

## The Triple Threats to Subregional Stability: An Exposition of the Politics of Identity, Political Violence, and Corruption in Post-War Sierra Leone

WUSU CONTEH\*

**Abstract:** Sierra Leone witnessed a bloody civil war in the 1990s. Although the war was not motivated by ethnoregional identity, Sierra Leone's post-war democratization exacerbated ethnoregional identity politics, political violence, and corruption. Existing scholarly works have highlighted the factors that account for the war and post-war democratization processes. Meanwhile, there is a paucity of studies explicating the increased politicization of ethnoregional identity, political violence, and corruption in post-war Sierra Leone. Drawing from a semi-structured interview and a public perception survey, the study posits that ethnic and regional salience contribute significantly to political violence and obstruct efforts to combat corruption. The study further argues that the post-war democratization resulted in an intense polarisation of ethnoregional identity. While post-war reconstruction established several democratic policies and institutions, entrenched ethnoregional identity politics posed several challenges to Sierra Leone's efforts to promote national cohesion. Hence, the country has been deeply divided along ethnic, regional, and party lines that have permeated every facet of the socioeconomic and political systems. The policy implication is that liberal peacebuilding and governance reforms must go beyond the usual rebuilding of democratic institutions to understand the security risks of ethnoregional identity politics in post-war societies.

**Keywords:** Identity politics, ethnoregional, political violence, corruption, democratization

### Introduction

During the Cold War, many African countries were torn apart by horrendous civil conflicts. The end of the Cold War led to the emergence of multiparty democratization, with elections being the main mechanism for political change. While experts disagree on the role of elections in the survival of democracy, they all agree that elections are vital to the process. However, researchers associated with African politics have long been concerned about the politicization of ethnic identity in Sub-Saharan Africa. Clearly, ethnicity is a key component of discussions pertaining to violence, economic underdevelopment, and failed governments. In

---

\* Graduate School of Global Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan.  
E-mail: [wusuconteh12@yahoo.com](mailto:wusuconteh12@yahoo.com)

Sierra Leone, ethnoregional characteristics are employed extensively to explain voter behaviour and elite connections. The Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC) party rely on ethnoregional support (Fridy and M'Cormack-Hale, 2011, pp. 40–41).

The post-independence political system of Sierra Leone is dominated by the APC and SLPP. The APC is dominated by the Temne in the north-western region and the SLPP by the Mende ethnic group in the south-eastern region of the country. Creole, an influential minority group, also enjoyed remarkable political opportunities during the colonial administration. The two major ethnic groups expressed resentment over such dominance by the minority Creole during the colonial era. However, during the post-independence period, the resentment shifted from the Creole to the Temne and Mende ethnic groups (Kandeh 1992). These two parties garnered remarkable support from the two major ethnic groups, which constitute an estimated 30 per cent of the population and have historically dominated the country's political system, even though there are 18 ethnic groups, some of which speak distinct languages.

In the 1990s, Sierra Leone witnessed an 11-year-long civil war. Numerous research papers advanced that ethnicity did not affect the war. According to the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) report (2004), socioeconomic marginalization, political marginalization, corruption, and bad governance led to the civil war. Few studies have examined how post-war electoral democratization promotes ethnoregional identity politics, political violence, and corruption. Significant economic and political transformations occurred after the war, and several democratic institutions and policies were created to help establish long-term peace. While the country has witnessed four consecutive elections (2002, 2007, 2012 and 2018), the political contestation has heightened ethnoregional identity politics, corruption, and political violence. Successive governments have failed to contribute to nationwide political representation. The SLPP and APC governments have been dominated by public and civil servants from their own regions.

The study drew on data from a semi-structured interview and public perception survey. The findings would be significant to the state as it unravels ethnic identity politics and its intrinsic dangers to the political system and helps understand the true mechanism behind political violence with an ethnoregional undertone in Sierra Leone. It would also help the researcher uncover how ethnoregional identity politics has hindered the fight against corruption. Existing studies on corruption largely focus on the socioeconomic implications of graft. This study investigates the question as to what accounts for the politicization of ethnoregional identity in the political system in post-war Sierra Leone. How does ethnic salience foster electoral violence? Under what conditions does the politics of identity undermine the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone? Despite the appalling political leadership of the APC and SLPP, these parties still command overwhelming support from the two major ethnic groups (Mende and Temne).

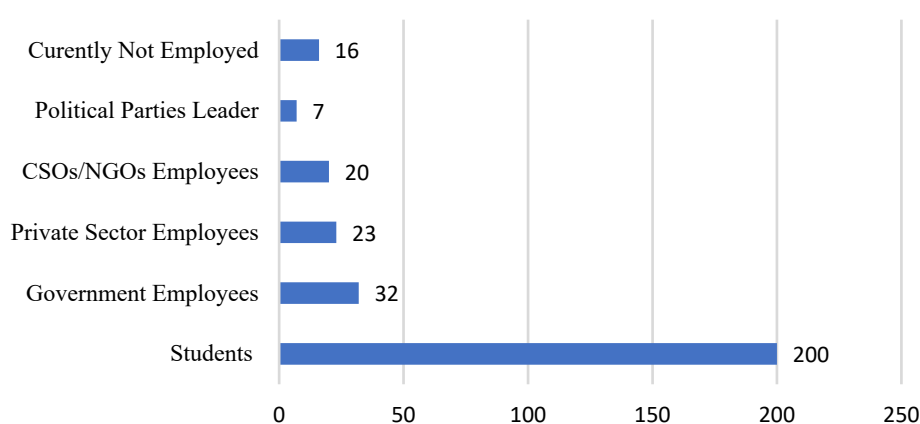
The paper consists of four sections. The first section provides an introduction. Section two describes the research and data collection methods. Section three discusses the findings and arguments on ethnoregional identity, political violence, and corruption in post-war Sierra Leone. The final section focuses on the concluding

remarks.

### 1. Research methods and data collection

This study employed a semi-structured interview and a public perception survey. The interview was conducted with key institutions in the domains of electoral management, anti-corruption, and anti-political violence campaigns. A well-balanced group of respondents from across the government—Ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)—were involved in the interview. Also, a social media-based public perception survey was conducted via WhatsApp. Social media expanded in Africa in the 2000s. Almost every category of the population uses social media, mostly Facebook and WhatsApp, to exchange personal information or discuss socioeconomic and political challenges. Sierra Leone witnessed the advent of social media after the 2000s. Millions of Sierra Leoneans access WhatsApp. During the 2012 and 2018 elections, prominent political parties used the media to communicate with young voters. Since 2012, most political parties' supporters have dominated WhatsApp forums. Despite various avenues to socialize and communicate non-political information, many WhatsApp forums are packed with political conversations that lead to intense confrontations between supporters of the two main political parties (APC and SLPP).

A three-week (January and February 2022) online public perception survey was carried out exclusively through WhatsApp forums in Sierra Leone. The survey was shared on prominent WhatsApp forums dominated by the two major political parties. Independent WhatsApp forums of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and students were also utilized. In total, 298 people responded to the online survey (Figure 1). The results of the survey showed that 200 of the respondents were students in tertiary institutions, 32 were government officials, 23 were private-sector employees, 20 were CSOs/NGOs employees, 16 were unemployed, and 7 were leaders of political parties.



**Figure 1.** Respondent affiliations

Note: The figures represent the number of respondents that indicated their affiliations

Numerous research articles have discussed the use of social media platforms for data collection. However, it is also important to discuss how the data is collected, analyzed, presented, and interpreted on specific social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Weibo, and Instagram, as well as how these platforms collaborate to accomplish these tasks (Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017). However, there is a paucity of studies that utilized WhatsApp as a data collection tool. WhatsApp is a social media platform owned by Facebook, now called Metaverse. In this study, WhatsApp was used extensively to obtain important social media data. According to Metaverse, there are around 2 billion active WhatsApp users worldwide, making it one of the most popular mobile communication applications. Over 200 million people in Africa use WhatsApp on a regular basis. The internet is a resource as well as a social phenomenon. Depending on how the researcher conceptualizes the internet's role in research, epistemological, logistical, and ethical challenges are likely to emerge (Markham and Buchanan 2012). Thus, the use of social media and a semi-structured interview are apt for this study.

