



European Union  
Election Observation Mission  
**SIERRA LEONE 2023**  
Final Report



**General Elections**

24 June 2023



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*The Election Observation Missions are independent from the institutions of the European Union. The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy and position of the European Union.*

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and People's Rights
ACDEG	African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance
APC	All People's Congress
AU	African Union
AYV	African Young Voices
C4C	Coalition for Change
CEDAW	Convention on the Political Rights of Women
CJ	Chief Justice
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSCA	Cyber Security and Crime Act
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECOWAS	Economic Community of Western African States
ECSL	Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone
EON	Elections Observer Network
EOPC	Election Offences and Petitions Court
EU	European Union
EU EOM	European Union Election Observation Mission
FVR	Final Voter Register
GEWEA	Gender Empowerment and Women's Equality Act
HRC-SL	Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
ICPNC	Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion
IGP	Inspector General of Police
IMC	Independent Media Commission
IRCSL	Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone
IRN	Independent Radio Network
LE	Leone
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIC	Ministry of Information and Communication
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAC	National Advisory Council (in reference to APC's National Advisory Council)
NatCA	National Communication Authority
NATCOM	National Telecommunications Commission
NCPD	National Commission for Persons with Disability
NCRA	National Civil Administration Authority
NCSIRCC	National Computer Security Incident Response Coordination Centre
NEW	National Election Watch
NGC	National Grand Coalition
ONS	Office of National Security
PEA	Public Election Act
POA	Public Order Act
PMDC	People's Movement for Democratic Change
PPA	Political Parties Act
PPRC	Political Parties Registration Commission
PR	Proportional Representation System
PRVT	Process and Results Verification for Transparency
PVT	Parallel Vote Tabulation

RRF	Reconciliation and result forms
SLAJ	Sierra Leone Association of Journalists
SLAWiJ	Sierra Leone Association of Women in Journalism
SLBA	Sierra Leone Bar Association
SLBC	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation
SLL	Sierra Leonean currency Leone
SLP	Sierra Leonean Police
SLPP	Sierra Leone Peoples' Party
UNCAC	UN Convention against Corruption
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VID	Voter Identification Card
WAYN	West African Youth Network

## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The 2023 general elections attested to Sierra Leoneans' strong commitment to democracy. On 24 June citizens in large numbers went to the polls to elect the president, members of the parliament, mayors, and local councillors. The recently revised legal framework gave hope for enhanced integrity in the conduct of the elections and greater gender parity in politics. However, voters' trust in the credibility of elections was undermined by lack of transparency during critical stages of the process, particularly during the tabulation process, and by significant statistical inconsistencies in the results. An independent citizen observer group who voiced concerns was threatened and its leadership had to flee the country, which is indicative to democratic backsliding.

The timely and inclusive electoral reform of 2022 laid a sound basis for democratic elections. New laws included gender quota for party lists, as well as provisions that aimed to ensure ECSL's financial independence and strengthen the mandate of other institutions involved in the elections. Legislative initiatives prior to the 2023 elections led to full implementation of five EU EOM 2018 recommendations, while another nine were partially implemented.

The election day was generally calm, despite notably delayed opening of polling stations and isolated cases of violence. Voters patiently waited to cast their ballots, dedicated poll workers strived to ensure a smooth voting, citizen observers were at all polling centres and journalists provided regular reports. Counting of the ballots was largely transparent, yet the planned electronic transmission of results from polling stations did not take place. However, a lack of sufficient explanation and action by the Election Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) made stakeholders perturbed.

Tabulation and announcement of results proved to be the tipping point for the credibility of the elections. The entire process was opaque, meaningful observation was impeded and the declaration of winners was not followed by publication of disaggregated results per polling station. On 27 June, the ECSL declared Julius Mada Bio of the Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP) elected for a second term, passing the constitutional threshold of 55 per cent in the first round by 1.17 percentage points.

Following the declaration of the results of the parliamentary elections a few days later, it was clear that result totals published by the ECSL showed several statistical inconsistencies and mathematical improbabilities. These included notable discrepancies in the number of average valid votes per polling station between the first and second batch of presidential results, varying from a decrease of 75 per cent to an increase of 31 per cent per district; a difference of up to 23 percentage points per district between the turnout for the presidential and parliamentary elections, with some districts registering substantially lower parliamentary turnouts and others showing significantly lower presidential turnouts; turnout above 90 per cent in five districts; and only 0.4 per cent of invalid votes nation-wide. These inconsistencies, combined with the ECSL's decision not to publish disaggregated results, undermined the credibility of the tabulation process and voters' confidence in the outcome of the polls.

Early in the process, the ECSL appeared operationally prepared, yet a lack of transparency raised concerns. Against the backdrop of prevailing distrust in state institutions, the presidential appointment of ECSL commissioners added to the perception of political bias. Furthermore, the ECSL itself missed many opportunities to build stakeholders' trust, as most decisions and procedures were neither published, nor comprehensively explained to the citizens.

The voter registration process and the subsequent production and distribution of voter identification cards (VIDs) created various uncertainties for stakeholders and voters alike. The ECSL took steps to improve the accuracy of the register and to distribute VIDs, yet, again, lack of timely and comprehensive communication on those corrective measures left room for speculations. The ECSL shared with political parties the final voters register per polling centre, but the one per polling station was not published, reducing confidence and transparency.

The candidate registration process was inclusive, yet voters' right to know whom they would be electing was disregarded. The final candidates' lists for parliamentary elections were published in the Gazette only four days before the polls; local council lists were made public after the elections. Parties also did not disclose their lists of candidates, adding to uncertainties for voters and candidates alike.

Throughout the campaign, fundamental rights of freedom of assembly and movement were largely respected. Lead presidential candidates toured the country, while those for other races focused on a door-to-door canvassing. The campaign was personality-centred, unfolding in a polarised environment and focusing on ethno-regional alliance building rather than issues.

Divisive online communication heightened tensions during the campaign. Aggressive content, exploiting ethno-regional divide and economic hardships, was posted on Facebook and Twitter, while manipulative information spread through WhatsApp. It created insecurity also for rural voters who rarely use internet, as such messages were often read out at community meetings.

Political violence in weeks before the polls disrupted the playing field in at least six districts. The EU EOM crosschecked and confirmed reports on at least 17 violent attacks, which negatively affected the campaign environment nation-wide. Most assaults of party supporters and attacks on party offices or private properties of politicians went unpunished. It shrank the space for political participation in the south and south-east.

Political activism was also discouraged through a demonstrative and disproportionate use of force by security agencies prior to, during and after election day. Live ammunition and tear gas was fired outside the main opposition party's headquarters in Freetown twice (three days prior to and then one day after the elections). In each case one person was killed. Most stakeholders had low trust in law enforcement bodies due to alleged biased behaviour.

Abuse of incumbency was another factor that distorted the playing field. Active participation of government ministers in rallies, alongside extensive campaign messaging on official government websites and social media accounts, effectively blurred the line between governing and campaigning. The public TV's favourable coverage of the SLPP was another example of incumbency advantage.

Well-established, independent media made a positive contribution to the electoral process. District-level debates helped voters to compare lead candidates directly and to make a well-informed choice on election day, while news coverage by independent broadcasters offered a balanced account on the campaign. However, the dire financial situation notably reduced pluralism in broadcasts of many community radio stations, who often sold their prime time to the APC or SLPP.

Another positive takeaway from the 2023 elections was the national fact-checking initiative iVerify, which was set-up to equip voters with reliable information and to safeguard the information environment. Falsehoods before, during and after the election day were de-bunked



through a multitude of digital and offline channels. In addition, media and civil society were also key to various voter information campaigns promoting inclusive participation.

Citizen observers and faith-based organisations played a pivotal role in these elections. They monitored different aspects and stages of the process, offering voters a non-partisan assessment. An independent and credible parallel vote tabulation, done by the citizen observer group National Election Watch (NEW), pointed out statistical inconsistencies in results data. The following public intimidation of NEW by state and non-state actors, punctuated by a disinformation campaign, aimed to clamp down on voices of dissent and clouded future perspectives for genuine, non-partisan civic activism.

Overall, the 2023 general elections underscored a clear commitment among Sierra Leoneans to the democratic processes, while also proving an urgent need for further reforms focusing on transparency, trust-building and inclusion. The EU EOM is offering 21 recommendations for improving the way elections are organised, managed, and conducted and for upholding regional and international commitments. There are seven priority recommendations:

1. Publish the final voter register per polling station and per polling center in a timely manner and allow voters to verify and correct all their details.
2. The ECSL to establish and publish detailed procedures for the tabulation and announcement of results, as well as put in place a robust, transparent, and easily verifiable results' processing system well ahead of elections.
3. Publish on the ECSL website comprehensive election results data by polling station, including results per candidate and per party, the number of registered voters and of valid and invalid votes, in a timely manner and in an easily trackable and downloadable database format.
4. Ensure safety and security for all candidates through a timely conclusion of investigations, holding perpetrators of violence accountable, and enabling the PPRC to act effectively upon violations of campaign rules.
5. Ensure enforcement of legal restrictions on the misuse of state resources and explicitly prohibit the use of official functions, as well as government websites and social media accounts for campaign purposes.
6. Ensure transparency in campaign finance by introducing caps for campaign revenues and expenses and clear rules of reporting and public disclosure before, during, and after the elections, including by the media, and by implementing robust sanctions for noncompliance.
7. Protect freedom of expression by clearly aligning the definitions of “cyber-terrorism”, “cyber-stalking”, “cyber-bullying” and “incendiary information” with relevant regional and international standards.

## **II. INTRODUCTION**

The European Union (EU) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to observe the 24 June General Elections in Sierra Leone following an invitation from the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The EU EOM was present from 11 May to 13 July 2023. It was the fifth time that EU deployed an observation mission to Sierra Leone.

The EU EOM was led by the Chief Observer, Evin Incir, Member of the European Parliament. The mission comprised a core team of 10 experts based in Freetown and 28 long-term observers who arrived on 20 May and deployed to all 16 districts regions of Sierra Leone; 40 short-term observers were present from 18 to 27 June and deployed throughout the country.

For the election day, the EU EOM was reinforced with 14 locally recruited observers from diplomatic representations of EU Member States and Norway. In addition, a delegation of four Members of the European Parliament, led by Georgios Kyrtos, Member of the European Parliament, joined the mission. In total, the EU EOM deployed 104 observers from 26 EU Member States, as well as from partner countries Canada and Norway.

The mission's mandate was to observe all aspects of the electoral process and assess the extent to which the elections complied with regional and international commitments for elections, as well as with national legislation. The EU EOM is independent in its findings and conclusions. The mission followed an established methodology and adhered to the "Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation", endorsed under United Nations auspices in October 2005 and now espoused by over 50 organisations.

### **III. POLITICAL CONTEXT**

The general elections held on 24 June 2023 were the fifth consecutive elections since the Republic of Sierra Leone returned from an 11-year period of civil war to civilian rule in 2002. During those 21 years the country saw two peaceful and orderly administered changes of power between the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC), through the citizens' vote, attesting to significant steps towards the consolidation of democracy. The changes of government that occurred each time happened when the incumbent President had concluded his second and constitutionally final term. During all previous elections the ruling party of the day has been exploiting incumbency advantages to tilt the playing field in its favour.

The 2023 presidential elections were contested by the same two main contenders of the 2018 elections, only that the incumbency has switched. Julius Maada Bio this time around campaigned from a position of executive power and sought re-election for a second and final term on the SLPP ticket. Samura Kamara, the 2018 candidate of the then ruling APC, went into this year's campaign as the leader of the main opposition party. Since independence in 1961, the SLPP and APC have dominated Sierra Leone's political landscape, with no new party being able to sustain a relative success beyond one election cycle. The two parties that won parliamentary seats in 2018, the National Grand Coalition (NGC) and the Coalition for Change (C4C), partly realigned with the SLPP and APC ahead of the 2023 elections.

The pre-campaign environment was characterised by strong political tensions between the main political camps and by high ethno-regional polarisation, primarily between the Temne in the north, mainly supporting the APC, and the Mende in the south and east, primarily backing the SLPP. Several issues contributed to this strife. The 2021 mid-term census was disputed by the APC, parts of civil society and data experts. The key controversy concerned a significant numerical population growth in southern and eastern districts, the strongholds of the SLPP, and a numerical population decline in the APC strongholds in the west, including a decrease in

Freetown of some 450,000 persons, as well in north and north-west.<sup>1</sup> This census contributed to additional five parliamentary seats in the Southern and Eastern Regions and a reduction of parliamentary representation by two seats in the Western Area.<sup>2</sup> Delays in the publication of the voter register and a lack of meaningful dialogue, cooperation and trust-building between the ECSL and the opposition parties compounded the political environment.

The elections took place within a context of high unemployment and soaring living costs for the majority of the population.<sup>3</sup> Protests over the increasing socio-economic hardship in August 2022 resulted in at least 30 citizens and 7 police officers being killed and saw use of disproportionate force by the security agencies. There were concerns that new protests could interact with electoral dynamics and destabilise the political situation in the run-up to the elections.

Signs of shrinking civic and political space became evident in 2022. During protests several APC politicians and CSO activists were arrested. Parallel court cases were opened against key APC leaders, including Samura Kamara and the mayor of Freetown, Yvonne Aki-Sawyer, for alleged misappropriation of public funds. Both the arrests and the court cases were seen by several stakeholders and independent analysts as signs of a more restrictive government course. Threats by the ECSL to withdraw the accreditation of the National Election Watch (NEW) over their findings during the 2022 by-elections added to that perception, as did the controversial confirmation of the ECSL Chair and the Commissioner for the Western Area. The President's decision to reintroduce the proportional representation (PR) system, despite the Parliament's refusal to include it in the revised Public Elections Act, also was seen as a move to consolidate political power instead of encouraging a broader national consensus.

