITIZEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF ELECTIONS MANAGEMENT BODIES (EMBs)

8. Sierra Leoneans felt that overall, the Electoral Commission (EC) did not do very well in enforcing COVID--19 protocols like mask-wearing, social distancing, and giving special treatment to people with special needs during the bye-elections. For example, just over half said the EC did a good job in giving special treatment to pregnant women and the elderly when voting.
9. The Police were seen as the least trusted institution in the most recent bye-elections - only 44% of respondents said they trusted the police a lot, compared to 57% who trust the army and 55% who trust the Electoral Commission.
10. Overall, a majority of citizens living in bye-election communities are very satisfied with EMB performance in the most recent bye-elections and also trusted the results. Nearly four in five (78%) citizens in bye-election areas say the results of the last bye-elections reflect the wishes of their community. 83% of citizens in bye-election areas say the Electoral Commission did a good job in managing elections in the last 24 months.