## **2. Ethnoregional identity politics in post-war Sierra Leone**

One of the factors that account for the politicization of ethnoregional identity is the way in which the political parties themselves are structured on the basis of regional consideration and not on a national basis. For instance, the structure of the four major parties—SLPP, APC, NGC, and C4C—is a classic example of how the politics of ethnoregional identity are evident. This was also the case when the PMDC was formed in 2007 when it secured the ten seats in the southeast, where the political leader Charles Francis Margai originated. The case of the ADP party of Mohamed Kamaranba Mansaray supporters is drawn mainly from the northwest, where he originated. If you look at the party structures of the two major parties, APC and SLPP, there is glaring evidence that people hold all positions with ethnoregional identities (Interview: Executive Secretary-Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, September 22, 2022).

The political socialization of the people inherited from colonial division continued to hunt the divide between people living in the western area and people living in the provinces. Given the political system's extractive nature, everyone wants to get in to exploit, raising the level of political competition between us and them. It is all about state capture, as a change of government is not the solution to Sierra Leone's problems. When the political system is built around nepotism and clientelism, the principle of democratic governance will not survive. Even when there is a call for women's inclusion in politics, this has been tokenistic, as those brought on board are mainly there to advance the existing political divide and reinforce the stereotype that already exists in the politics of the country. This pattern is not different from that at the chiefdom level, where traditional authority manifest poor management of resources (Interview: Executive Director- Campaign for Good Governance/Chairperson- National Elections Watch, October 12, 2022).

SLPP and APC have significant, long-standing ethnic relations with Mende and Temne, respectively. In 2007, the APC won 36 of 39 northern seats, and the SLPP won 24 of 25 southern seats. In 2007, the APC returned to power amid widespread

corruption and ethnic favouritism. Ernest Bai Koroma was accused of replacing southern and eastern officials with northern APC members (International Crisis Group 2015). King (2013) concluded that the APC and SLPP use tribalism, and it has become entrenched in Sierra Leone's government and politics. Tribalism is also responsible for the country's poor socioeconomic status. Tribal card was used to win presidential and legislative elections. People voted based on ethnicity and with little regard for national development and economic policies in the 2007 General Elections and 2008 Local Council Elections. When the APC party picked a Kono Vice Presidential candidate, Samuel Sam Sumana, the Kono ethnic group largely voted for the APC in the 2007 and 2008 local council elections. The Kono supported the APC as the vice president belonged to their tribe (Awoko Newspaper 2018).

Identity politics is deeply entrenched in national politics and intra-party-political processes. The political party structures are ethnically based. Hence, the SLPP and APC parties' executive positions prior to the 2007 elections were dominated by Mende and Temne, respectively. Interestingly, even when the political elites abuse the ethnic group, the people remain committed to supporting these parties. Prior to the 2012 elections, APC flag bearer Ernest Koroma publicly declared that he was a Loko (i.e., one of the minority ethnic groups in the North). One of the local tabloids, 'The Torchlight Newspaper,' quoted him as saying, 'I am a Loko by tribe.' Even though political elites take ethnic groups for granted, their open support for these two major parties continues (Kanu 2010).

Sierra Leonean voters and political parties traditionally considered voting to strengthen 'kith and kin' who might redirect public and private resources and prestige to a family, ethnic group, or community. Voting has less to do with analyzing individuals' reputations and abilities to be successful leaders and evaluating political parties' policies and objectives. The SLPP's 2007 performance in Kailahun and Bombali demonstrates this. Despite the city's poor infrastructure (roads, schools, and healthcare), 90 per cent of Kailahun inhabitants voted for the then-ruling SLPP. Since the SLPP built a road to Makeni, the party should have received more votes in the Bombali district than 10.1 per cent. Established electoral allegiances and patrimonialism have led to the 'majority rules' mentality. Voters believe the SLPP would prioritize the South and the East, while the APC will prioritize the North and the West. Many feel that a candidate who loses the election will be cut off from society, politics, and the economy (Institute for Governance Reform-IGR 2018).

Ethnoregional rhetoric is prevalent in elections, especially before a runoff. The first-round 2018 elections revealed that ethnic politics is vital. Some groups denounced the results, criticized the electoral commission for inefficiency, stirred up ethnic hostility, and asked the police to assume parts of the NEC's responsibilities, particularly ballot box examination. Several politicians devised a plan to mobilize voters in the runoff by arousing their ethnic sentiments, blaming poor electoral performance on ethnic divisions, and motivating electorates to vote along ethnic lines. This tactic led to the southeast/northwest division that was developed after a violent election in 1967, leading to ethnic fundamentalism, coups, and the restoration of democracy in 1968. (Institute for Governance Reform-IGR 2018). There is little evidence that overlapping ethnic identities may bridge ethnic disparities (Horowitz

2016, p. 330). Political elites view ethnic relations as their most reliable political supporters and ethnic identity may be used to foster low-cost collective action and galvanize large electoral bases (Posner 2007).

The post-independence and post-war election results showed the voting patterns based on ethnoregional identity. Sierra Leone has witnessed four uninterrupted general elections since the end of the war in 2002. Although the country is considered one of the few 'successful' cases of UN intervention and has attracted a wide array of institutions, actors, and structural reforms, the politics of identity, political violence, and corruption are deeply ingrained in the country's political system. To demonstrate a political system based on ethnoregional identity, the study further utilized 2007, 2012, and 2018 election results to analyze the voting pattern based on ethnoregional identity. Tables 1 and 2 depict the voting patterns of the supporters of the two major political parties. The Mende predominantly live in the southeast, the Temne in the North, and most parts of western Sierra Leone.

Tables 1 and 2 show the voting patterns in the first decade of post-independence and post-war elections, respectively. Many scholars disagreed with the reliability of the 1967 election data; Sierra Leone, like many other African countries during this period, had limited access to quality data and record keeping. Reynolds (1999, p. 794) noted that primary source electoral data for Sierra Leone was extremely challenging to obtain. Owing to the country's violent and problematic past, official documents were hardly stored securely and widely distributed, if at all available. The preceding electoral data should indeed be regarded as the closest available representation to reality, as they were compiled from secondary information that often differed. Even though the reader can trust the overall number of parliamentary seats, the party vote percentages may be somewhat erroneous. This data shows that the voting patterns of ethnic groups in Sierra Leone's political system have remained unchanged since the country became independent.

The Institute for Governance Reform (IGR) (2018) found that in the 2018 elections, human security and livelihood considerations were major voting factors, especially in swing and contested districts. People voted for policy, not ethnicity. Charles Margai's Peoples Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) supported the APC in the 2007 runoff elections, and the PDP supported the SLPP in 2002. A cost-benefit analysis of political prominence explains this phenomenon. Their study demonstrates a shift in voting patterns outside regional lines, but it does not explain why or when political players make such shifts. In 2002, a war had recently ended, and the people wanted peace. Kandeh (2003) noted that the SLPP succeeded in the 2002 election because of the party's dedication to resolving the civil conflict rather than ideological or policy differences with other parties. Opposition members' choice of candidates in their opponents' strongholds can change voting trends beyond ethnoregional lines. When the APC degraded Peter Bayuku Konteh in Koinadugu District, the SLPP welcomed him and gathered a large proportion of votes in 2018.