There were also uncertainties about the competitiveness of the elections. The APC faced internal struggles, partly stemming from a court injunction in April 2022 against its leadership structure, which had been deemed unlawful by the High Court, and led to the installation of an Interim Transitional Governance Committee. In February 2023, the APC finally overcame its leadership impasse, electing as party flagbearer and rallying behind Samura Kamara, who, a few days after his election, was indicted for alleged misappropriation of public funds. In late April 2023 the High Court adjourned the court case against him until after the election.

#### **IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVIOUS EU EOM RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Several EU EOM 2018 recommendations not requiring constitutional revision were fully or partially addressed.**

Following the 2018 elections, the EU EOM made 30 recommendations for changes of which six were identified as priority recommendations. Altogether five recommendations can be considered fully implemented, including two priority recommendations, while another nine recommendations are considered partially implemented.

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<sup>1</sup> The government usually undertakes a population census every 10 years, with the last one being undertaken in 2015. Whereas the government argued that a mid-term census would be needed for development planning, the opposition alleged political motives and called to boycott it. International development partners were critical, and the World Bank retracted from pledges of financial support.

<sup>2</sup> During the 2022 voter registration process about 2 percentage points more voters were registered in the SLPP strongholds if compared with 2018, whereas the north and north-west the number of registered voters decreased by 1 percentage point.

<sup>3</sup> According to the World Bank, Sierra Leone's economic growth has been affected by exposure to multi-dimensional exogenous shocks (economic, epidemic, climatic) with little time to recover: the Ebola epidemic (2014-16), the collapse in global commodity prices, including of iron ore (2015-16), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020) and, recently, the war in Ukraine. Food prices has risen by more than 50 percentage points during the last year.

Legislative initiative and change of practice both contributed to fully addressing five recommendations. One priority recommendation was implemented during the 2022 voter registration exercise, which was conducted jointly by the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) and the ECSL. The other priority recommendation considered implemented concerned the introduction of the National Elections Sustainability Trust Fund that enhanced the financial autonomy of the ECSL, with all disbursements made in a timely manner. The ban on vehicular movements on election day was judged unconstitutional and was not imposed this time, in line with the 2018 recommendation. Two out of four recommendations, related to the media and freedom of expression, were addressed by amending the Public Order Act (POA) and by strengthening the independence of media regulator, the Independent Media Commission (IMC).

Partially implemented recommendations were mostly addressed in terms of laws or regulations but lagged behind in their implementation. These included clearly defined nomination fees for elections, with a scale of fees enumerated in the Public Elections Act, 2022 (PEA). However, these fees were still considered high by stakeholders. Delays in the adjudication of both election petitions and offences have been partially addressed through the PEA and the Public Elections (Petitions) Rules (2022). The recommendation referring to campaign finance was partially implemented with the revised Political Parties Act 2022 (PPA), that expanded the role of the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC) in regulating political parties' conduct and provides a mechanism to sanction breaches. However, these powers were not used to a full extent. The enactment of the Gender Empowerment and Women's Equality Act 2022 (GEWE), the PEA and the PPA addressed the legal aspect of the recommendation on enhancement of women participation, but in practice political parties did not demonstrate will to foster women electability.<sup>4</sup>

Other recommendations were not implemented mainly because of lack of political will and/or time. Those include amongst others, recommendations to publish ECSL decisions and disaggregated results per polling station, to enhance independence of the state broadcaster, to conduct more comprehensive civic and voter education, and to address problematic dispute resolution mechanisms. Nine recommendations required constitutional changes, but no constitutional revision took place during the electoral cycle.

## V. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

**A sound foundation for conducting democratic elections, but legal uncertainty stems from ambiguities and gaps in the law.**

### a. International principles and commitments

Sierra Leone is a signatory to the main international conventions and treaties containing principles and standards for the conduct of democratic elections.<sup>5</sup> As a member of the African Union (AU), Sierra Leone has also ratified many regional human rights treaties and as a member

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<sup>4</sup> Other recommendations partially implemented concern voter education, measures to level the playing field during the campaign and improving security features on results' forms and reconciling ballots received by voters and signatures.

<sup>5</sup> Those include the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR ratified in 1996); the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW ratified in 1988); the [Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) (ICERD ratified in 1967); the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD ratified in 2010); the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (ratified in 1990); the [Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness](#) (ratified in 2016); and the [UN Convention against Corruption](#) (ratified in 2004).

of ECOWAS is a party to the protocol of Democratic and Good Governance.<sup>6</sup> Ratification of international treaties is provided for in the Constitution through an enactment or by passing of a resolution in Parliament to ensure domestication of international commitments.

## **b. Electoral legislation**

The electoral cycle was marked by the adoption of new laws for the conduct of elections, addressing some of the issues previously identified, and statutory instruments to regulate the electoral system. The reforms followed broad stakeholder consultations, in line with international good practice, and were seen as a positive development rising the expectations of an improved electoral process.

Fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression and the right to a legal remedy are enshrined in the 1991 Constitution but may be unduly restricted by law and in practice. The Constitution also underpins key election processes, such as the electoral system, candidacy eligibility, voter registration, establishment of the ECSL and the appointment of commissioners, conduct of political parties, and some aspects of dispute resolution. Notable restrictions on the right to stand include the ban on independent candidates for the presidential office, dual and naturalised citizens, and requirement for civil servants who intend to contest the election to resign 12 months before the polls. The legal framework was amended partially to reflect the widely advocated enhancement of gender equality and respect for other human rights issues, but further reforms are needed to guarantee full inclusion, transparency, and legal certainty.

All amendments to the electoral framework were made at least six months prior to the election date in line with regional commitments.<sup>7</sup> The Public Elections Act (PEA) and the Political Parties Act (PPA), both revised in 2022, largely reiterate the provisions of their previous versions. Novelties of the PEA include the introduction of a gender quota in candidate nomination for party lists, and the enhanced financial autonomy of the ECSL, addressing previous EU EOM recommendations. The PPA expanded the powers of the renamed Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC) to regulate political parties' activities and even to deregister them for non-compliance, with a possible appeal to the Supreme Court. Potential sanctions for prohibited conduct, including hate speech, are set out in the new provisions. Although the PPRC can further regulate campaign finance, potentially limiting the influence of money in the elections, this statutory power was not used.

Progress towards the advancement of gender equality was also made by the adoption of the 2022 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (GEWE Act), introducing a 30 per cent gender quota in public and private bodies.<sup>8</sup> While, positively, provisions criminalising defamatory and seditious libel were repealed from the Public Order Act in 2020, the enactment of the 2021 Cyber Security and Crime Act (CSCA) was seen by many as impeding freedom of expression, also in the electoral context. These instruments, supplemented with elements of other

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<sup>6</sup> Those include the [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) (ACHPR ratified in 1983); the [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#) (ratified in 2015); the [African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance](#) (ratified in 2009) and the [AU Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption](#) (ratified in 2008). Sierra Leone has signed, but not yet ratified, the [African Youth Charter](#). The ECOWAS [Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, supplementary to the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security](#) (The ECOWAS Protocol).

<sup>7</sup> [ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance](#).

<sup>8</sup> [The GEWE Act, s.3\(1\) and 4\(1\)](#)

statutes, as well as regulations and codes of conduct, form the core of the national legal framework governing the elections.

Nonetheless, the amendments introduced did not address some previously flagged issues. Namely, legal provisions are not sufficiently elaborated, several sections of the law are still lacking clarity, and other vaguely drafted provisions leave undue scope for arbitrary interpretation, including provisions related to the announcement of election results.<sup>9</sup> Campaign finance issues and enforcement of sanctions for campaign violations are not adequately addressed to ensure transparency and equal opportunities, which created an uneven playing field amongst contestants. At odds with international and regional commitments, the legal framework does not articulate clear mechanisms for certain aspects of dispute resolution, depriving stakeholders from an effective legal redress.<sup>10</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Ensure legal certainty for all aspects and stages of the electoral process by removing from Constitution and the PEA conflicting sections and ambiguities that leave undue scope for arbitrary interpretation, through an inclusive revision process.*

### c. Electoral system

The President serves a five-year mandate, with a two-term limit for presidential office. The two-round system is applied to elect the President and Vice-President together in the first round if they obtain at least 55 per cent of the valid votes. Otherwise, a second round takes place, between the two candidates who achieved the highest vote, within 14 days from the official announcement of election results. The Parliament comprises 149 members who serve a five-year mandate; 135 seats were distributed through a District Block Proportional Representation system (PR system), while the remaining 14 were reserved for Paramount Chiefs, who were elected in late May.

The decision to conduct elections under the PR system was taken in late 2022 without broad stakeholder consultation and founded on a constitutional provision,<sup>11</sup> challenged in the Supreme Court by the opposition and justified by the court on the absence of valid constituencies.<sup>12</sup> The method of allocation of the seats in the districts, of calculation of minimum threshold to be attained, and of apportionment of seats to the elected political parties or candidates were provided in the 2022 Regulations.<sup>13</sup> The allocation of seats per district was performed by the ECSL based

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<sup>9</sup> No deadline is provided in the law for the ECSL to announce the election results; [PEA](#), s.93 does not indicate a timeframe for results to be published, while the wording “and in any other means” leaves room for arbitrary interpretation on the method of publication. Such information should be precise, given that parliamentary elections can only be challenged upon publication in the Gazette; [PEA](#), s.52(a) there is no time frame for the issuing of the certificate of elections, while s.52(b) does not provide for a deadline to publish the results in the Gazette; [PEA](#), s.144(1)(a) contravenes s.54 on the jurisdiction of the Election Offences and Petitions Court and the relevant provision of the [Constitution](#); [PEA](#), s.54 the form of initiating a challenge against presidential election is not in line with the Supreme Court Rules; The [PEA](#) does not include any provision on complaints’ procedure on election day.

<sup>10</sup> [ICCP](#), art. 2.3(a): “All persons whose rights or freedoms are violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity” and art. 2.3(b): “Such a remedy shall [be] determined by competent judicial, administrative or legislative authorities, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy.” [ACDEG](#), art. 17(2): “State Parties shall [...] establish and strengthen national mechanisms that redress election-related disputes in a timely manner.”

<sup>11</sup> [Constitution](#), s.38A(1) provides that the president upon consultation with the ECSL may direct that an election is to be conducted applying PR system “instead of constituencies”. The PR system was introduced by constitutional amendment and used in 2002 and was a provisional arrangement since no reliable population census data were available to draw constituencies.

<sup>12</sup> [Hon. Abdul Kargbo & Councillor Hakiratu Maxwell-Caulker v. AG & ECSL S.C. Misc. Appl. 06/2022](#), Judgment dated 27 January 2023.

<sup>13</sup> [Statutory Instrument of N°14 of 2022, The Public Elections \(District Block Proportional Representation System\) Regulations 2002.](#)

on a political compromise that resulted in an average of the 2016 seats and the population quota of the 2021 mid-term census.<sup>14</sup> Political parties had to submit lists of candidates twice the number of seats to the ECSL, respecting the 30 per cent gender quota for each of the 16 districts, which varied between 4 seats (Falaba and Koinadugu) and 16 seats (Western Urban-Freetown). To enter Parliament, contestants had to pass a 11.9 per cent threshold, which was the calculated product of dividing the total number of districts with the total number of seats multiplied by 100.

Low level of public awareness of the revived PR system was a common concern throughout the campaign. Many voters were not aware of how their votes would translate into parliamentary or local council seats, while most EU EOM interlocutors viewed the PR system as largely centralised and depersonalised, lowering deputies' accountability towards voters. Other aspects of the PR system, such as the filling of potential vacancies, were not discussed.<sup>15</sup> EU EOM interlocutors claimed that the high threshold to enter parliament was challenging to reach for smaller parties and independent candidates, negatively affecting political pluralism.

## VI. ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION

### **The ECSL's lack of transparency affected confidence in the integrity of the elections and hindered the right of access to information and institutional accountability.**

#### **a. Structure and composition of the election administration**

The Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) is a constitutionally independent and permanent body with regulatory powers, responsible for voter and candidate registration and the conduct of all elections and referenda. It is composed of a chairman and five commissioners appointed for a five-year term, each responsible for a different region, namely the East, North, South, West, and for the first time Northwest. All commissioners were appointed between April 2019 and March 2023.

ECSL commissioners are appointed by the President upon consultation with the leaders of all political parties and subject to parliamentary approval. The appointment procedure has always been criticised by whichever parties are in the opposition for impeding on the ECSL's institutional independence. The lack of formal structures of consultations, along with questions over the parliamentary process,<sup>16</sup> does not guarantee inclusivity, which in turn negatively affects trust in the ECSL and perception of its institutional independence.<sup>17</sup> Eligibility criteria for the position of ECSL commissioner include "proven integrity," but do not provide for any merit-based criteria.<sup>18</sup> Positively, the 2022 revision of the PEA provided a higher standard for the President's authority to remove a commissioner from office by replacing the term "misbehaviour" with "gross misconduct" to mitigate potential misuse. However, the previous terminology of

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<sup>14</sup> The last two population censuses were conducted within less than 10 years. The first, in 2015, under the then APC government, was criticised by the opposing SLPP; the second, considered a mid-term population census in 2021, under the SLPP government was boycotted by the APC.

<sup>15</sup> [Constitution](#), s.38A(4) on the PR system provides for potential vacancies in Parliament to be filled from political parties' lists and not with by-elections as provided in s.39.

<sup>16</sup> The exact number of votes cast during parliamentary sessions is not systematically counted nor publicly available.

<sup>17</sup> [ACDEG](#), art. 17.1 states that State Parties shall "Establish and strengthen independent and impartial national electoral bodies responsible for the management of elections." 2001 [ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance](#), art. 3 states that "The bodies responsible for organising the elections shall be independent or neutral and shall have the confidence of all the political actors."

<sup>18</sup> Candidates for the position of ECSL commissioners cannot hold at the same time the office of ministers, deputy ministers, be members of the parliament, or be a public officer. Commissioners must not be older than 65 years and must be otherwise qualified to be elected as members of parliament.



"misbehaviour" remains in the Constitution, which takes precedence over the PEA.<sup>19</sup> There is no specific mechanisms to appeal such dismissal.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Establish an inclusive appointment process for ECSL commissioners including formalised consultations. Considerations could be given to introducing criteria and measures to ensure equal and merit-based access to the election administration.*

Most stakeholders expressed confidence in the ECSL's operational capacity. The organisational structure of the ECSL is suitable to fulfil its mandate, with an administrative secretariat coordinating the activities of fifteen specialised departments.<sup>20</sup> During the election period, the 17 District Election Offices are complemented by 5 regional tally centres.

Perception of the impartiality of the ECSL was highly polarised along the political divide. The SLPP expressed trust in the ECSL, while the APC perceived the ECSL as biased, with rising criticism as election day approached. Nearly all stakeholders expressed concern about governmental influence over staff appointments among public institutions. The ECSL was not exempt from such criticism.

#### **b. Administration of the election**

The ECSL received timely disbursement of state funding and appeared operationally prepared, but delays, errors, and omissions in the delivery of sensitive materials occurred on election day.<sup>21</sup> Some ECSL staff shared their views with the EU EOM indicating that additional resources, especially for logistics and voter education, could have been beneficial. Despite a tight timeline and budget, the ECSL recruited some 91,300 temporary election staff and conducted cascade trainings, which were mostly positively assessed by the EU EOM observers. More simulations with sample materials could have been beneficial. The tablets, which were to be used for the electronic transmission of results from polling stations, were not deployed on time for testing or inclusion in trainings, while problems encountered on election day highlighted the lack of logistical preparedness and quality control at the central level.

The ECSL held regular public meetings of its Political Parties Liaison Committee in the presence of civil society and media. Those meetings informed on key decisions and offered opportunities for discussion. However, ECSL decisions, regulations, procedures, and minutes were not published, which prevented the scrutiny of the ECSL decision-making processes and if the necessary quorum was reached. This undermined regional and international commitments to access to information and institutional accountability.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> [Constitution](#) s.32.8.

<sup>20</sup> Operations, procurement and logistics, training and procedures, data management and voters roll, information and communication technology, electoral education, electoral inclusion, external relations, media and communication, research, monitoring and evaluation, legal affairs, finance, administration, human resources and capacity building, and internal audit.

<sup>21</sup> [ACDEG](#), art. 15.4 states that "State Parties shall provide [public] institutions with resources to perform their assigned missions efficiently and effectively."

<sup>22</sup> [UNCAC](#) art. 10: "Taking into account the need to combat corruption, each State Party shall [...] take measures to enhance transparency in its public administration, including with regard to its organisation, functioning and decision-making [including] Adopting procedures or regulations allowing members of the general public to obtain [...] information on the organisation, functioning and decision-making processes of its public administration and [...] on legal acts that concern members of the public." [ACDEG](#), art.15.8 requires "Transparency and fairness in the management of public affairs."



**RECOMMENDATION:** *Introduce a legal obligation for the ECSL to publish timely, including online, all ECSL decisions, regulations, and procedures, while also guaranteeing their continued online accessibility.*

Most operations were conducted in accordance with the electoral calendar. Yet, several delays and shortcomings at key stages of the electoral process occurred, and were not comprehensively explained to the public, reducing confidence in the process. Those included important steps in the voter registration process (see below); late publication of and numerous errors in the final candidate lists for parliamentary elections; late announcement of the early voting date;<sup>23</sup> lack of publication of tallying and result certification procedures; and lack of publication of results disaggregated at the polling station level. A stress-test or a nation-wide mock exercise of the results management system was not conducted, and there was no public information on the security safeguards of the results management system, a measure that could have defused political tensions.

The ECSL worked to address problematic issues at different stages, but more systematic and timely public information could have enhanced certainty and institutional transparency.

### **c. Civic and voter education**

The ECSL developed TV and radio ads, videos, animations, songs, jingles, and posters, explaining how to mark the ballot and calling for peaceful elections. However, the overall visibility of the voter education varied, with many stakeholders noting that it was insufficient in rural areas. Civic and voter education was rarely designed to address women and persons with disabilities. Furthermore, voters were not often aware about the requirement to be included in the civil registry to vote.

Radio jingles were produced in twelve languages and disseminated through local radio stations. The ECSL also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with 27 CSOs for the dissemination of voter education, as well as with four broadcasters for a free weekly slot dedicated to discussions on the electoral process. The list of CSOs and radio stations the ECSL said to be working with was neither published nor shared with the EU EOM.<sup>24</sup> The ECSL was active on its social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter, but very few posts supported its voter education campaign.

The ECSL also contracted town criers and some 1,800 Locality Electoral Education Committees to spread information at the local level. Nevertheless, due to limited financial and human resources, it remained highly dependent on CSOs for the dissemination of voter information. Some district election staff confirmed that monitoring of voter education activities conducted by civil society was challenging, and that the implementation of all activities could not always be confirmed. In general, the vast majority of voter education activities were proactively conducted by CSOs, sometimes even on a voluntary basis.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Conduct continuous campaigns to ensure all eligible voters are duly recorded in the civil register and develop targeted civic and voter education with a continued collaboration between the ECSL with other governmental institutions, civil society, and media.*

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<sup>23</sup> Voters registered with the Ministry of Social Welfare and away on pilgrim on election day could vote early (20 March 2023 Constitutional Instrument, Early Voting Regulation). It was announced on 13 June and took place on 15 June in 16 district election offices. In total 321 voters registered as Hajj pilgrims were registered; turnout was 72 per cent.

<sup>24</sup> The EU EOM media interlocutors criticised ECSL's lack of transparency in selection process of outlets for voter information campaign.

## VII. VOTER REGISTRATION

**Lack of clear and timely public explanations of technical problems related to the voter register reduced confidence in its integrity and accuracy.**

### a. The right to vote

The right to register as a voter is afforded to all citizens, who are at least 18 years old on the date of the election, of sound mind and ordinarily resident in a ward.<sup>25</sup> Persons who have committed an electoral offence within the preceding five years, as well as all persons serving a prison sentence, are disqualified from voting regardless of the nature of the offence or the duration of the sentence.<sup>26</sup> For the 2023 elections, despite existing legal provisions, no arrangements were made to adjust the voter register or to register persons in pre-trial detention and the diaspora and subsequently facilitate voting.<sup>27</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Ensure the right to vote by making the necessary arrangements to facilitate registration and voting for prisoners on remand.*

### b. Voter registration

Since the 2016 National Civil Registration Act, citizens are only added to the voter register if already included in the civil register, which is used to initially extract voters' data. The registration was conducted jointly by the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) and the ECSL from 3 September to 4 October 2022. Both institutions described the cooperation as successful and cost effective. A total of 3,374,258 voters, among whom 52 per cent women, were registered.

The NCRA and ECSL registered first-time voters who were not previously included in the civil register and updated voters' contact details. Changes in voters' address of residence and related allocation to the relevant polling stations were conducted during the registration update, the display of the provisional voter list and the distribution of voter identification cards (VID). Voters were however not provided the opportunity to correct misspelled names or erroneous dates of birth, reducing the accuracy of the voter register.<sup>28</sup> At a later stage, before the elections, voters could not verify the voter register, which created uncertainties and lack of confidence in the final voter register. Following transfers and corrections to voters' allocation per polling station, the number of registered voters per polling centre was published on 25 May 2023. The final voter register per polling station was neither published nor shared with stakeholders, undermining transparency and confidence in the voter register, and hindering the ability to assess voter turnout accurately.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Constitution, s.31.

<sup>26</sup> A blanket deprivation of prisoners' right to vote has been deemed in caselaw a violation of article 25. [HRC GC 25](#), para. 14: "If conviction for an offence is a basis for suspending the right to vote, the period of such suspension should be proportionate to the offence and the sentence".

<sup>27</sup> According to the Director of Correctional Centre as of 12 July there are 1,959 male and 88 female prisoners on remand. See the PEA s.15.2.b.ii on the diaspora and s.17.c on imprisonment disqualification.

<sup>28</sup> [PEA](#), s.18 state that "the registration of voters, updating and revision of the Voters Register" to be conducted at least six months prior to an election.

<sup>29</sup> Transparency and the right to information are promoted by the [ICCP](#) art.19.2 and by the [UNCAC](#) art. 5.1 and 13.1: "Each State Party shall [...] promote the participation of civil society and reflect the principles of the rule of law; proper management of public affairs and public property, integrity, transparency, and accountability." The [ECOWAS Protocol](#), art. 5: "The voters' lists shall be prepared in a transparent and reliable manner, with the collaboration of the political parties and voters who may have access to them whenever the need arises."

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** *Publish the final voter register per polling station and per polling center in a timely manner and allow voters to verify and correct all their details.*

Issues related to the voter registration were widely debated throughout the electoral period, as political parties, the opposition in particular, and civil society organisations were requesting access to and publication of the disaggregated voter register since December 2022.<sup>30</sup> Technical problems and oversights included missing pictures, incomplete data, inadequate software capture of first-time voters, and omission of voters from the provisional voter lists. Many of these problems stemmed from data losses incurred during data transfers with the NCRA. Although the ECSL developed an application for voters to verify their data, provided certificates to concerned voters, and recaptured some 6,000 pictures during the voter card distribution, the voter register remained a source of mistrust throughout the entire electoral process.

Several shortcomings and problems related to the procurement, quality, and distribution of VIDs compounded criticism of the voter registration, also negatively affecting public confidence in the ECSL. The ECSL did not communicate on the procurement process of the VIDs, and many VIDs had missing or poor-quality pictures.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the ECSL went ahead with the distribution of VIDs from 6 to 17 April across all 3,630 registration centres. The short distribution period led to the extension for collection of VIDs in district offices until election day. Three days before the election, the ECSL announced the delivery of 19,000 reprinted VIDs, without providing their distribution per district or voter information targeting concerned voters. The total number of VIDs collected was not made public.

An electronic copy of the final voter lists, including voters' names and pictures, was provided to political parties on 8 June and to the NEW two days before the election. However, the lists provided were considered insufficient. The provision of data per polling station, as well as additional voter data in case person's picture was missing or was of a very poor quality would have strengthened stakeholders' ability to assess the accuracy of the final register of voters.

## VIII. REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES

**Introduction of gender quota elevated women participation, while late publication of lists interfered with voters' right to know their candidates.**

### a. Registration of political parties

The freedom of association and the right to form or join political parties are enshrined in the Constitution and generally respected in law and in practice. The PPA 2022 grants the PPRC the power to register, regulate, supervise, and monitor the conduct of political parties, as well as deregister political parties for non-compliance with the law, with a possible appeal to the Supreme Court.

Requirements for registering political parties are considered excessively onerous for smaller political parties, undermining the principles of equal participation, freedom of association, and fair competition.<sup>32</sup> Those include a minimum of fifty registered members in each electoral district

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<sup>30</sup> The publication of the full voter register, should not interfere with international standards related to privacy and data protection. Sharing the full voter register with electoral stakeholders is considered an effective confidence building measure.

<sup>31</sup> The ECSL informed the EU EOM that low-quality pictures included in the civil registry were not enhanced or recaptured.

<sup>32</sup> [ICCPR](#), art. 22.1: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests." and art. 22.1: "No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of the right to freedom of association other than those which are prescribed by law [...]"

and maintaining offices in Freetown and all regional headquarters' towns for at least five years. Except for the SLPP and APC, no other party fully met these criteria. The PPRC, however, did not enforce the law, as it did not want to disadvantage other parties. Out of the 17 political parties registered, 13 filed candidates for the presidential and 14 for the parliamentary elections.

#### **b. Registration of candidates**

Several candidacy requirements are overly restrictive and do not accord with regional and international standards. Presidential candidates should be political parties' nominees, over 40 years old and meet the criteria to run for parliament, excluding naturalised citizens and those with dual citizenship. Independents may stand only for parliamentary and local council elections. Civil servants intending to contest presidential and parliamentary elections must resign 12 months prior to the polls, which is considered too restrictive and against regional and international commitments.<sup>33</sup> All contestants must pay a non-refundable nomination fee, linked to the minimum wage.<sup>34</sup> Many interlocutors considered it still to be disproportionately high especially for smaller political parties, given the double number of candidates required to be included in the lists for parliamentary and local council elections under the PR system.