**Table 1.** 1967 elections' results by district (extracted from Sierra Leone politics since independence by Allen [1968, p. 319]).

| District          | SLPP    | APC     | IND     | Per cent of poll |     |     |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|------------------|-----|-----|
|                   |         |         |         | SLPP             | APC | IND |
| Western Area      | 14,954  | 43,157  | 1,733   | 25               | 72  | 3   |
| Tonkolili         | 3,233   | 42,188  | —       | 7                | 93  | —   |
| Koinadugu         | 20,146  | 25,745  | 1,881   | 42               | 54  | 4   |
| Bombali           | 10,114  | 35,199  | —       | 22               | 78  | —   |
| Kambia            | 13,287  | 28,742  | 1,906   | 30               | 65  | 4   |
| Port Loko         | 17,838  | 50,493  | 1,046   | 26               | 73  | 1   |
| Northern Province | 64,618  | 182,367 | 4,833   | 26               | 72  | 2   |
| Kono              | 22,094  | 26,158  | 1,057   | 45               | 53  | 2   |
| Kailahun          | 15,229  | 1,823   | 22,557  | 38               | 5   | 57  |
| Kenema            | 48,478  | 8,861   | 24,930  | 50               | 22  | 28  |
| Eastern Province  | 85,801  | 36,842  | 48,538  | 25               | 8   | 75  |
| Pujehun           | 8,867   | —       | 26,812  | 70               | —   | 30  |
| Bonthe            | 11,297  | 89      | 4,815   | 43               | 44  | 13  |
| Moyamba           | 9,126   | 9,271   | 2,735   | 55               | 12  | 33  |
| Bo                | 36,536  | 7,989   | 22,470  | 59               | 11  | 30  |
| Southern Province | 65,626  | 17,349  | 56,832  | 47               | 12  | 41  |
| National          | 230,999 | 279,715 | 111,936 | 37               | 45  | 18  |

**Table 2.** Ethnoregional voting patterns (in per cent) in post-war elections: Presidential results (Round 1).

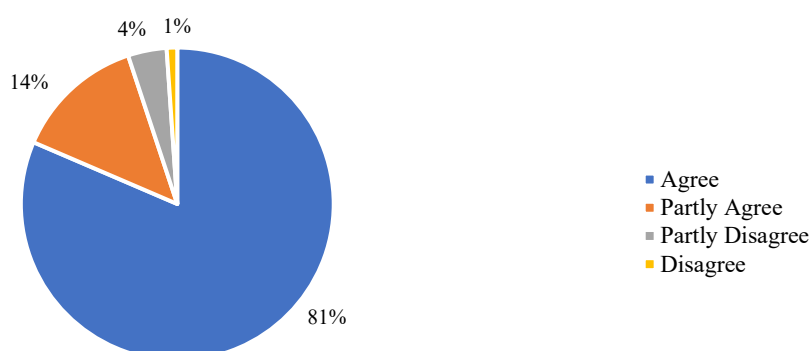
| Region  | District      | 2007 |      | 2012 |      | 2018 |      |
|---------|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|         |               | APC  | SLPP | APC  | SLPP | APC  | SLPP |
| South   | Kailahun      | 9.4  | 90.6 | 22.6 | 73.3 | 10.5 | 81.9 |
| South   | Kenema        | 16.9 | 83.1 | 18.7 | 77.9 | 11.0 | 83.8 |
| East    | Kono          | 41.5 | 58.6 | 58.2 | 37.1 | 20.1 | 21.5 |
| North   | Bombali       | 89.9 | 10.1 | 93.2 | 4.4  | 86.2 | 8.5  |
| North   | Koinadugu     | 64.6 | 35.4 | 86.4 | 9.1  | 56.3 | 27.2 |
| North   | Tonkolili     | 88.7 | 11.3 | 92.6 | 4.4  | 76.7 | 9.8  |
| North   | Kambia        | 80.9 | 19.1 | 82.2 | 13.0 | 39.3 | 10.2 |
| North   | Port Loko     | 88.2 | 11.9 | 90.2 | 5.6  | 71.3 | 9.3  |
| South   | Bo            | 26.0 | 74.0 | 16.7 | 77.1 | 10.3 | 83.7 |
| South   | Bonthe        | 41.4 | 58.6 | 11.7 | 80.6 | 4.6  | 89.8 |
| South   | Moyamba       | 34.7 | 65.3 | 26.2 | 65.3 | 17.9 | 73.5 |
| South   | Pujehun       | 7.0  | 93.0 | 15.5 | 74.7 | 7.9  | 86.1 |
| Western | Western Rural | 68.3 | 31.7 | 74.3 | 23.4 | 55.8 | 34.7 |
| Western | Western Urban | 70.8 | 29.2 | 71.4 | 27.3 | 57.8 | 33.1 |
|         | National      | 54.6 | 45.4 | 58.7 | 37.4 | 42.7 | 43.3 |

Note: Extracted from the Institute for Governance Reform-IGR. 2018. Presidential election results 2018: Lessons learnt and implications for the runoff and democracy building (modified by the author to indicate the regions of the districts).

Additionally, Charles Margai, who was denied the SLLP leadership after a disputed party convention, rallied behind the APC in the 2007 runoff elections out of personal vengeance. Voting trends in the SLPP's southeast strongholds changed dramatically. PMDC supporters who supported SLPP in 2007 voted for APC. When the PMDC and APC's 'political marriage' disintegrated, APC's support plunged into SLPP strongholds formerly controlled by the PMDC. Many PMDC supporters



switched to the SLPP during the 2012 and 2018 elections. Understanding the voting pattern across ethnic and geographical boundaries requires a nuanced examination rather than a rapid change in voting behaviour impacted by political parties' agendas. Figure 2 below illustrates the public perception of the voting behaviour of the youth. According to the online public perception survey, 81 per cent of respondents agreed that young people emulate their political leaders when it comes to recreating ethnic and regional identities in Sierra Leone's political system.



**Figure 2.** Political parties' youth wings are following the footsteps of party leaders on ethnoregional identity politics

Source: Own construction

Sierra Leone's elections are dominated by ethnoregional voting. Political parties do not promote national representation. Despite President Koroma's rhetoric about 'inclusive administration', his administration participated in 'tribalism' and 'regionalism' in hiring and promoting staff at the State House, government ministries, diplomatic missions, and most notably in state parastatals and agencies. When the APC assumed office in 2007, it dismissed dozens of key officials perceived to be SLPP sympathizers due to Mende or similar ethnic backgrounds. They were replaced abruptly, without regard to qualifications or legally binding contracts, with Temne or Limba individuals, mainly from the APC's Bombali home district. These politically and ethnically driven selections eclipsed all ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) by March 2018, when the administration's second term ended. They accounted for roughly 71 per cent of all senior and middle-level jobs created by former President Koroma's administration (Government of Sierra Leone - GoSL), 2018, pp. 35–36). Meanwhile, President Bio's administration has replicated a similar political trend of placing southerners in strategic MDAs. The current administration has been criticized for favouring southerners (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, p. 23).

The traditional and parochial political structures and the perceived nature of political parties are key factors of ethnoregional politics. Assuming you are coming

from the south, you are considered a supporter of the SLPP, and coming from the North, you are considered a supporter of the APC. This essentially boils down to our tradition of politics. Over time, it has not been glaring, but to some extent, there are tribal undertones in the manner in which citizens tend to sympathize with or become supporters of the two major political parties. This is a challenge, and one of the things the PPRC is focusing on is how the euphoria around tribal lines should be eroded. It generally boils down to our political parties' traditional pattern and structure (Interview: Executive Secretary, Political Parties Registration Commission: October 4, 2023).

Moreover, identity politics goes beyond elections. After elections, ethno-regional factors determine the political structure. Ethnic and regional affiliations have dominated political appointments since independence. Ernest Bai Koroma vowed to run Sierra Leone like a business (The Patriotic Vanguard Newspaper 2008). His early appointments to key MDAs signalled a return to ethno-regional identity politics. Tables 3, 4, and 5 demonstrate ethno-regional appointment trends at a prominent tax agency. The National Revenue Authority (NRA) was created after the war to rebuild the economy. Tables 4 and 5 indicate Koroma and Bio's regional and ethnic appointments. Two online survey questions confirm the widespread belief that governmental appointments are based on ethnicity and region. According to the online perception survey, 66 per cent of the respondents noted that public and civil servants are selected based on ethno-regional identities, and 79 per cent commented that identity politics is widespread in government MDAs and higher learning institutions. Mende mostly live in the southeast, and Temne in the northwest of Sierra Leone.

**Table 3.** Regions of workers in various agencies and parastatals

| Company/<br>Region | North       | West       | South and<br>East | Total      |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| NATCOM             | 91 (89.2%)  | 4 (3.9%)   | 7 (6.9%)          | 102 (100%) |
| NASSIT             | 337 (85.7%) | 20 (5.1%)  | 36 (9.2%)         | 393 (100%) |
| NRA**              | 10 (62.5%)  | 5 (31.3%)  | 1 (6.2%)          | 16 (100%)  |
| RMFA               | 13 (46.4%)  | 10 (35.7%) | 5 (17.9%)         | 28 (100%)  |
| NPPA               | 27 (58.7%)  | 11 (23.9%) | 8 (17.4%)         | 46 (100%)  |
| MARITIME           | 149 (81.4%) | 23 (12.6%) | 11 (6%)           | 183 (100%) |
| EPA                | 72 (72%)    | 12 (12%)   | 16 (16%)          | 100        |
| Average %          | 71%         | 18%        | 11%               | 100%       |

Source: Extracted from the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) report of the Governance Transition Team (2018, p.116).