**RECOMMENDATION: *Protect the right to stand by removing undue restrictions, including the requirement for civil servants to resign from public office 12 months before election, and allow for independent candidates to run for presidential office.***

For the first time a gender quota was introduced for party lists, requiring at least one woman for every two male candidates nominated, although without a clear ranking order, which was interpreted by political parties as an authorisation to place women candidates primarily in the third place. To ensure compliance, the ECSL designed a software for submission of party lists, with a fair and mandatory vertical distribution of women candidates.<sup>35</sup> However, as reported by EU EOM interlocutors, parties tried to circumvent the quota by identifying male candidates as female ones. Women eventually comprised 32 per cent of all parliamentary candidates, with the APC and SLPP having 32 and 33 per cent female contestants respectively.

The registration process for all races was inclusive, but the extremely delayed publication of the full lists of candidates for parliamentary elections reduced voters' ability to make an informed choice. The provisional list of 13 presidential candidates was published timely on 11 May. The parliamentary and local council lists, however, were posted on the ECSL's website on 14 June and then removed and reposted several times, with the final list for parliamentary elections published in the Gazette on 20 June, beyond the legal deadline and with numerous errors.<sup>36</sup> The ECSL explained delays with necessary rectifications in the lists, amongst others, to identify the right gender of the candidate, and to ensure that parties submit at least twice the number of

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<sup>33</sup> [ICCPR](#), art. 25(b) "Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any [...] unreasonable restrictions to vote and to be elected [...]". [HRC GC 25](#), para.17 "The right of persons to stand for election should not be limited unreasonably by requiring candidates to be members of parties or of specific parties." The right to stand as an independent candidate has also been recognised by the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. In [Tanganyika Law Society and The Legal and Human Rights Centre and Reverend Christopher Mtikila v. The United Republic of Tanzania](#), (009 & 011/2011), the court found the ban on independent candidacy violated the individual right to equal protection, prohibitions against discrimination and rights to political participation and association in the African Charter.

<sup>34</sup> Some SLL 36,000 (EUR 1,680), SLL 3,600 (EUR 168), and SLL 1,800 (EUR 84) for presidential, parliamentary, and mayoral or chairmanship candidates, respectively. [HRC GC 25](#), para. 16, "Conditions relating to nomination dates, fees or deposits should be reasonable and not discriminatory."

<sup>35</sup> The ECSL software was rejecting lists that did not have a female candidate in one of the first three places, then one in the next three places, etc.

<sup>36</sup> The candidate lists for local council elections were not published before elections.

nominations as seats. Political parties also refused to disclose their own lists, admitting that internal negotiations on the ranking of candidates were still ongoing. As a result, many contestants from the APC and SLPP campaigned without having confirmed their placement in the list and subsequent electability. The absence of final candidates' lists undermined voters' right to scrutinise their prospective representatives, contrary to international standards.

While 14 parties contested the parliamentary elections, only the SLPP and APC filed candidates for all elections in all districts; there were 29 independent parliamentary candidates nationwide, including one woman.

## IX. CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

**The initially competitive campaign turned openly confrontational, and subsequently was marred by violence against the opposition in several parts of the country.**

On 25 May, for the first time in the country's electoral history, most presidential candidates, including the SLPP and APC flagbearers, publicly signed a peace pledge. The high-profile event was initiated by the Inter-religious Council and the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC) and supported by a wide range of national and international actors. Key to the success of the event was that the two main contenders signed the document together on stage, with their handshake lending weight to the promise to abstain from violence. However, the impact of the peace pledge on the campaign environment appeared limited, with little or no awareness among party activists and the wider public at the district level. Also, in the weeks that followed, both parties failed to dissociate themselves from acts or potential acts of violence.<sup>37</sup>

The political environment initially allowed for competitive campaigning throughout the country, in a generally peaceful atmosphere, with a focus on personalities and ethno-regional alliance building rather than issues. However, in a highly polarised political scenario, with the tensions raising in the weeks ahead of the polls, the campaigning space became increasingly restrictive for the APC in several southern and eastern districts. This followed initially localised politically motivated violence that eventually affected the districts of Kailahun, Pujehun, Kenema, and Bo in the south and east, as well Kambia in the north-west, all of them except for Kambia strongholds of the SLPP.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the campaign, the EU EOM received and crosschecked information on at least 17 violent attacks. Those included the burning of an APC office in Bo district, vandalism of further party offices in Kailahun and Pujehun, and armed attacks on party officials and some candidates in Pujehun, Kenema and Kambia with several of them being hospitalised. The security concerns led to the cancellation of scheduled APC rallies in some locations, and in the week before the elections, APC officials left Bo, Kailahun and Pujehun districts for fear of their safety.

In the south and south-east, the attacks on the APC and the lack of adequate police reaction distorted a level playing field, while the police were generally seen as biased by most EU EOM interlocutors. EU EOM observers reported about a widespread perception that investigations of violent attacks against APC candidates and activists often were not sufficient to ensure victim's

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<sup>37</sup> Neither the President nor SLPP leadership called on supporters in their strongholds to stop violence against the APC. The APC did not distance itself from inciteful calls by a prominent diaspora blogger to potentially use violence during the protests against the ECSL.

<sup>38</sup> In Kambia, the country's ambassador to Guinea organised the SLPP campaign, police treated SLPP favourably, and according to the EU EOM observers, army trucks transported SLPP campaign material.

right to effective remedy. The police cited lack of capacity as a reason for failing to conclude investigations in a timely manner. It is acknowledged though that in several districts police also attempted to accommodate interests and concerns of both main parties.

EU EOM observers also confirmed a few instances when SLPP supporters were victims, including damaging of a house of a SLPP candidate in Freetown. They noted, however, that generally the SLPP campaign went on freely without interruptions or security incidents throughout the country, including in the APC strongholds.

Demonstrative and disproportionate use of force by security agencies discouraged political activism, with the political climate becoming more tense starting from the second week of June. On 12, 13 and 21 June in several district capitals, including Freetown, police and military were deployed to the streets in large numbers.<sup>39</sup> Though no large-scale protests or confrontations occurred, at least 150 persons were arrested. The excessive use of force by the police, with live ammunition and tear gas canisters fired against the APC headquarters in Freetown on 21 June, resulted in one casualty.<sup>40</sup> The APC's public requests to ECSL which were not met, fuelled further tensions.<sup>41</sup> The attempt to broker a compromise between the APC and ECSL failed and the party called for protests just three days prior to the polls.<sup>42</sup> This created insecurities for voters and stakeholders alike.

The PPRC with its capital headquarters and five offices in the regions did not always and fully use its recently enhanced powers to ensure adherence to the campaign rules.<sup>43</sup> Its most significant and publicly discussed decision was a ban, agreed with political parties, on so-called "street rallies", which were widely used in past elections to show the strength and popular support of the party or a candidate. The PPRC chair in specific cases used his personal authority to mediate conflicts between the parties. However, the PPRC as an institution often did not use its powers to sanction campaign violations, partly due to concerns that sanctions could destabilise the political situation, and partly because the police were not able to conclude investigations in political violence cases, which in turn would allow the PPRC to take further actions. This led to perceptions of impunity among stakeholders at the district level.

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** *Ensure safety and security for all candidates through a timely conclusion of investigations, holding perpetrators of violence accountable, and enabling the PPRC to act effectively upon violations of campaign rules.*

The political campaigns were dominated by the two main presidential candidates, whereas the 11 other candidates conducted very limited and low-key or no campaigns at all. At the beginning of the campaign, district-based campaign days had been allocated to each party who fielded

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<sup>39</sup> A highly popular diaspora blogger called for protests on 12 and 13 June against the ECSL, with severe threats against the chairman and requesting the postponement of the elections. Some of his demands, like the one for the publication of the disaggregated voter register, echoed those of the APC. While not openly supporting the blogger, the APC also did not distance itself from his messages, which included elements of hate speech.

<sup>40</sup> Similar incident at the same location occurred also after the elections. See section Post-election Developments.

<sup>41</sup> On 14 June the APC presidential candidate called for the resignation of all ECSL commissioners within 72 hours and the elections to be administered by a panel of international experts. They also requested the disaggregated voters register and asked the ECSL not to use electronic result transmission. There was also a request to end the violence against the party in the south and the east.

<sup>42</sup> The PPRC and ICPNC held several meetings between the APC and the ECSL, in the presence of other electoral stakeholders.

<sup>43</sup> At the end of the first week of June, PPRC deployed another 20 staff to the district level, hosted by the ECSL.



candidates in that district, to avoid possible clashes between competing parties.<sup>44</sup> The 11 low-key presidential candidates and their parties openly formed alliances with one of the two main parties, mostly the SLPP, but no clear camps took shape, as internal splits prevented a unified position of the individual parties in favour of one of the two main presidential candidates. Although discouraged by the PPRC, smaller parties “donated” campaign days to the two main ones or campaigned together with them. It was mainly SLPP benefitting from this practice in several districts, including Bo, Kambia and Kono.

Abuse of state resources and public office as well as campaigning by government officials gave an undue advantage to the ruling party. Neither the PPRC nor any other state authority ensured adherence to the PPA and the PEA, which explicitly prohibits use of state resources, facilities or officials for campaigning.<sup>45</sup> The President started to campaign early, using inaugurations of government projects to promote his track record and agenda. During the official campaign period (23 May – 21 June), the EU EOM noted misuse of government vehicles in 50 per cent and ministers canvassing for votes in 32 per cent of SLPP campaign events observed.<sup>46</sup> The country’s ambassadors to Guinea, Liberia and Egypt were actively organising the SLPP campaign in Kambia and Pujehun. Official websites and social media accounts of ministries and the presidency were also used for campaign purposes. Paramount and other Chiefs, as public officials legally bound to be neutral, were seen either actively campaigning for or silently taking sides with the SLPP in 8 of the 16 districts (Kono, Tonkolili, Pujehun, Koinadugu, Falaba, Bonthé, Bo and Western Urban). Campaigning by state officials blurred the line between governing and campaigning, and gave an undue advantage to the ruling party, contrary to regional and international good practice.

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** *Ensure enforcement of legal restrictions on the misuse of state resources and explicitly prohibit the use of official functions, as well as government websites and social media accounts for campaign purposes.*

## X. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

### **Inadequately regulated finances of the campaign undermine transparency of the process.**

Campaign finance is not sufficiently regulated, undermining transparency. The law neither provides for interim reporting nor for fair ceilings on income or spending, contrary to the international and regional principle of level playing field. The PPRC did not apply its statutory powers to impose such limits, disadvantaging parties with less resources. The PPRC also did not require disclosure of information on donations or expenses, which could have reduced the impact of money in the electoral process.<sup>47</sup> Only the APC, NGC and SLPP out of the 14 political parties

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<sup>44</sup> When publishing the campaign calendar in Gazette, the ECSL mixed up the second page of the calendar for seven districts, meaning, that some parties who did not have candidates in those districts received days for campaigning, while others could campaign on days that were not initially allocated to them. In practice it changed the rhythm of campaign but went entirely unnoticed by the ECSL at national and district level as well as by the main parties.

<sup>45</sup> The PPA s 35 (5) explicitly prohibits on the use of “state resources, facilities or officials” for the daily activities of campaign of a political party.

<sup>46</sup> The EU EOM observed a total of 50 campaign events throughout the country, 28 of SLPP, 15 of APC, 2 of PMDC, 1 NGC, 1 UDM, 3 independents.

<sup>47</sup> ICCPR, [HRC GC 25](#), para. 19: *Reasonable limitations on campaign expenditure may be justified where this is necessary to ensure that the free choice of voters is not undermined [...] by the disproportionate expenditure on behalf of any candidate or party.* [UNCAC](#), article 7(3): *“Each State Party shall also consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures [...] to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, article 10; “Each State Party shall [...] incorporate the principle of transparency into funding of political parties.”*

contesting elections submitted their financial statements to the PPRC as required by law. The PPRC admitted that abiding strictly by the legal requirements would result in most political parties being excluded from the races, hence no sanctions were imposed. Overall, many aspects of campaign finance, such as obligations for accounting and reporting, are inadequately elaborated, and combined with limited enforcement during elections, did not ensure equal opportunities for contestants.

Political parties and campaigns were mostly financed from membership fees and donations including from the diaspora; on the regional level most campaigns were self-financed, with no details provided as to the origin or the allocation of funds. Most candidates and local party branches did not keep income or expenditure records, as reported to the EU EOM.<sup>48</sup> In most cases, individual candidates received campaign material from the parties' headquarters.

Political parties did not advertise much in traditional and online media. Instead, the APC and SLPP bought bulk airtime by hour on local radio stations. Only a few political ads were placed in national broadcasters. The Facebook Ad Library report shows that from 8 May, 32 political ads were bought, with a total spending not exceeding EUR 600. All but two favoured the SLPP.<sup>49</sup>

There are no reporting requirements for service providers, such as media or online platforms, further reducing the accountability in campaign finance. Even if the law requires all media to offer equal prices for political advertisement, in practice each outlet established a different price list for different political parties. The professional organisations of journalists recommended strict adherence to equal price policy and publication of the price lists by media organisations.

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** *Ensure transparency by introducing caps for campaign revenues and expenses, and clear rules of reporting and public disclosure, before, during, and after elections, including by media, and by implementing robust sanctions for noncompliance.*

## **XI. MEDIA**

**A few well-established media strived to offer balanced coverage of elections, yet most outlets favoured either the SLPP or APC**

### **a. Media environment**

Media provided extensive campaign and elections coverage, despite technical and financial hardships, which especially affected outlets outside urban areas. With only 26.2 per cent of the population having access to electricity, radio is the main source of news, especially in rural areas, with 228 radio stations out of a total of 531 registered media outlets. Many radio stations operated sporadically and faced additional challenges during the rainy season, which coincided with the start of the election campaign. Also disinformation and fake news originating from social media often entered the radio and TV broadcasts, as observed by the EU EOM.

English and Krio were the main languages for television and radio programmes, whereas English dominated the print press. Major local languages, such as Mende, Temne, Limba, Kono and Fullah, were only used in the ECSL and the CSO Centre for Accountability and the Rule of Law (CARL) voter education jingles to reach out to various groups of multi-ethnic population. With the strong broadcast media market and low adult literacy rate, newspapers have gradually lost

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<sup>48</sup> Despite a legal obligation for political parties and candidates to submit a statement on expenditures incurred during the campaign to the PPRC after the elections as per [PPA](#), s.37(2).

<sup>49</sup> See Annex 3 *Social Media Monitoring Results*, sub-section 4 for further details.



their readership. Positively, most print outlets have up-to date news websites and very popular social media accounts.

Most media outlets face multiple financial and technical challenges, which in turn significantly affected the quality of editorial outputs, to the detriment of voters. The public broadcaster Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) did not receive state funding on a regular basis, and often funds received did not reach regional offices, thus impeding their operations. Community and private radio stations also struggled financially. Hence, instead of producing their own content, broadcasters sold their prime time to leading parties. It significantly reduced the amount of impartial information available to voters and affected smaller parties and independent candidates, as there was no space left for the free airtime, contrary to the law. In the highly polarised pre-election information environment, lack of funding also made media vulnerable to political interference with editorial decisions.

Professional trainings for journalists improved the quality of election coverage. Multiple media organisations, such as Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Guild of Newspaper Editors, Association of Broadcasters, Independent Radio Network (IRN), and Sierra Leone Association of Women in Journalism (SLAWiJ) organised a wide range of trainings for journalists on key professional principles for election coverage.

Instances of violence against journalists occurred before and during the campaign, creating a challenging working environment for media professionals. For example, shortly before the official start of the campaign two executives of the radio station FOP were brutally assaulted at two different political events in Moyamba. Both reported those incidents to the police, yet both cases were closed due to lack of evidence. Another freelance journalist was harassed and intimidated by party supporters closer to the polls, with perpetrators not being brought to justice. After the elections, two journalists were trapped inside the APC headquarters during the standoff with security agencies, their cars were damaged, but no compensation was paid. Those cases exemplify the absence of effective protection of media practitioners.

Communication between independent media houses and the ECSL was difficult, undermining media's editorial independence. For the first time since 1996, the ECSL informally discouraged the IRN, which is Sierra Leone's largest platform of radio stations, from reporting the provisional results from the polling stations.<sup>50</sup> This eroded the confidence of the journalistic community in the transparency of the process. Another instance that damaged the image of the ECSL and reduced trust among media professionals, was the ECSL's informal "advice" given to the journalists from one of the leading broadcasters to change their reporting style or to be 'blacklisted' from covering any upcoming public events. Inconsistent communication from the ECSL to the media continued until the election day and some journalists did not receive the accreditation to report from the national tally centre in Freetown.

#### **b. Legal framework for the media**

The Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and of the press. The Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC) establishes the regulatory framework for the media sector, while the National Communication Authority (NatCA) provides broadcast media with frequencies. The Independent Media Commission (IMC) is the main regulatory body for the broadcasting sector

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<sup>50</sup> It was a long-standing tradition of the IRN to have reporters moving from one polling centre to another and reading out results data, as posted outside the voting place or citizens sending to the radio station photos with result forms which were then later, after the verification, read out by radio presenters.

and was monitoring media's compliance with campaign coverage rules, which require equal access and balanced reporting.

Recent legal changes introduced into the IMC Act strengthened the regulator's mandate and enhanced its powers to uphold professional reporting standards but failed to ensure its financial independence. The IMC comprises 13 members, with the chairman being appointed by the President, on the advice of SLAJ and subject to the approval of Parliament, while the other 12 members are appointed by SLAJ, Sierra Leone Bar Association, Sierra Leone Institute of Engineers, Inter-Religious Council, Minister of Information, and civil society organisations.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Protect the independence of the media regulator by granting in the law financial independence and sustainability of the IMC, as well as by further facilitating the autonomy of the IMC, with the Chairman being appointed by an independent board of media professionals and legal experts, through an open, inclusive, and competitive pre-selection process.*

The IMC introduced the 2022 Elections (Coverage and Reporting) Regulation to orient media outlets on how to report and election stakeholders on how to interact with the media. Prior to the elections, the regulator organised numerous trainings for journalists and monitored broadcasters' coverage of the campaign. After the elections, the IMC published the results of their countrywide media monitoring, with an overall positive assessment of journalists' work. The regulator was perceived by media professionals as effective and fair.

The IMC upheld principles of professional journalism and implemented sanctions in an overall effective manner. After a review of complaints, the regulator suspended live call-in programmes of three radio stations – Citizen, Justice and Tumac. Two of those radio stations were APC and one SLPP leaning. All three allowed on air commentaries that in a local context were perceived as “hate speech”. The formal reason for suspension was lack of the equipment for delaying live broadcasts, which is a legal requirement.<sup>51</sup> In another case the IMC decided to seek through the court a permanent closure of an SLPP-leaning radio station, who openly attacked IRN's professional integrity and reputation, while also disrespecting other reporting standards.

Legal and operational standing of the SLBC makes the public broadcaster excessively dependent on governmental bodies. The President appoints the Director General upon the approval by the Parliament. The Deputy Director General is appointed by the Board, with representation of the Council of Paramount Chiefs, Inter-religious Council, Women's Forum, Sierra Leone Bar Association, University of Sierra Leone, Youth Council, SLAJ and civil society. The SLBC reports on their financial activities to the Minister of Information and Communications after the end of each financial year; the Minister also approves remuneration, fees and other expenses paid to the Chairman and the Board.<sup>52</sup>

In a positive development, Part V of the Public Order Act (POA), which criminalised libel, defamation, and sedition, was repealed in 2020. However, the 2020 Cyber Security and Crime Act placed new constraints on freedom of expression and was seen as potentially harmful for media by journalists and civil society organisations advocating for media freedom.

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<sup>51</sup> Most EU EOM interlocutors noted that these three radio stations do not follow professional journalistic standards, instead they openly favour one party and incite violence.

<sup>52</sup> [SLBC Act, 2009](#), Sec. 6 and 19.

### c. Media monitoring findings

Broadcast media closely followed the campaign, devoting most of its prime-time news to election-related topics, and focusing primarily on the campaigns of the APC and SLPP. A handful of well-established radio and TV stations strived to offer balanced coverage and engaged in fact-checking, helping voters to navigate the pre-election environment.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, many other outlets were either owned by politicians or their affiliates, or they financially hinged on government advertising. These outlets openly rallied either for the APC or SLPP and allowed divisive language to be used on air. Such coverage did not stimulate an issue-based debate.

Public broadcaster SLBC's TV favoured the SLPP and devoted to the ruling party, the President and his family some 90 per cent of all prime-time newscasts, predominantly in a neutral tone. The President was the most quoted political actor within SLBC TV evening shows.<sup>54</sup> During the 30-day monitoring period incumbent's direct speech reached 2 hours 9 minutes, compared to the direct quotations of APC's presidential candidate that summed up to 28 minutes.<sup>55</sup> The SLPP and the President also dominated SLBC Radio broadcasts on elections and politics, exceeding 60 per cent of the total airtime. Such campaign coverage illustrated SLBC's subservience to the government and proves that resolute steps are needed to ensure that the public broadcaster fulfils its public service remit and provides voters with diverse information.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Ensure the citizens' right of access to information by transforming Sierra Leone Broadcast Corporation into a genuine public service broadcaster. This includes a clear legal separation of SLBC from any government institution, and an open and competitive pre-selection process for the appointment of the management, with the participation of industry professionals, and by an independent board.*

Private broadcasters better facilitated the ability of voters to make an informed choice by equitably dividing the prime-time news between the APC and SLPP, with an overall neutral tone. The African Young Voices (AYV) Radio and Democracy Radio undertook a more diversified approach. They analysed the President's record in office in their news and gave some airtime to parties that were not represented in the Parliament.<sup>56</sup>

Main campaign narratives featured in the news were "NO run-off", "economic changes" and "peaceful elections", yet no detail on substance was included in those notions. The coverage of rallies also did not add much, as the APC and SLPP presidential candidates were accusing each other of various wrong-doings, using negative rhetoric, rather than explaining their manifestos. Journalists also rarely scrutinised APC and SLPP campaign promises for accuracy or economic viability. As a result, voters had a very narrow scope for obtaining factual information on which to make a well-informed choice.

Media's coverage of the activities of the President and the government exposed how the ruling party used institutional events for campaign purposes. The President's official visits, frequently accompanied by the Minister of Information, regularly featured in broadcast media with news stories exemplifying the lack of clear distinction between their official and campaign roles. The

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<sup>53</sup> The five-member EU EOM Media Monitoring Unit monitored a sample of national and state-level media. The sample included two public (TV a radio) and six private broadcasters (two TV and four radio) with a close to-nationwide reach, and four newspapers and their online versions. For further details on media monitoring methodology see Annex 2 *Media Monitoring Results (Annex 2)*.

<sup>54</sup> See also Annex 2, Charts 4, 5 and 7.

<sup>55</sup> See also Annex 2, Charts 6.

<sup>56</sup> See also Annex 2, Charts 4 and 5.

Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Spokesperson of the President were also often taking part in the campaign-related events, as featured on broadcast media. During those events, government officials encouraged voters to support the SLPP.

AYV TV and SLBC TV held regular programmes and discussions with stakeholders on voter education, as well as showed voter information jingles by the ECSL, NEW and CARL in different local languages. Celebrities also took part in audio-visual messages calling for peaceful elections.<sup>57</sup>

Positively, debates among candidates for various elections were organised by media and civil society organisations in at least eight districts, allowing voters to compare candidates directly. Mayoral debates were held in Freetown, Kambia, Kabala, Moyamba and Port Loko. Regrettably, on 3 June in Kambia the debate between the SLPP and APC candidates was interrupted by the police, who used force to disperse the participants, stating that such actions were needed as no prior notification was received. The peace initiative ‘Talking Drum Studio’ held 60 debates, also bringing together representatives of vulnerable groups. Such positive and inclusive practices merit further expansion and continuation beyond the electoral period, as debates proved to be an effective format of general civic education.

The presidential debate did not take place, to the detriment of voters. The National Political Debates Committee was preparing it but could not secure the necessary funding. It was also not clear if both the SLPP and APC presidential candidates would agree to share the stage. Unlike the peace march, the presidential debate was not included in the ECSL campaign calendar. There is also financial support foreseen for media, who would organise it. Many EU EOM interlocutors stressed that the inclusion of a presidential debate in the ECSL calendar would promote a culture of issue-based political discussions and would help voters to form their opinion about their prospective leaders.

## **XII. SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL RIGHTS**

**Independent fact-checkers countered disinformation, while divisive messages raised agitation.**

### **a. Social media environment**

One out of five Sierra Leoneans has access to the Internet, while only one out of ten has a social media account.<sup>58</sup> In total, some 780,000 people access social media regularly. Although there are no official data related to digital or media literacy in Sierra Leone, most stakeholders cite challenges in education and digital skills as the key reason why misleading and manipulated information was shared so broadly. Overall, only 47.7 per cent of the adult population are literate, knowing how to write and read.<sup>59</sup> Yet, some 60 per cent have access to 3G coverage, which is sufficient for browsing internet and, most importantly, for sharing voice messages, pictures, and videos via different social media channels.

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<sup>57</sup> See also Annex 2, Charts 10 and 11.

<sup>58</sup> [Digital Sierra Leone 2023](#). See also Annex 3 *Social Media Monitoring Results, Chart 1*.

<sup>59</sup> In Sierra Leone there is a gender gap in literacy skills: while the literacy rate among males is estimated to 55.3 per cent, among females reaches only 40.1 per cent [World Bank: literacy in Sierra Leone 2021](#)

The main social media platform is Facebook, with 75 per cent of social media users having an active Facebook account.<sup>60</sup> In most cases the communication language on all social platforms is English or Krio. Among instant messaging platforms, WhatsApp is the most popular one, having a three-fold role in political communication: it was a key platform for contestants to communicate with supporters and voters; it was used by the ECSL and civil society to inform voters; and it was the channel for misinformation to spread. Usually, WhatsApp communication comprised an audio or video message, which was easy to understand for everyone regardless their literacy rate and which was then further shared with friends and family, without a verification. The EU EOM also observed that in areas where the internet coverage was limited, political messages were sent to community leaders who passed the content orally to others.<sup>61</sup>

The first national fact-checking initiative, iVerify, was established just before the elections. It effectively debunked many false stories before, during and after the elections, helping voters to navigate the pre-election information environment. However, the project was established too late to also carry out wider educational programmes on the danger of disinformation and to teach social media users on how to identify false or manipulated content. Considering that access to internet is growing steadily, while the literacy rate remains very low, further development and implementation of various media literacy programmes, including related to elections, would be beneficial. Such programmes could have a special focus on digital literacy and could target the most vulnerable parts of society.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Promote the independent formation of voters' opinions by developing inclusive media and digital literacy programmes in close collaboration with civil society, fact-checking initiatives, professional media organisations and tech platforms.*

**b. Legal framework for social media and digital rights**

The 2021 Cyber Security and Crime Act (CSCA) puts undue restrictions on freedom of expression online. The vague definitions of various cybercrimes do not accord with international standards and leave room for politicians and law enforcement bodies to exert pressure on critical voices. The National Cybersecurity Coordination Centre, citing the CSCA, has publicly warned those engaged in the “spreading of incendiary information in social media to destabilise the state”, considering it as an “act of cyber-terrorism”, subject to long prison sentences. However, the CSCA does not refer to the “spreading incendiary information”, rather it references “a terrorist act”, without defining it, and refers to the 2012 Anti-terrorism Act, which also contains vague definitions. Many EU EOM interlocutors noted that the CSCA leads to self-censorship online, especially on politically sensitive topics. During the campaign, the Act was cited to detain a prominent APC activist for allegedly spreading harmful content on WhatsApp, while in mid-April, a media entrepreneur was detained after posting a video critical of the president. Those examples demonstrated that this broadly worded Act might be misused to silence dissent.