**Table 4.** Ethnic and regional profiles of workers at the senior management level at NRA (APC era 2007-2012).

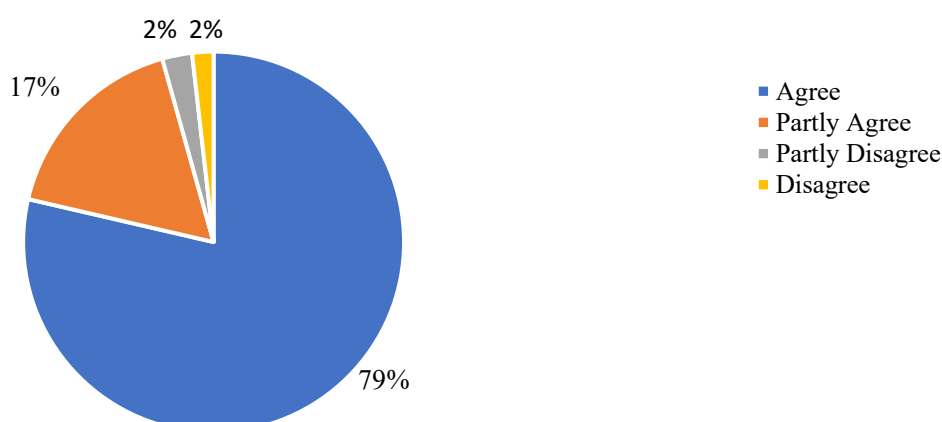
| Position  | Name               | Region | District  | Tribe  |
|---|--------------------|--------|-----------|--------|
| Commissioner General  | Haja Kallah Kamara | North  | Bombali   | Temne  |
| Deputy CG   | Vacant             |        |           |        |
| Commissioner Domestic Tax Dept.                                 | Ibrahim S Kamara   | North  | Kambia    | Limba  |
| Commissioner Customs  | Sahid Conteh       | North  | Tonkolili | Temne  |
| Director of Finance   | Abdulai Conteh     | North  | Bombali   | Temne  |
| Head, Nontax revenue  | Thelma Pratt       | West   | Freetown  | Creole |
| Head. ICT   | Gerald Ganda       | South  | Bo        | Mende  |
| Head, Monitoring, Research and Planning                         | Philip Kargbo      | North  | Bombali   | Limba  |
| Head, Internal Control and Audit                                | Philip Koroma      | North  | Bombali   | Temne  |
| Head, Admin and HR  | Joseph Koroma      | North  | Bombali   | Temne  |
| Director, Corporate services                                    | Chrispina Rnn      | West   | Freetown  | Creole |
| Assistant Commissioner OPS (Customs)                            | Abubakarr Conteh   | North  | Bombali   | Temne  |
| Assistant Commissioner, PSSD (Customs)                          | AB Label           | North  | Bombali   | Temne  |
| Assistant Commissioner, Revenue Intelligence, and Investigation | Sheku Kamara       | North  | Bombali   | Limba  |

Extracted from the government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) report of the Governance Transition Team (2018, p. 117). Ethnic profile of staff of NRA.

**Table 5.** Ethnic and regional profiles of workers at the senior management level at NRA (SLPP era 2018-2022).

| Position  | Name                     | Region | District  | Tribe   |
|---|--------------------------|--------|-----------|---------|
| Commissioner General                                  | Dr. Samuel S. Jibao      | East   | Kailahun  | Mende   |
| Deputy Commissioner General                           | Mrs. Jeneba K. Bangura   | South  | Pujehun   | Mende   |
| Commissioner Domestic Tax dept                        | Mr. Ibrahim Sorie Kamara | North  | Kambia    | Limba   |
| Commissioner Customs Service Dept                     | Mr. Abu Martin Kanneh    | South  | Pujehun   | Mende   |
| Commissioner Non-Tax Revenue Dept                     | Mr. Sheku Fadika         | West   | Freetown  | Madingo |
| Senior Director ICT                                   | Mr. Gerald P. Ganda      | South  | Bo        | Mende   |
| Senior Director MRP                                   | Dr. Philip M. Kargbo     | North  | Karene    | Limba   |
| Senior Director Modernisation                         | Mr. Sahid Conteh         | North  | Tonkolili | Temne   |
| Director ICA  | Mr. Philip A. Koroma     | North  | Bombali   | Temne   |
| Director HR   | Mrs. Dora Tucker-Gambai  | South  | Bo        | Mende   |
| Director Admin  | Mrs. Fanta Kanneh        |        |           | Mende   |
| Director of legal and Corporate services              | Ms. Martina B. Egbenda   | South  | Bo        | Mende   |
| Assistant Commissioner OPS (Customs)                  | Mr. Kpana M. Conteh      | East   | Kailahun  | Mende   |
| Assistant Commissioner Anti-Smuggling Unit            | Mr. Brimah Kemoh         | South  | Bonthe    | Mende   |
| Director Revenue Intelligence and Investigations Unit | Mr. Mohamed J. Foday     | South  | Bonthe    | Mende   |

Source: Created by the author



**Figure 3.** Identity politics is common in government ministries, departments and agencies, and higher learning institutions

Source: Created by the author.

### 3. Political violence in post-war Sierra Leone

This section presents findings on political violence in post-war Sierra Leone during and after elections. The genealogy of political violence in Sierra Leone could be traced back to post-independence. According to Fearon and Laitin (2000), elites provoke and ignite ethnic tensions and, in some instances, deliberately provoke ethnic violence as a strategy to secure power, protect their existing authority, or defend against threats from other groups. It is no secret that ethnicity has contributed significantly to political violence in Sierra Leone. It has become more evident recently because of the conscious effort made by politicians to canvass along ethnic and regional lines. Thus, politics has been conceived as akin to financial well-being. The most common statement made by politicians is that if one ethnic member is in governance, the ethnic group tends to be financially stable. This is absolutely not the case, as several party supporters are wallowing in poverty, irrespective of which party is in power (Director of Operations-National Electoral Commission, September 21, 2022).

#### 3.1. Political violence in post-war democratization

Since the Cold War ended, 55 per cent of African nations have witnessed electoral violence (Burchard 2015, p. 50). During post-war elections in Sierra Leone, political violence increased. Many Sierra Leoneans felt that politics always resulted in violence. In Sierra Leone, politics and violence are intricately intertwined, and elections have always led to violent conflicts (Christensen and Utas 2008). Since independence, urban youth, popularly referred to as ‘raray’ boys or gangs, have been a strategic instrument for politicians to commit acts of violence. Sierra Leone was regarded as one of the reasonably stable post-conflict governments after 11 years of civil war. However, since independence, every election has been marred by political

violence. Patronage-backed regional and ethnic support for political parties further escalates political violence (African Research Institute 2011). Since the 2007 elections, both the SLPP and APC have had a prevailing worldview that separates the population into two identities: the entitled and the aggrieved. The activities of prominent politicians on both sides exacerbated these disparities. Everything is now politicized. To avoid being physically or verbally assaulted for political reasons, individuals increasingly make particular considerations about what colours of clothing to wear for various locations and activities (Institute for Governance Reform 2016). In the previous administration of the APC, there were instances of directors of MDAs publicly wearing party regalia and going to party rallies. This is also the case for the SLPP, as they took over in 2018 (Interview: Monitoring and Evaluation Officer- Centre for Coordination of Youth Activities, October 5, 2022).