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<sup>60</sup> 75.4 per cent of traffic data is generated by the Facebook users, 7.5 per cent by Twitter, 5 per cent by YouTube. Number of WhatsApp users is not publicly available.

<sup>61</sup> Online communication in Sierra Leone is not limited to social media platforms. Different dedicated phone apps are serving as hubs for media outlets: Sierra Leone Radio Stations app is a hub for 8 radio stations, SLTube app covers several live TV channels, 16 newspapers and 5 radio channels, and AYYV has their own app. The ECSL and IRN also have up-to date apps, as has Samura Kamara, although introduced only on 2 June 2023.

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** *Protect freedom of expression by clearly aligning the definitions of “cyber-terrorism”, “cyber-stalking”, “cyber-bullying” and “incendiary information” with relevant regional and international standards.*

The NatCA is the regulatory body for the ICT and telecommunication industry, established under the respective Act in 2022. The NatCA Chairman is appointed by the President for four years, with a possibility of renewal for another term. The NatCA is responsible for issuing licences to telecommunication companies and internet providers, and regulates access to the internet, but not the content. The Act lacks precision on who initiates a shutdown of the internet or a restriction of access to certain content or platforms, while it is in NatCA’s remit to enforce such measures. The August 2022 protests served as an example of the government’s ability to swiftly, within hours, switch off the internet without following a due process.<sup>62</sup> Such lack of transparency on matters related to restricting access to internet does not accord with international standards for freedom of expression.

The IMC Act was amended in 2020 amongst others to regulate online content created by traditional media outlets. Thus far the IMC has not used these powers, admittedly having little or no capacity to examine the content that broadcast, and print outlets post on their social media accounts or websites. The IMC also has not issued any regulations related to online content.<sup>63</sup>

There is no specific data protection legislation. The 2013 Right to the Access to the Information Act regulates retrieval and re-use of information held by public institutions and stipulates publication of information of public interest online.<sup>64</sup> However, in practice only a few government institutions provide comprehensive and up to date websites where citizens could source information of public interest in a user-friendly format.

### **c. Social media monitoring findings**

Political discussion groups and pages on Facebook offered a relatively pluralistic space to discuss issues related to elections and politics.<sup>65</sup> Those large groups were open to the public and their moderators swiftly removed content that was inciteful or unrelated to politics or elections. On traditional media’s Facebook pages around half of the posts were related to elections, while most social media influencers focused on infotainment, frequently mixing news with entertainment. Notably, on political party groups, only 17 per cent of all posts were related to elections.<sup>66</sup>

The online campaign by APC and SLPP was vivid, with engaging, yet also confrontational discussions unfolding across various social media platforms.<sup>67</sup> During the campaign, different social media strategies were used by the APC and SLPP presidential campaigns, with both

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<sup>62</sup> See: [Netblocks.net report](#)

<sup>63</sup> Another institution that has oversight powers over online communication, including election-related, is the National Computer Security Incident Response Coordination Centre (NCSIRCC), established by CSCA. The head of NCSIRCC is appointed by the President for five years with the possibility of a second term. The appointment mechanism makes the institution vulnerable to perception of bias. There is virtually no public information on this institution, its website is almost empty. EU EOM interlocutors also were not fully aware of this institution. Hence, its role in regulating online communications cannot be assessed.

<sup>64</sup> [Right to the Access to the Information Act, 2013](#), part 1.1 states that publication of information means “to make available it in a form generally accessible to members of the public and includes print, broadcast and electronic forms [...]”.

<sup>65</sup> The EU EOM established a Social Media Monitoring Unit (SMMU) on 21 May, and consistently monitored online content until 23 June. The SMMU downloaded 45,571 posts and tweets from which 17,351 were coded, with 55.2 per cent of them being election related. See also Annex 3, Section 2, Table 1, Chart 3 and 4

<sup>66</sup> See in Annex s3, Chart 8 for further details about election and non-election related posts.

<sup>67</sup> No other party meaningfully campaigned online.

finding their ways to interact with voters, disseminate information and raise support. While the President posted only on Twitter, the presidential candidate of the opposition divided his messages between Twitter and Facebook, putting 367 posts on Facebook and almost ten times less on Twitter.<sup>68</sup> The President posted 67 tweets during the campaign period, but his Facebook account stayed dormant. Both candidates had enabled Twitter Blue feature, with Bio posting three times longer messages than Kamara.<sup>69</sup> However, their active use of social media did not translate into cohesion of a policy message, as political hashtags were applied chaotically, and party' manifestos were only briefly presented and quickly forgotten.<sup>70</sup>

The SLPP campaign strongly relied on amplification of their messages through official government accounts on Facebook and Twitter, systematically eroding the distinction between governing and campaigning. Combined, the official Facebook pages of the State House and Ministry of Information placed 41 posts, with 80 per cent of them featuring SLPP campaign activities, including re-posts of President Bio campaign.<sup>71</sup> On June 18, the ECSL reposted on its official Twitter account the first page of Awoko newspaper with the headline "Sierra Poll predicts 56 per cent win for Bio".<sup>72</sup>

Aggressive and divisive messages added to the already tense pre-election information environment, playing a significant role in online communication on political and electoral matters. The most damaging messages were made by a diaspora blogger, Adebayor, whose calls to boycott the elections and to protests in mid-June reached at least 58,000 people on Facebook alone. His posts were also widely shared on WhatsApp and re-played at community gatherings, reaching those who seldom use social media.<sup>73</sup> In total the EU EOM detected divisive content on 409 Facebook posts and in comments to 550 tweets; 49 posts and 10 tweets contained a tribalistic message. Facebook pages and groups placing such messages had up to 238,345 followers each.<sup>74</sup>

Disinformation was mostly spread through WhatsApp groups aiming confuse voters and impair their electoral choices. Outright false content rarely featured on Twitter and Facebook. The EU EOM found such content in only 35 posts, while manipulated information was identified in 89, out of 9,586 election-related posts coded. None of those posts got more than 2,813 interactions.

Facebook's owner, Meta, introduced for the elections period only basic measures to prevent abuse and spread of harmful content. Fact-checkers recognised by Facebook did not have a solid presence in Sierra Leone and Meta did not have a so-called "trusted partner" with a direct communication line with Facebook. Consequently, content moderation in local languages was scarce, without a direct communication channel for swift removal of harmful content.

The ECSL's communication on social media was chaotic and only a fraction of all posts and tweets were on voter education.<sup>75</sup> For the whole campaign period, the ECSL published 132 posts

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<sup>68</sup> See Annex 3, Chart 5 and 7 for further details.

<sup>69</sup> See Annex 3, Chart 6 for further details about coded tweets.

<sup>70</sup> The EU EOM analysed the use of 82 hashtags, half affiliated with the APC or SLPP. See also Annex 3, Chart 9a and 9b, 10, 11 and 19.

<sup>71</sup> The name of the Facebook page of State House was changed to "[TheBioPresidency](#)".

<sup>72</sup> The post is still on their Twitter account (accessed: 07.07.2023)

<sup>73</sup> During the monitoring, Adebayor posted 50 audio messages on Facebook; got 13,293 reactions and 715 shares in total.

<sup>74</sup> See Annex 3, Chart 13, 14a and 14b, as well as 15.

<sup>75</sup> See Annex 3, sub-section 5 for further details on the ECSL communication online.



on Facebook and 163 Tweets.<sup>76</sup> Messages often were posted with delay. Furthermore, half of the posts on Facebook and around 25 per cent of all tweets were posted in the last week before the election day.<sup>77</sup>

### XIII. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

#### **Positive legislative steps to enhance women's political participation were undermined by lack of political will.**

Positive legislative steps strive to ensure the advancement of women in elected and appointed offices and were welcomed by all EU EOM interlocutors. The much-anticipated 2022 Gender Empowerment and Women's Equality (GEWE) Act introduced a 30 per cent gender quota for appointed and elective positions, except for those made by the president. Women accounted for an average of 37 per cent of candidates for the parliamentary elections and 30 per cent of elected members of the parliament (41 out of 135).<sup>78</sup> Every district, except for Falaba, will be represented by at least one woman.<sup>79</sup> Out of 7 mayoral and 15 local council chairperson positions, two women were elected. One as a mayor of Freetown for the APC and one as a local council chairperson in Bonthe district on the SLPP ticket (see Annex 1).

Political will to genuinely enhance women participation in political life was still lacking. It was exemplified by the placement of women in the lists of candidates for parliamentary elections:<sup>80</sup> only one SLPP list (Kambia) was led by a woman, while all APC lists were headed by a man and women were rarely placed in the second position. Only one woman ran as an independent, one contested the presidential race, while five stood as presidential running mates.

A positive initiative to promote inclusion were the organisation of public debates for female candidates, but overall women were still underrepresented in media. For example, the EU EOM media monitoring showed that not a single prime-time news item was devoted to the female presidential aspirant, and women contesting other races were also barely visible in the national media with the exception of the First Lady whose canvassing for SLPP was often featured in both broadcast and print media and promoted on social media.<sup>81</sup>

Despite legislative progress, actual enhancement of gender equality is lagging behind, due to a number of factors, including the social and cultural context and developmental and educational challenges. Gender inequality hampers women's political participation, contrary to the country's international commitments and constitutional provisions on equality.<sup>82</sup> To promote *de facto* gender parity, political parties could take more responsibility by making clear commitments to include women in all levels of their executive and providing for voluntary quotas in their constitutions or manifestos.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> To put this into perspective: the ECSL posted 12 posts on Facebook and 13 tweets on the election day alone and further 7 posts on Facebook and 9 tweets day after the elections, on Monday 25 June.

<sup>77</sup> See Annex 3, Chart 18a and 18b.

<sup>78</sup> The SLPP will be sending 20 while the APC 21 women to the parliament.

<sup>79</sup> In Falaba district the four seats are evenly divided between APC and SLPP and none of them had a woman candidate in either of the first two positions.

<sup>80</sup> In total only four out of 63 lists were led by female candidates.

<sup>81</sup> See also Annex 2, Charts 8 and 9.

<sup>82</sup> The [Protocol to the ACHPR on the Rights of Women in Africa](#) requires State Parties to take affirmative action to promote women's political participation. CEDAW encourages adoption of temporary special measures.

<sup>83</sup> [PPA](#), s.43 "A political party may have at least 30 per cent placement for women in executive position from ward to national level".



**RECOMMENDATION:** *Advance gender parity through a clear commitment by political parties to appoint women to decision-making positions within their structures at all levels. A continued, cross-sectoral capacity and awareness building would further enhance women participation in political life.*

Positively, there is a strong civil society movement to advance the inclusion of women in political and economic life. Organisations like Campaign for Good Governance, 50/50 and SEND in May 2023 launched the Sierra Leone Women’s Manifesto 2023 with the target to engage a wide range of actors to advance gender parity. The EU EOM interlocutors also noted that the GEWE Act and its alignment with other laws was only the first step, and that further advocacy for translating this legal progress into tangible improvements for women in public life will be essential.

#### **XIV. PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH**

**Further efforts needed to promote genuine youth engagement in elections.**

Sierra Leone ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 (the “Convention”) and has signed in 2008 but not yet ratified the African Youth Charter, a comprehensive regional instrument that seeks to reinforce and consolidate efforts to empower young people through meaningful participation.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, Sierra Leone still lacks the legal framework and a proper national youth policy that would provide for the rights and duties of young people.

Youth constituted some 60 per cent of voters registered for 2023 elections and positively, everyone who turned 18 shortly before or even on election day could vote.<sup>85</sup> All first-time voters had to actively request inclusion in the voter register. At times it was cumbersome for those who did not have a valid national identity card, as such voters were required to provide a birth certificate or testimony from a traditional or religious chief. To facilitate youth participation as voters, continuous civic campaigns encouraging timely registration could be beneficial.

Youth actively participated in elections not only as voters, but also as citizen observers, poll workers and journalists yet high unemployment rate also made them prone to political instrumentalisation.<sup>86</sup> A number of voter education jingles targeting youth were aired on broadcast media. The ECSL and Inspector General of Police focused their messages on preventing youth involvement in electoral violence, while CSOs stressed the importance of peaceful elections and adherence to electoral procedures. Despite those voter information efforts, political parties were seen to take advantage of economically vulnerable young persons, paying some of them to cause targeted disruption or to attack opponents during the campaign. This underlines the need for greater efforts to protect genuine youth engagement in elections.

#### **XV. PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**Despite encouraging commitments by several stakeholders, independent access to the electoral process for persons with disabilities was not always ensured.**

For the first time political rights of persons with disabilities were reflected in law. The participation rights of persons with disabilities in public life were introduced in the PPA 2022

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<sup>84</sup> The rights of the child are spelled out in the Constitution and in the Bill titled the 2022 Child Rights Act. The Act seeks to repeal and replace the 2007 Child Rights Act and the Children and Young Persons Act (Cap. 44) and would provide for the promotion of the rights of the child. Yet, it is pending in parliament since early 2023.

<sup>85</sup> According to the 2015 census, youth make up about 80 per cent of the population.

<sup>86</sup> According to West African Youth Network there were only some six candidates below 35 running for the parliament.

with a non-mandatory provision aiming to promote their greater inclusion on all levels of political parties. Similarly, the rules for assisted voting were revised in the PEA 2022 in accordance with international standards.<sup>87</sup> However, the right to vote and stand remains unduly restricted to persons of a sound mind.<sup>88</sup> While these steps represent measures of progress, meaningful inclusion to reflect constitutional guarantees of citizens' equality is yet to be achieved. According to census figures and the ECSL, persons with disabilities represent over one per cent of the entire population and some 0.6 per cent of registered voters.

The ECSL efforts to promote the participation of persons with disabilities were limited by the lack of general accessibility of public buildings and insufficient targeted reach of voter education. The ECSL coordinated measures to facilitate the participation of vulnerable groups through a dedicated inclusion department. Nevertheless, EU EOM observers noted that voter education was rarely designed to address persons with disabilities, and polling centres were not independently accessible for persons with reduced mobility or the elderly in over a half of EU EOM observations, contrary to national and international requirements.<sup>89</sup> Further, no alternative arrangements were considered, as assistive voting devices were rarely available. The tactile ballot guides were available in only half of the polling stations visited.

The two main political parties addressed needs of persons with disabilities in their manifestos, but those issues did not meaningfully feature in their campaigns and were not discussed in media. The SLPP claimed certain progress during their administration, including social protection schemes and cash transfers. The APC and SLPP both promised to aim at stronger policy mainstreaming to address needs of persons with disabilities, but neither ensured that their campaign activities and materials were accessible and adapted to for this group of voters. The public television SLBC was not translating their news bulletins in sign language. Sign language was only used during live broadcasts from results collation centres.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Ensure meaningful access to the electoral process for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, by targeted voter information campaigns, by granting independent access to polling stations, and by providing various assistive tools for independent voting.*

## XVI. CITIZEN AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS

### **Intimidation of credible citizen observer groups that offered an independent assessment of elections, signalled democratic backsliding.**

Election observation is clearly addressed in the legal framework, and accredited organisations are entitled to attend and observe all aspects of the electoral process, including registration,

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<sup>87</sup> [PPA](#), s.43 requires that political parties “shall endeavour to make adequate provisions for persons with disability in executive position from ward to national level”.

<sup>88</sup> [PEA](#), s.17(a) deprives the right to register from “lunatics within the meaning of an enactment in force in Sierra Leone.” UDHR, article 21, para. 2, “[...] equal access to public service [...]” [HRC GC 25](#), para. 15, “Persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements [...]”; CPRD, article 29 “States Parties shall [...] undertake to: a) Ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life.”

<sup>89</sup> The [2011, Persons with Disability Act](#), s.29: “The National Electoral Commission shall ensure that during elections, polling stations are made accessible to persons with disability [...]” [CRPD](#), art 29 states: “State Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others [...] by ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use.” [HRC GC 25](#) p.12 also states that “Positive measures should be taken to overcome [...] impediments to freedom of movement which prevent persons entitled to vote from exercising their rights effectively.”

polling, counting, and the compilation and announcement of results.<sup>90</sup> The law does not provide timeframes for accreditation nor any requirement for the ECSL to justify decisions not to accredit an applicant or provisions for the timely appeal against refusal of accreditation. In total, the ECSL accredited some 25,000 domestic and 1,000 international observers, as well as 2,500 journalists.

Citizen observers and faith-based organisations monitored different aspects and stages of the electoral process, with well-established groups issuing timely reports thus offering voters a non-partisan assessment of elections.<sup>91</sup> The largest citizen observer group, the National Election Watch (NEW) deployed 6,000 observers on election day, covering all polling centres, and was the only observer group that conducted a comprehensive parallel vote tabulation (PVT). In the morning of 27 June, NEW published a statement noting that according to the PVT results, Sierra Leoneans should prepare for a second round of presidential election. On the same day that the ECSL announced the presidential results, which declared Bio having won the election in the first round, NEW released its PVT results, and two days later, on 29 June, the Office of National Security (ONS) issued a press release which could be read in no other way than a possible threat to NEW's leadership. Public intimidation of citizen observers not only goes against regional and international commitments, but also signals prospective democratic backsliding.

The second largest group, the Elections Observer Network (EON), a newly created umbrella body, reported some 4,500 observers on election day. They did not publish any statement prior to the elections and released a brief positive assessment of elections two days after the polls. Several interlocutors perceived EON as a government friendly initiative set up to counter the potentially critical assessment by NEW. Concerns had been raised by civil society activists about the potential instrumentalisation of civil society organisations, who would echo the government's narrative and discredit non-partisan voices. EU EOM interlocutors also noted that while an overall conducive environment is being created for government-friendly organisations, the space is shrinking for voices of dissent.

International observer groups included the African Union, ECOWAS, the Commonwealth, and the Carter Center. Most stakeholders, including political parties, stressed the importance of international observer groups in contributing to the integrity of the electoral process.

## **XVII. ELECTORAL DISPUTES**

**Despite legislative revision, procedural timelines deter timely consideration of election-related matters, particularly before election day.**

### **a. Complaints and appeals.**

Adjudication of complaints and appeals has not been significantly reviewed in the new PEA, which does not provide for effective or timely remedies, especially for pre-election cases. Given the short time between the nomination of candidates and election day, decisions on objections to presidential aspirants may be delivered very close to the election day, whereas objections on parliamentary and local council candidates are decided by the ECSL and may be challenged in

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<sup>90</sup> Several mentions of observers are made in the [PEA](#), including in s.s.164 and 167. [HRC GC 25](#): "There should be independent scrutiny of the voting and counting process".

<sup>91</sup> Entities that published post-election statements included NEW, the Sierra Leone Bar Association, the Council of Churches Sierra Leone, and the Pentecostal Fellowship Sierra Leone.

court only after the elections, falling short of international standards by depriving aspiring contestants of the right to an effective remedy.<sup>92</sup>

Registrations of candidates were in general not objected to, with very few exceptions. The EU EOM became aware of one and two objections against parliamentary candidates in Kailahun and Kenema districts respectively, which were dismissed by the district office and therefore not appealed to the ECSL.<sup>93</sup> On 31 May, the Supreme Court concluded a case filed on 17 May challenging Samura Kamara's presidential candidacy with a court order striking out the case on procedural grounds.<sup>94</sup> Candidates for all races may be disqualified after a conviction and sentence for an offence involving fraud or dishonesty, with no statutory provision for a fresh nomination of a substitute candidate by the political party. In April, a criminal case pending before the High Court, involving, among others, the APC presidential candidate, was adjourned until after the elections, relieving political uncertainty and tensions and allowing for a smooth registration of presidential candidates. The indictment was initiated by the Anti-Corruption Commission in November 2021 over alleged funds' misappropriation during Samura Kamara's tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2014. A potential conviction a few days before elections could have deprived APC from contesting the presidential race. An appeal filed to the High Court by the Unity Party on 23 May against a decision made by the PPRC in April not allowing the party to contest the elections was not decided until after the elections.<sup>95</sup>

Two election-related cases were submitted in June but were not considered before election day. On 7 June the APC filed a case against ECSL in the High Court requesting orders directing the ECSL to release the disaggregated data of the voter register and to strictly comply with the legal provisions on tabulation and certification of results on a district level.<sup>96</sup> The court case followed an APC's letter to the ECSL requesting to provide the party with an electronic copy of the disaggregated voter register and a confirmation that compilation and certification of results would be performed by the District Returning Officers. On 12 June, the People's Movement for Democratic Change filed a case with the Supreme Court questioning the constitutionality of the Chief Electoral Commissioner's appointment and the handling of the electoral process by the ECSL.<sup>97</sup> Governed by regular procedural timeframes, those cases were not expedited by the court and therefore not heard before the elections, depriving the parties from an effective legal remedy and thus falling short of international and regional principles.<sup>98</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Allow for expedited adjudication of all election-related disputes before election day by adjusting court regulations and timelines and by permitting challenges to parliamentary candidates' registration to be brought to court before election day.*

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<sup>92</sup> [ICCPR](#), article 2(2): "[...] to adopt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights [...]" [UDHR](#), article 8: "Everyone has the right to an effective remedy [...]"

<sup>93</sup> Pursuant to [PEA](#), s.61(5) the right to appeal to the ECSL is granted only in the event of disqualification of a candidate.

<sup>94</sup> *Paul Kamara and Rev. Alimimay Coleson Turay v. Chairman of the ECSL, the ECSL, Dr. Samura Kamara and the APC, SC No 2 2023*. The respondents, namely the ECSL and the APC, had previously applied for dismissing the case for not complying with formal requirements. Given that the applicants did not file their statement of case within the deadline provided by the Supreme Court Rules, the case was automatically struck out.

<sup>95</sup> *Unity Party v. Political Party Regulations Commission CIV.APP. 2/23 2023 U.No.1* pursuant to [PPA](#), s.40(3).

<sup>96</sup> *The APC, The National Secretary General of the APC v. ECSL, the Chairman of ECSL, HC MISC 116/2023 A. No.6* was filed on 7 June and dismissed by the Court on 5 July for failure of the applicant to appear in court.

<sup>97</sup> *Patrick John, People's Movement for Democratic Party (PMDC) v. Mohamed Konneh, Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone, Attorney General*.

<sup>98</sup> [ECOWAS Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security](#), art.7: "Adequate arrangements shall be made to hear and dispose of all petitions relating to the conduct of elections and announcement of results."

Unless alternative resolution mechanisms are applied, electoral disputes are handled by courts, with *ad hoc* election tribunals established. On 11 May 2023, the Chief Justice appointed twenty judges to all regions and districts and assigned additional six to deal with cases across the country to the newly introduced Election Offences and Petitions Court (EOPC).

The courts are broadly accessible for addressing pre- and post-election disputes, including in some instances rights of appeal. Despite improved mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes, such as the establishment of the EOPC and the adoption of new rules governing their procedures,<sup>99</sup> the late appointment of the registrars and the subsequently delayed set up of EOPCs raised questions over their effectiveness during the campaign. The EU EOM observers reported no cases filed until after election day to the regional branches of the EOPC. Overall, trust in the judiciary in handling political cases is low amongst the electoral stakeholders of the opposition and smaller political parties. The judicial branch reportedly also suffers from financial constraints to fulfilling its tasks.

### **b. Electoral offences**

The PEA provides for campaign related offences and respective sanctions applied; offences listed in the POA fall under the competence of the magistrates' courts and are governed by regular court procedures, at times confusing stakeholders.

Throughout the campaign period the EU EOM received reports of arrests of party supporters and prolonged detentions beyond the constitutional deadline that clearly fall below international and regional standards.<sup>100</sup> On 9 May, 11 APC supporters were arrested at different locations in Pujehun district and subsequently detained at the police station in Bo for allegedly disorderly behaviour during celebrations that followed the nomination of an APC local council candidate. The EU EOM was informed that they were only released on bail after several appearances before the court. The case was still pending before the Bo Magistrate's court at end of July. Another case of an attack on an independent candidate allegedly by an SLPP supporter during the campaign was dismissed by Moyamba Magistrates' court. On 13 June, 13 persons were arrested in Western Rural and detained in Waterloo police station allegedly for carrying placards containing election-related slogans. They were only released after seven days while ten persons were charged under the POA.

Further instances of harassment or assaults during the campaign period were reported to the EU EOM but did not reach the courts reportedly due to lack of evidence or witnesses. Interlocutors noted that witnesses often feel intimidated, or evidence is hard to collect. Arthur Pearce, a well-known APC supporter, was arrested on 10 June and detained at the Criminal Investigations Department without been formally charged, while attempts at securing bail by his lawyers were denied. An application requesting his release on the grounds of unjustified prolonged detention was not timely assigned to a judge and ultimately abandoned after his release on 20 June.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> The Public Elections (Petitions) Rules, 2022.

<sup>100</sup> Contrary to [Constitution](#), s.17(3)(b) and [ICCPR](#), article 9.1: "Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law" and article 9.4: "Anyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings before a court, in order that that court may decide without delay on the lawfulness of his detention and order his release if the detention is not lawful." [UDHR](#), article 9: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile". [ACHPR](#), article 6: "Every individual shall have the right to liberty and to the security of his person. No one may be deprived of his freedom except for reasons and conditions previously laid down by law. In particular, no one may be arbitrarily arrested or detained."

<sup>101</sup> *Arthur E. Pearce v. AG, IGP and CID* MISC. APP. 57/23 filed on 14 June in the High Court.



Overall, stakeholders expressed low trust in law enforcement bodies due to alleged biased behaviour.