Although there are intermarriages and interrelationships between the Northwest and Southeast, political leaders with limited realistic policies use the ethnic card to gain political power. There is an instance of the current President addressing party supporters in Mende by telling them that if they vote for the APC, they will be subject to perpetual poverty. Quite recently, one of the key flagbearers of the APC, Samura Kamara, made a tribal bigotry statement, noting that the employment and recruitment in the current administration are from one tribe. Making such a statement to a gullible and illiterate youth thus fuels ethnic tensions across the country. This was strongly condemned by members of the CSOs. The statements from the political leaders reinforced the ethnic and regional divide. This largely resonates with the youths' belief that if their party is in government, there is the likelihood that they will benefit and thus engage in any form of violence during elections (Interview: Executive Secretary-Human Right Commission of Sierra Leone, September 22, 2022).

Since the return to multiparty elections in post-war Sierra Leone, political violence has become prevalent, assuming an ethnic dimension. Sadly, this is supported by the political actors of the major political parties. In the election-related violence cases in Kono in 2009, Kailahun and Freetown in 2010, and Lunsar in 2016, evidence show that political actors outside these communities financially support youth to perpetrate violence targeting opponents of the SLPP and APC (Institute for Governance Reform 2016). It is reported that 15 out of the 22 political violence cases occurred in the southern and eastern regions, where there was a strong feeling of perceived marginalization of the SLPP supporters with respect to resource distribution, jobs, roads, infrastructure, contracts, and allocations of development projects. This increased political violence in places like Kono, Kenema, Bo, Tongo Fields, and Pujehun during the local by-elections. All these are places where the opposition SLPP party is located. Political violence occurred when state actors—ministers and other public servants or opposition party members—had resources to share with the youth (Institute for Governance Reform 2016).

In several African countries, youths play a major role in election-related violence. Political parties in Sierra Leone mainly depend on youth to foment violence during and after elections. The SLPP and APC are being questioned for allegedly employing street gangs and cliques to attain their political goals. Several gang members claimed they received vast sums of money from political party middlemen in exchange for political support (Bangura 2016). The growing involvement of cliques as

perpetrators is especially evident in party militias. While the SLPP relies largely on ex-combatants, clique groupings established around commanders (so-called COs) are increasingly drawn into the SLPP and are colloquially dubbed 'solda teams' (a term used to refer to anybody who supports 'ex-solda' Maada Bio). For instance, by 2018–2019, a significant enforcer group positioned at the party headquarters was a former Black-clique group ousted from the APC by an SLPP party militia commander. Conversely, the APC recruits musclemen more directly through gang structures, preying on the existing hierarchies inside cliques and gangs by employing leaders and obtaining their recruits for free. For example, when police tear-gassed the APC party headquarters, violent rallies at the end of May 2019 were sparked by a ring of loyal gang leaders who had converged around the party headquarters (ACLEDD 2020).

Electoral violence is more prevalent in high-stakes regions, such as battleground states. Bangura and Kovacs (2018) stated that developing democracies are more prone to utilize violent techniques to mobilize and terrorize swing voters. Appealing to ethnic ties and patronage is likely effective in swing states (Ibid 2018, p. 117). This happened in Kono in 2002. The SLPP was expected to win the first post-war elections after the conflict, and the APC had little chance of winning any seats in Kono. The SLPP employed violence and intimidation to maintain its control over the district. Local SLPP members created the Poro secret society to intimidate 'outsiders' (Bangura and Kovacs 2018, p. 123). The President threatened a state of emergency if SLPP and APC members clashed in Kono. Allegations of Koroma and Margai's assassination plots were never confirmed, but they heightened the voters' anger and fear that the SLPP would not abide by the rules (Kandeh 2008, pp. 616–617). Every political party has 'martialts' that are mobilized to actively participate in the political process and incite violence during the elections. When there is an election in a setting where a political party is sure not to win, what normally happens is that young people are sent there to disturb the smooth conduct of the election. This is now the norm in the electoral process, and it is the leading cause of political violence. In most by-elections, violence is perpetuated by young people imported from other areas by politicians (Interview: Director of Operations-National Electoral Commission, September 21, 2022).

The management of the 2007 elections was considered one of the factors that resulted in an increase in electoral violence. The nullification of over 400 polling stations when the other commissioners were going through a recount and the failure to listen to the aggrieved party resulted in massive violence after the 2007 elections. When the APC came to power in 2007, the opposition party office was attacked, and women were raped. When the SLPP came to power, it was a revenge game (Interview: Chairperson-National Commission for Democracy, September 28, 2022). Sierra Leone's political violence escalated in 2014 and 2015 and worsened in 2018 (ACLEDD 2020, p. 19). This surge in violence can be attributed to the increased political competition and violence, not during the elections. According to Christensen and Utas (2008), Sierra Leone's election moment has legitimized violence. Political violence raises the cost of politics and makes it harder for people to agree to development programmes and identify vested interests. As a result of the political violence and intolerance preceding the 2010 Kono local council elections,

SLPP and APC offices in Koidu City were demolished. Senior SLPP stakeholders, including two presidential aspirants and the deputy minority leader, were injured in APC attacks (Africa Research Institute 2011). Before the 2018 elections, Sierra Leone's two largest political parties clashed. The National Electoral Commission alleged voter intimidation throughout the election. The police, which is known to sympathize with the APC, engaged in regular intimidation (Zanoletti 2018).

Elections and preceding campaigns accurately represent the functioning of Sierra Leone's political system. Elite tactics to mobilize people around polarising ethnic issues to obtain economic and political opportunities leading to the introduction of competitive multiparty elections provide the path for violent political mobilization after competitive multiparty elections are introduced. Political legacy influences elite strategy and adds to the likelihood of electoral violence throughout some of these transitions (Fjelde and Höglund 2018, pp. 29–30). In Sierra Leone, political fights are mainly characterized by ethnicity rather than policy or the political manifestos of the two major political parties. The regional voting patterns maintained by entrenched patronage networks and graft are as glaring as ever. Elections are considered 'winner takes all' competitions, necessitating exclusion and deprivation for the losing party and its strongholds (Balla and Ashraph 2012). In the campaign prior to the 2012 elections, in September 2011, the presidential candidate of the SLPP, Julius Maada Bio, was attacked by mobs of APC supporters in the SLPP stronghold of Bo. The SLPP mobs retaliated by setting fire to the APC district office and residential properties. A public enquiry found that the violence was both calculated and carried out by the elites of both parties (Balla and Ashraph 2012). The constitution of Sierra Leone does not provide for an inclusive political system. It is largely based on the discretion of the President on the appointment of people in government MDAs. There is recurring mistrust of the dominant political parties' ability to bring members from each party into government, with the fear that bringing members from the opposition parties into government will undermine the incumbent government (Interview: Executive Secretary-Human Right Commission of Sierra Leone, September 22, 2022).

Political parties mobilize voters on identity lines, using ethnicity as a manipulative tool to maintain a grip on the various constituents of the parties. Following the 2018 presidential runoff elections, the political language between the SLPP and the APC was dominated by a poisonous political tribalism campaign. This resulted in ethnic clashes around the country, as people were savagely attacked and properties were damaged (Hanciles 2014). The announcement of the 2018 presidential runoff elections attracted nationwide violence that resulted in the killing and burning of houses of supporters of both parties (APC and SLPP). Calculated attacks on ethnic groups, especially the Temne and Limba that strongly supported the APC party, were reported.

During campaigns, the slogans used by political parties are associated with ethnic groups and thus help to strengthen people's mindset towards being akin to certain ethnic groups. It is no secret that the two major political parties, SLPP and APC, are linked by the northwest and southeast divides. The campaign rhetoric by politicians has contributed to political violence. In the 2018 elections, there were videos on social media where a political leader said that if his party is not voted for,



opposition supporters will be driven from the stronghold of the said party. The truth is that ethnic tension raised its ugly head during the elections. Most Sierra Leoneans have extensive family relations across the different ethnic groups, and thus, beyond politics, people relate, and there are several inter-ethnic marriages. People in Tonkolili district believe it is an opposition stronghold and should be won by the opposition party in the recently held by-elections (Director of Operations-National Electoral Commission, September 21, 2022).

The issue of misinformation is critical to increasing violence. The information shared by political leaders and supporters during elections via social media often results in violence. With the proliferation of drugs during elections, political parties provide substance to young people in order to induce them to commit violence. The increased unemployment among young people is critical to fostering violence. Most young people are unemployed due to a lack of basic skills. The crux of political violence lies squarely with the political leaders who lack the sincerity to urge their supporters to stay away from violence. Since young people are guaranteed to be protected and defended by their political big men after experiencing violence, a vicious cycle of political violence during elections is created (Interview: Executive Secretary, Political Parties Registration Commission: October 4, 2023).

The post-election ethnic division has been further demonstrated by the newly elected SLPP President-Retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio. During his election campaign with the vanguard 'New Direction', Bio promised to promote national cohesion and political tolerance. However, most new cabinet-appointed ministers are members of his ethnic support base in the southeast. There has been a spree of sacking and sending off public officials on leave who are perceived to be supporters of the APC. On the contrary, the public officials who publicly backed the current government when they were its opponents are being retained and promoted. Our political leaders have contributed to the challenges the country is facing, as they are the ones who often inject the ethnic and regional divide. The type of messages they often convey to supporters significantly affects the political dynamics. Messages resonate along regional and ethnic lines during the campaign period, evoking one's affiliations to the leaders' tribespeople or homeland ((Interview: Executive Secretary, Political Parties Registration Commission: October 4, 2023).

Furthermore, in Bio's first year as President, the country experienced political intimidation and violence in by-elections and non-election-related matters. The APC secured a legislative majority in 2018, but it was short-lived as the SLPP used state power to coerce and expel APC members of parliament. This was preceded by the unconstitutional and hasty imposition of an SLPP party stalwart as Speaker of the House of Parliament, notwithstanding his past scandals. Africanist Press (2020b) argued that the SLPP's actions laid the ground for further violence by people whose representatives were brutalized and humiliated by executive coercive agents. The state created panic and violence during voting. SLPP officers intimidated opposition members during the August 2019 by-election in Constituency 110. Members of the ruling SLPP, including a cabinet minister and party henchmen, vandalized polling sites and damaged the voting equipment, forcing the polls to be cancelled. The 2018 Tonko Limba local elections were violent (Africanist Press 2020b). Political intimidation, thuggery, violence, and fraud marred the 2021 elections in Koinadugu

District. APC and SLPP were instrumental in fuelling political violence (National Elections Watch 2021).

The reason why violence has increased is political clientelism. The former President Kabbah did well with inclusive governance, where people were given power irrespective of their regional and ethnic affiliations. However, when President Koroma took over in 2007, he laid a very dangerous foundation, as there were mass dismissals of public and civil servants. Those precedents were set in broad daylight and in the open, reversing the gains of former President Kabbah in bringing people together. When the new government came, they broke away from the Ernest Koroma pattern of politics. It is glaring that when the SLPP took over in 2018, the southeast gained dominance, and the other regions felt left out, including young people, such as graduates seeking jobs, but the private sector cannot absolve them. Furthermore, these youths are everywhere, desperate on social media, influencing and fuelling tribalism and regionalism. The political desperation in a winner-take-all structure is the major problem. Some people have been sitting for five years with no meaningful life, and they are concerned that the incumbent will win again in the next elections in 2023 (Interview: ACC Commissioner, October 4, 2022).

Youth violence is manifesting in different ways. The instigators are those in power who provide resources to youth groups on a weekly basis to perpetuate hate messages on social media. NEW has documented cases of political leaders engaging in violence during the by-elections. There are cases where ballot boxes are looted, and the elections are disrupted, particularly in places where one of the major parties has no chance of winning. In the end, such a politician is appointed minister. This is where the lack of ethics and moral values is most evident in Sierra Leone's political system. Unfortunately, most young people are heavily addicted to drugs and unemployed. The two major political parties, APC and SLPP, harbour youths in their offices and make them readily available to perpetuate violence (Interview: Executive Director- Campaign for Good Governance/Chairperson- National Elections Watch, October 12, 2022).

In general, the two major political parties exploit ethnoregional identities to perpetuate political intimidation and violence and have used youth gangs to ignite the flames of regional divisions and political violence. Even though Sierra Leone is considered a 'successful' liberal peacebuilding country, having held four consecutive multiparty elections without a relapse of the civil war, the ongoing political intimidation and violence are early warning signs that the stakeholders in the electoral management bodies (EMBs) and the international community must pay increased attention to prevent a potential civil war. Before the elections of 2023, the recurrent political violence with regional and ethnic implications is a serious issue that should be addressed. There is a severe polarisation between the two major political parties, one of Sierra Leoneans' chief concerns. The establishment of the Coalition for Change (C4C) and the National Grand Alliance (NGC) has also contributed to the growing ethnoregional polarisation. This might lead to further ethnic tensions and political violence in the country, as the fifth post-war election, scheduled for June 2023, is anticipated to be one of the most contentious in history, as the main opposition party considers it their turn to enjoy the national cake.

#### 4. Corruption in post-war Sierra Leone

After the war, the succeeding governments strengthened the anti-corruption institutions and policies. The 2000 Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) created the ACC Act. The ACC investigates corrupt practices and prevents corruption. The ACC Act of 2000 was amended in 2008 to strengthen the commission and improve its effectiveness. The 2008 Act gives the ACC prosecutorial power, promotes public integrity, and makes corruption punishable. The ACC Amendment Act of 2019 strengthened the commission's anti-corruption powers. The Act simplifies the list of public officials required to declare assets, raises penalties, and facilitates witness protection. The current ACC czar (commissioner) has gained recognition for his strong anti-corruption efforts. However, this does not indicate declining corruption. Post-war reforms were met with ethnoregional identity politics and political violence. Ethnoregional identity politics inhibits anti-corruption efforts. When party officials are accused of corruption by the ACC, their supporters assemble outside the court to show solidarity. Large crowds of party supporters scuffle with the security forces. When political leaders are indicted, the party loyalists often inhibit the work of the ACC.

The historical foundation has been there as we vividly see the northwest supporting the APC and the southeast supporting the SLPP, which has led to a problematic structure. Everything is filtered through the lens of tribe, region, name, or anything else that can indicate identity. This foundation and the context in which the ACC fights corruption play essential roles, both positive and negative, but mostly negative, because they are built on nepotism, tribalism, and regionalism. This has filtered into every facet of society, where people identify themselves along ethnic and regional lines. This makes the fight against corruption, which should be built on the foundation of impartiality, very difficult (Interview: Commissioner-Anti Corruption Commission, October 4, 2022).

The "big man" phenomenon is when a political representative serves as a provider for a community. Political leaders are under immense pressure when party supporters have unrealistic expectations that force political leaders to engage in unscrupulous deals that undermine the country's economic development. When power changes hands, all the critical institutions considered independent are full of party people. Thus, when politicians go to the community to solicit support from their supporters, they advance the argument that the current regime is after them not based on the alleged resources being squandered but because of a witch hunt (Interview: Executive Director- Campaign for Good Governance/Chairperson-National Elections Watch, October 12, 2022).

Since the post-war era, successive governments have promoted anti-corruption rhetoric and pretexts. In 2007, former President Koroma declared 'zero tolerance' for corruption and immediately initiated legal measures. In 2008, the ACC Act was amended to provide prosecution power. The President also approved the release of Auditor General reports. Nonetheless, President Koroma allowed top officials affiliated with him to pressure the anti-corruption commissioner, Abdul Tejan-Cole, thus preventing him from using his expanded authority. Tejan-Cole left the ACC in 2010. Despite its jurisdiction, the ACC remained a weak and politically driven

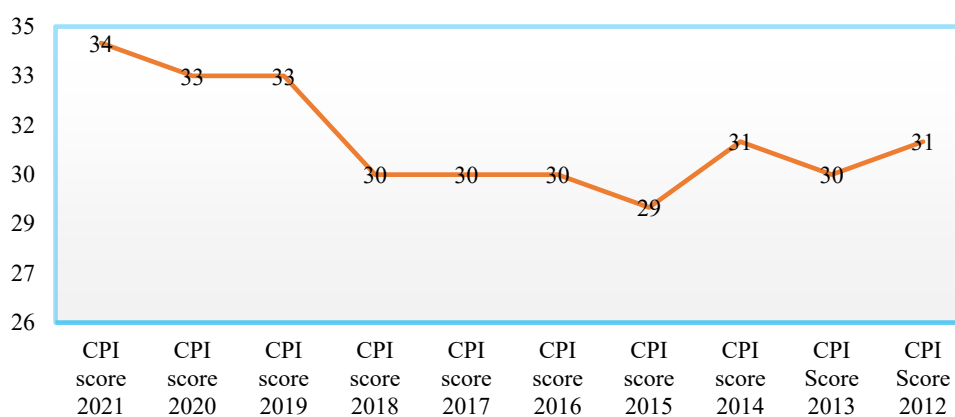
organization run by an inept and well-paid political henchman, Ady Macauley, who participated in multiple APC campaign meetings prior to the March 2018 elections in contravention of the 2008 ACC Act. The President ignored corruption concerning finances pertaining to Ebola and high-state officials squandering Hajj funds. President Koroma's government gave a similar confusing signal regarding the Auditor General's findings, releasing the material but not acting on virtually all the critical findings. This behaviour or inaction shows less dedication towards anti-corruption initiatives than disregard for state institutions and country standards (Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) 2018, pp. 37–38). The ACC was also condemned locally and globally for ignoring the President's entourage. It only seemed concerned with small-scale corruption. Over half of external Ebola assistance donations (approximately \$9 million) were misused in 2014, according to the Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL). ACC promised an inquiry that never happened (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020, p. 30).

In 2018, President Maada Bio started a campaign against corruption by forming three Commissions of Inquiry to examine former Koroma officials and provide cabinet recommendations. Several audits tracked corrupt practices and undeclared wealth among Koroma government officials. Anti-corruption officials reportedly recovered stolen public assets from former government officials through pleas and payment arrangements in the previous two years (Africanist Press 2020a). According to Lawson (2009), anti-corruption initiatives sometimes have a goal other than eliminating corruption. They can assist a leader in boosting his domestic and international position while weakening the opponents. Recently, President Bio's government has come under criticism for its rhetoric in the fight against graft when the offices of the President and first lady are accused of extensive corruption. According to the Africanist Press (2022), information about corruption and misappropriation of public funds involving President Julius Maada Bio's relatives and business partners was omitted from an annual audit report delivered to the parliament in early December 2021. Sierra Leone's parliament received the FY2020 Audit Report on December 9, 2021. Aziz was appointed the head of the ASSL in November 2021 after the country's long-serving auditor general and her deputy were suspended for the first time in history. The Africanist Press revealed that the Petroleum Directorate's FY2020 Audit Report hid the identity of President Julius Maada Bio's nephew, James Bio and Global Energy Consultant, Jacqueline Khoury.

Furthermore, even though President Bio appointed a young and vibrant ACC head, the public is deeply concerned about the allegations of corruption in the office of the President, first lady, and government MDAs. According to the Africanist Press (2020a), the SLPP government fostered a graft-inducing climate throughout the country's public offices by inflating the public payroll with burgeoning inequalities among public and civil service employees. The current administration has been unable to address the structural factors that lead to different forms of public corruption and corrupt activities within the state institutions. To confront such systemic problems, the recruitment and appointment to the public or civil service workforce should be transparent. The highly unbalanced scale of salary payments, gross discrepancies in public workplace conditions, complete absence of job protection for non-partisan public and civil service employees, and dismissal of

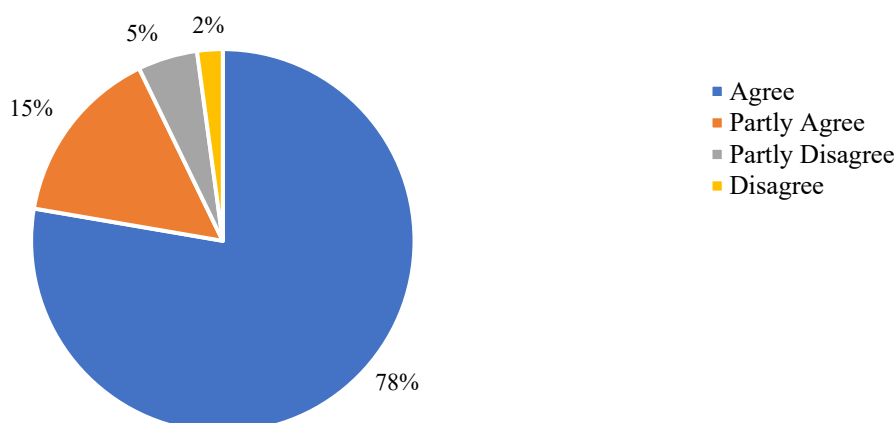
professionals serving in national service should be revamped. These are the true breeding grounds for institutionalized corruption by the government, and they must be directly addressed. This is especially true because partisanship over job benefits does not facilitate the success of any important development plan, let alone aid it in lasting long (Africanist Press 2020a).

The Transparency International (TI) Public Perception Index on Corruption shows the corruption trends in Sierra Leone. According to the 2021 TI Corruption Perception Index (CPI) (2021), Sierra Leone scored poorly, 33 per cent out of 100 in 2020. Even though the country has recently introduced a robust legal framework and a ‘vibrant anti-graft commissioner’ has been appointed, whom many applaud as a young and vibrant leader, the country has continued to score low. Figure 5 below shows Sierra Leone’s consistently poor performance in the fight against corruption. Although the TI CPI does not tell us why and under which conditions corruption is happening and how ethnoregional identities undermine the fight against corruption, it gives a general understanding of the trends in corruption in Sierra Leone.



**Figure 4.** Extracted from the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, 2021

Source: Created by author



**Figure 5.** Party supporters of major political parties engage in violence during ACC investigation of their political leaders.

Source: Created by the author

One of the online perception survey questions examined how identity politics undermines the fight against corruption and, in certain situations, leads to violence. Approximately 78 per cent of 290 respondents stated that political party supporters are violent during ACC indictments. According to Orjuela (2014), inequalities between identity groups hinder post-conflict reconciliation—cynicism and anger foster group identity mobilization and often fuel corruption. Figure 6 shows how ethnoregional identity politics hinder Sierra Leone’s anti-corruption efforts. In October 2021, when the ACC summoned former President Koroma for a probe into suspected corruption during his ten years in power, his party members blocked the highways leading to his residence. The ACC employees were attacked and intimidated. First-time interrogation failed. This demoralized ACC personnel and aroused fear of operating in opposition-majority districts. Many party supporters supported their leaders because they were oblivious to how their activities hindered anti-corruption efforts. Such activities indicated how party leaders have instrumentalized ethnic and regional allegiances to evade corruption-related charges. The perception of the general public, particularly party supporters, is a major obstacle in the fight against corruption. According to the Anti-Corruption Commissioner, since, the commissioner is appointed by the sitting President, and if that commissioner is appointed by the SLPP, it is generally perceived as coming from the ethnic line of the President. This is the case for the other party in an instance where someone is given money to construct a bridge, and there is nothing to show for it. When the ACC summoned the individual for questioning, the individual and his or her party supporters saw it as a “witch haunting”, claiming that the indictment was brought against him or her because of ethnic or regional lines. This is a major problem not just for the fight against corruption but for development, progress, and

unity. It is a fundamental reason why the country has not been able to get a foothold on progress and development.

### **Conclusion**

The study explored the increased politicization of ethnoregional identity politics and political violence and how identity politics hindered the fight against corruption in post-war Sierra Leone. The findings show that ethnic identity politics is part of everyday life in Sierra Leone's politics. Additionally, ethnic identity stimulates and facilitates political violence, which has had a significant impact on the state's national integration. The findings indicate a constant trend of ethnic identity politics in Sierra Leone. This is not unrelated to Temne and Mende's consistent voting patterns and appointments of the public and civil servants along ethnic and regional lines by the government. The APC and SLPP political dispensations have engendered a vicious cycle of ethnic polarisation that continues to haunt the political system of Sierra Leone.

The current anti-corruption campaign has come under severe threat. The disturbing trend is how young people are swayed by ethnic and regional affiliations, which limit their ability to support the fight against graft. Identity politics, corruption, and political violence accompany Sierra Leone's political system. Although the civil war was never initiated because of ethnoregional identity, post-war democratization has engendered increased polarisation of identity politics and political violence. Thus, development assistance in countries dominated by ethnoregional patronage and corruption requires an understanding of the dynamics underlying these phenomena. While post-war reconstruction engendered the formation of several policies and institutions aimed at advancing development, reducing corruption, and fostering national unity, the embedded foundation of ethnoregional identity politics poses several challenges in promoting national cohesion in Sierra Leone. Thus, even though Sierra Leone is considered one of the 'successful' cases of peacebuilding interventions by the United Nations, ethnic polarisation, political violence, and corruption have become the dominant trends in the country's political system.

### **References**

- ACLED. 2020. "When emerging democracies breed violence: Sierra Leone 20 years after the civil war." Available at: [https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Report\\_SierraLeone\\_ACLED\\_Clingendael\\_WANEP-SL\\_2020webpub.pdf](https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Report_SierraLeone_ACLED_Clingendael_WANEP-SL_2020webpub.pdf)
- Africanist Press. 2022. "Sierra Leone: Evidence on corruption linking President's family missing" in FY2020 Audit Report. January 24, 2022. Freetown, Sierra Leone. Available at: <https://africanistpress.com/2022/01/24/sierra-leone-evidence-on-corruption-linking-presidents-family-missing-in-fy2020-audit-report/>
- Africanist Press. 2020a. "Payroll corruption in Sierra Leone: The Ministry of Finance's Scandalous Wage Bill." March 1, 2020. Freetown, Sierra Leone. Available at: <https://africanistpress.com/2020/03/01/payroll-corruption-in-sierra-leone-the->

- [ministry-of-finances-scandalous-wage-bill/](#)
- Africanist Press. 2020b. "State violence and political repression in Sierra Leone." May 10, 2020. Freetown, Sierra Leone. Available at: <https://africanistpress.com/2020/05/10/state-violence-and-political-repression-in-sierra-leone/>
- African Research Institute. April 2011. *Old Tricks, Young Guns: Elections and Violence in Sierra Leone*. Briefing Note 1102. Available at: <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/BN-1102-Old-Tricks-Young-Guns.pdf>
- Allen, Christopher. 1968. "Sierra Leone politics since independence." *African Affairs* 67(269): 305-329.
- Bhalla, Jonathan and Sareta Ashraph. November 2012. *Democracy in Africa: A Resource for the Study of Democracy in Africa*. Elections and violence in Sierra Leone. Africa Research Institute.
- Bangura, Ibrahim. 2016. "We Can't Eat Peace: Youth, Sustainable Livelihoods and the Peacebuilding Process in Sierra Leone." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 11(2): 37-50.
- Bangura, Ibrahim, and Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs. 2018. "Competition, Uncertainty, and Violence in Sierra Leone's Swing District." In Söderberg Kovacs, Mimmi, and Jesper Bjarnesen (eds.), *Violence in African Elections: Between Democracy and Big Man Politics*, 114-134. Zed Books; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Bertelsmann Stiftung. 2018. *Country Report - Sierra Leone*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung. Available at: [https://btipproject.org/content/en/downloads/reports/country\\_report\\_2018\\_SLE.pdf](https://btipproject.org/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2018_SLE.pdf)
- Burchard, Stephanie M. 2015. *Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: Causes and Consequences*. Boulder CO and London: First Forum Press.
- Christensen, Maya M., and Mats Utas. 2008. "Mercenaries of Democracy: The 'Politricks' of Remobilized Combatants in the 2007 General Elections, Sierra Leone." *African Affairs* 107(429): 515-539.
- Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. 2000. "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity." *International Organization* 54(4): 845-877.
- Fjelde, Hanne, and Kristine Höglund. 2018. "Ethnic Politics and Elite Competition: The Roots of Electoral Violence in Kenya." In Söderberg Kovacs, Mimmi, and Jesper Bjarnesen (eds.), *Violence in African Elections: Between Democracy and Big Man Politics*, 27-46. Zed Books; Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Fridy, Kevin S., and Fredline AO M'Cormack-Hale. 2011. "Sierra Leone's 2007 Elections: Monumental and More of the Same." *African Studies Quarterly* 12(4).
- Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL). 2018. *Report of the Governance Transition Team*. Freetown, Sierra Leone. Available at: <https://statehouse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GTT-report-25June-2018-.pdf>
- Hanciles, Oswald. 2014. "The 'Tribal Card': Not 'Wise' Option for Any Governing Party in Sierra Leone (Part One)." *Sierra Express Media*. Available at: <https://sierraexpressmedia.com/?p=64936>
- Horowitz, Jeremy. 2016. "The Ethnic Logic of Campaign Strategy in Diverse Societies: Theory and Evidence from Kenya." *Comparative Political Studies* 49(3): 324-356.
- Institute for Governance Reform (IGR). March 2018. *Presidential Election Results 2018: Lessons Learnt and Implications for the Runoff and Democracy Building*. Policy Brief - Vol 4. Available at: <http://igrsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/IGR->



[Analysis-of-First-Round-Election-Results.pdf](#)

- Institute for Governance Reform (IGR). 2016. *Cost of Politics in Sierra Leone: Understanding Violence and Division*. Critical Perspective of Governance Vol. 7. Available at: <http://igrsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Cost-of-Politics-Vol-1-Violence1.pdf>
- International Crisis Group. October 28, 2015. *The Politics Behind Ebola*. Technical report, International Crisis Group Brussels, Belgium. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/politics-behind-ebola-crisis>
- Kandeh, Jimmy D. 2008. "Rogue Incumbents, Donor Assistance and Sierra Leone's Second Post-Conflict Elections of 2007." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 46(4): 603-635.
- Kandeh, Jimmy D. 2003. "Sierra Leone's Post-Conflict Elections of 2002." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 41(2): 189-216.
- Kandeh, Jimmy D. 1992. "Politicization of Ethnic Identities in Sierra Leone." *African Studies Review* 35(1): 81-99.
- Kanu, Mohamed I. 2010. *Political Parties and the Politics of Ethnicity in Sierra Leone*. Critique Echo Newspaper. Available at: <http://www.critiqueecho.com/political-parties-and-the-politics-of-ethnicity-in-sierra-leone/>
- King, Nathaniel. 2013. *Citizens' Perceptions of Sierra Leone's Ethno-political Divide and Diversity Management*. Max Planck Research Associate. Available at: <http://democracy.gov.sl/images/reports/Final%20Version%20of%20the%20Report%2020Dec2013.pdf>
- Lawson, Letitia. 2009. "The Politics of Anti-corruption Reform in Africa." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 47(1): 73-100.
- Markham, Annette and Elizabeth Buchanan. 2012. *Ethical Decision-making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0)*. Association of Internet Researchers, 1-19. Available at: <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>
- National Election Watch (NEW). October 4, 2021. *Koinadugu Bye-elections marred by widespread political intimidation, incidents of thuggery and suspension of tallying*. Freetown: Sierra Leone. Available at: <https://nationalelectionwatchsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/PR-KOINADUGU-BYE-ELECTIONS-FINAL.pdf>
- Orjuela, Camilla. 2014. "Corruption and Identity Politics in Divided Societies." *Third World Quarterly* 35(5): 753-769.
- Posner, Daniel N. 2007. "Regime Change and Ethnic Cleavages in Africa." *Comparative Political Studies* 40(11): 1302-1327.
- Reynolds, Andrew. 1999. "Sierra Leone." In Nohlen, Dieter, Bernard Thibaut, and Michael Krennerich (eds.), *Elections in Africa: A Data Handbook*, 789-802. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sloan, Luke, and Anabel Quan-Haase (eds). 2017. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*. Sage.
- Transparency International. 2021. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2021*. Available at: [https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI2021\\_Report\\_EN-web.pdf](https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI2021_Report_EN-web.pdf)
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report. 2004. *Witness to Truth - Volume Three A (Chapter 1: Historical Antecedents to the Conflict)*. GoSL Printing Press, Freetown. Available at: [https://sierraleonetr.com/index.php/view-the-final-report/download-table-of-contents/volume-three-a/item/witness-to-the-truth-volume-three-a-chapter-1?category\\_id=13](https://sierraleonetr.com/index.php/view-the-final-report/download-table-of-contents/volume-three-a/item/witness-to-the-truth-volume-three-a-chapter-1?category_id=13)

Zanoletti, Giovanni. April 4, 2018. "The Sierra Leone Election Triggers Political Violence." *The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)*. United States. Available at: <https://acleddata.com/2018/04/04/the-sierra-leone-election-triggers-political-violence/>