### c. Challenging election results

The renewed EOPC has an expanded mandate to hear civil cases, including election petitions. However, the revised jurisdiction resulted in conflicting provisions both within the PEA and with the Constitution over the jurisdiction of presidential election results petitions.<sup>102</sup>

Any citizen who voted may challenge the validity of the presidential election by petition to the Supreme Court within seven days of the declaration of the results. Apart from specific provisions on candidates' qualifications, the law does not specify the grounds on which an election may be invalidated or detail the threshold of evidence required to substantiate claims. Notably, no specific provisions are made for the possibility of invalidating an election after assumption of office or in the event of a run-off there is no legal provision for challenging the results of the first round, which, combined with recent jurisprudence, leaves a gap in the law.<sup>103</sup> Further provisions for possible challenges to presidential election do not allow for an effective and timely legal redress, since no specific deadlines for a court ruling are foreseen.

**RECOMMENDATION: *Introduce timelines ensuring speedy consideration of petitions against presidential election results before assumption of office. Provide for the possibility of challenging the results of the first round in the event of a run-off.***

For parliamentary elections, only voters registered in the respective district, or persons who claim to have been elected or to have had the right to stand, may challenge the election, by petition to the EOPC within 21 days upon publication of the results in the Gazette. According to the 2022 Public Election (Petition) Rules, the EOPC has approximately four months to issue a judgment, which then can be appealed within 14 days to the Court of Appeal. Under the general constitutional provision, the latter is bound by a three-month time limit upon conclusion of evidence and final addresses to deliver its judgment.<sup>104</sup> The lack of a deadline for publishing parliamentary results may detract from the expedited procedure of adjudication of election petitions in the revised framework.

Possible effects of a petition include an order to inspect election materials and the EOPC must thereby determine whether a person was duly elected, or the election was void.<sup>105</sup> An election will not be held void solely on the grounds of non-compliance with the PEA if conducted in line with the principles laid down therein or the results were not affected. When the EOPC determines that a person was not duly elected, then the candidate's seat becomes vacant, regardless of whether an appeal is lodged against the decision.<sup>106</sup> For elections conducted under the PR system, parliamentary vacancies are filled by the next-in-line candidate in the political party list.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> [PEA](#), s.144.

<sup>103</sup> [Constitution](#), s.45(1)(b) provides for a challenge to the validity of the election of an individual and not to the process as such. The Supreme Court in the petition [SC/CIV. 6 and 7/2018 Dr. Sylvia Olavinka Blyden, Dr. Samura Matthew Wilson Kamara, Hon. Alhaji Minkailu Mansaray, Dr. Osman Foday Yansaneh v. The Chief Electoral Commissioner, National Electoral Commission, His Excellency Julius Maada Bio, SLPP](#) filed after the second round of the 2018 election, ruled that the petitioner could not reference the conduct of the election in the first round as the seven-day deadline had elapsed.

<sup>104</sup> Relevant provisions: [Constitution](#), s.78(2)(4), [PEA](#), s.144-153, Public Election (Petition) Rules, 2022.

<sup>105</sup> [PEA](#), s.147(b), 148-153, [Constitution](#), s.38A.

<sup>106</sup> In the latter case, the seat remains vacant until a decision is reached by the Court of Appeal, or the appeal is abandoned.

<sup>107</sup> [Constitution](#), s.38A and [Statutory Instrument of N°14 of 2022, The Public Elections \(District Block Proportional Representation System\) Regulations 2002](#).

## XVIII. VOTING, COUNTING AND TABULATION OF RESULTS

**Critical lack of transparency during the tabulation of results eroded trust in the credibility of the elections.**

### a. Opening, voting, closing, and counting

The election day was generally calm, yet several isolated violent incidents disturbed the polling and counting. Tensions in some polling stations were directly observed by the EU EOM and in nine cases observers could not finish their observation of voting or counting due to insecurities.

The opening of polling stations was delayed in nearly all polling stations visited, due to the late reception of essential and sensitive material, as well as the lack of preparedness of, or absent polling staff. The longest delays were reported in Kono and Western Urban Freetown, where at some polling stations voting started as late as five hours after the scheduled opening. On election day the ECSL did not comprehensively explain reasons for delays. The EU EOM observers negatively assessed the opening in 19 out of 43 polling stations observed across all 16 districts.

The overall conduct of the voting was positively assessed in 92 per cent of the polling stations observed, with procedures mostly followed except for the verification of voters' finger for ink mark. Other procedural deviations included the addition of voters in supplementary voter lists without having the ECSL authorisation certificate and allowing voters with a VID who were not registered in the polling station to vote. In one third of polling stations observed, the polling staff did not read the name of voters, and as the number of registered voters per polling station was neither published nor included in the result and reconciliation form, party agents and observers could not adequately scrutinise voter lists' integrity.

Overall, polling staff shared information with the EU EOM and worked in a transparent manner, with exception of one instance in Kono where EU EOM observers were denied entry to a polling station and two instances in Kenema and Kono where the presiding officers were refusing to respond to observers' questions. The EU EOM observers noted that some polling staff was absent in a number of polling stations, mostly queue and ballot box controllers (in 27 per cent of polling stations visited). Throughout the day long queues were noted in 40 per cent out of the 353 polling stations observed. Women represented 47 per cent of all polling staff members in observed stations.

Essential materials were missing in 21 polling stations observed, mostly material transfer and result and reconciliation forms, but also insufficient ballot papers. Voting ended early in two observed polling stations due to lack of ballots, compromising voters' right to vote. The EU EOM was informed of similar cases from across the country, including from Freetown where infrastructure allowed timely corrections to prevent early closing of polling stations. Inadequate logistical planning and the inability to promptly address logistical shortcomings, especially in Freetown, reduced confidence in the process. The secrecy of vote was not ensured in nearly 20 per cent of observed polling stations due to layout of the polling station and configuration of the voting screen.

Closing and counting were generally transparent and calm in the polling stations observed. However, in 3 out of 42 cases the EU EOM observers could not finish the observation due to rising tensions. 10 polling stations observed closed after the designated time due to long queues, in line with the regulation, whereas in two other cases voting was officially extended to compensate for the late opening, contrary to the ECSL instructions. Inconsistent instructions on extension of polling hours were observed by the EU EOM during ECSL's trainings.

Counting procedures were largely followed in polling stations observed, although the sequence for processing different elections varied. In 13 out of 42 observed cases, polling staff had difficulties to fill the result and reconciliation forms (RRF), but figures mostly reconciled. In nearly all cases the electronic transmission of results from polling stations was not successful, due to either malfunctioning of the tablet or lack of internet connection.

During opening, voting and counting, party agents from SLPP and APC were present in nearly all observed polling stations, with the exception of the district of Pujehun, where APC agents were disproportionately underrepresented, with presence in only 17 per cent of polling stations visited. Citizen observers, primarily NEW and EON, were less represented, with presence in 50 per cent and 25 per cent of visited polling stations, respectively.

On election day intimidation and violent incidents were reported by police, media, citizen, and international observers in six districts, and live ammunition was fired in Port Loko, Freetown and Koinadugu, creating insecurities for voters and poll workers alike. The EU EOM directly observed violence and unrest inside nine polling stations during voting, closing or counting, including in Port Loko, Western Urban, Tonkolili, Kambia and Freetown, primarily caused by delays or voters not being able to find their names on the list or tensions closer to the end of voting. Further confirmed election day incidents included the burning down of a house of the APC parliamentary candidate in Bonthe and the evacuation of APC agents from Pujehun due to threats. EU EOM observers also saw the SLPP chief campaigner bussing Sierra Leonean voters residing in Guinea into Kambia. The ECSL reported intimidation of election staff and destruction of voter register in several polling stations.

Preliminary turnout figures were not announced after the closing.

#### **b. Tabulation and announcement of results**

The reception of materials at district level was slow, sometimes disorganised, and procedural omissions were observed in all 15 district collection centres observed. Contrary to procedures, some 38 per cent of tamper evident envelopes (TEEs) received were not sealed. Other observed procedural irregularities included TEEs being opened to verify their content prior to their transmission to the regional tally centre and at times also to capture the result forms for electronic transmission. In two instances, EU EOM observers observed changes being made to the RRFs in Kono and Freetown, outside of the verification process. Party agents and observers were very rarely present at the intake of materials at the district level. Overall, meaningful observation of this phase proved to be difficult, as procedures were not published, and the plans for retrieval of materials were not shared with the EU EOM observers in most districts.

Result tabulation at regional tally centres was not transparent and EU EOM observers could not meaningfully observe the process. Tallying begun slowly in the morning of 25 June, in the presence of party agents, citizen and international observers. The workflow between the material intake of RRF and their data entry was well organised. Projection screens were not used, contrary to ECSL's initial indication. Two regional certifying officers informed the EU EOM that last-minute instructions precluded use of the projectors and further instructions on how to communicate at the tally centres were not given. As a result, in all five tally centres no progressive release of information was provided on polling station results received, processed, audited, and excluded per district. The reasons for the exclusions of results or number of voters concerned were not communicated.



Unrest and tensions were directly witnessed by EU EOM in tally centres in Port Loko, Freetown and Makeni. Overall, the right to access information during the tabulation and to effective remedy thereafter were not guaranteed, contrary to regional and international commitments.<sup>108</sup>

District and regional certification of the results was not made public, and no information was shared as to when it was conducted prior to the announcement of results at the national level.

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** *The ECSL to establish and publish detailed procedures for the tabulation and announcement of results, as well as put in place a robust, transparent, and easily verifiable results processing system well ahead of election days.*

Announcement of results was not accompanied by prompt publication of results data, thus preventing independent scrutiny and eroding trust in the credibility of the elections. Partial results for presidential elections were released on 26 June through a press release posted on the ECSL social media accounts. On 27 June, the ECSL Chairman formally announced the final results of the presidential race. Result totals were first published on ECSL website but removed a day later. On 1 July the results for parliamentary, chairpersons and mayoral elections were read out, but not published on the ECSL website or its official social media accounts, hence making live broadcasts from the national tally centre the only public source of information. Those results per district were placed online only in the late evening of 3 July; final results per district for the presidential elections were not published.

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION:** *Publish on the ECSL website comprehensive election results data by polling station, including results per candidate and per party, the number of registered voters and of valid and invalid votes, in a timely manner and in an easily trackable and downloadable database format.*

The ECSL did not publish online disaggregated results and turnout by polling station, preventing voters, observers, and parties from comparing the result forms provided at polling station level with final results data and thus limiting stakeholders' ability to verify and challenge the results. The ECSL reported a total of one per cent of all polling stations nationwide being excluded from the presidential count, yet the specific polling stations that were excluded, their distribution per district or region, or the reasons for the exclusion of specific polling stations was not provided. The percentage of polling station results excluded from the parliamentary count per district ranged from 0.2 per cent in Pujehun to 6.6 per cent in Kailahun, per region it ranged from 0.6 per cent in the West to 4.4 percent in the North. For the parliamentary elections also neither the list of polling stations, nor reasons for exclusion were published.

The RRF do not include the number of voters registered, added to the supplementary voter list and who signed/thumb printed the voter list, reducing the transparency and accountability of turnout data and preventing reconciliation with the number of votes cast. These omissions are

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<sup>108</sup> [UNCAC](#) art. 13.1: "State parties shall promote the active participation of individuals and groups [by] ensuring that the public has effective access to information." [ACDEG](#) art.3.8 requires "Transparency and fairness in the management of public affairs." [HRC GC 34](#), p.18: "State parties should proactively put in the public domain Government information of public interest" and "make every effort to ensure easy, prompt, effective and practical access to such information".

contrary to the general principles of transparency and the right to information enshrined in regional and international instruments.<sup>109</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Enhance the transparency and integrity of the elections by including in the results and reconciliation form reconciliation between votes cast and the number of voters included in the final register of voters and added on the supplementary voters list, and voters who received ballots as confirmed by signatures or thumbprints in the final register of voters.*

## **XIX. RESULTS AND POST-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT**

**Threats against credible civil society organisations and statistical inconsistencies in results data compromised the democratic process.**

### **a. Publication of results**

According to the results, as announced by the ECSL, President Julius Maada Bio of the SLPP secured his second term with 56.17 of the valid votes, thereby meeting the constitutional 55 per cent threshold for the first round. The APC's presidential candidate got 41.16 per cent, whereas the other 11 candidates together accumulated to 2.67 per cent of the valid votes. The parliamentary results allocated to the SLPP 81 seats (60 per cent) and to the APC 54 seats (40 per cent), out of the directly elected 135 seats.<sup>110</sup> No other party or an independent candidate surpassed a 11.9 per cent threshold to enter the legislative chamber.

The results, released at various stages of the process, showed several mathematical impossibilities. For example, for the presidential election the results data of the first batch (representing 60 per cent of polling stations) released by the ECSL for Kailahun district indicated that in 407 polling stations 153,668 votes were cast. This is mathematically improbable, even if all the biggest polling stations of the district were taken into account.<sup>111</sup> There were also mathematically improbable results in the first batch from Bo and Bonthe district. The statistical inconsistencies between the first and second batch of presidential results included notable discrepancies in the number of average valid votes per polling station, varying from a decrease of 75 per cent in Karene to an increase of 31 per cent in Kono. There were also very high turnouts exceeding 95 per cent in three districts and 90 per cent in further two districts, as well as a strikingly low number of invalid votes nationwide of just 0.4 per cent, significantly lower than previous elections.

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<sup>109</sup> See [ICCPR](#) art.19.2: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas"; and [UNCAC](#) art. 13.1: "State parties shall promote the active participation of individuals and groups [by] ensuring that the public has effective access to information." See also [HRC GC 34](#), p.18 "State parties should make every effort to ensure easy, prompt, effective and practical access to information (of public interest)."

<sup>110</sup> Results of parliamentary and the local council election were published in Gazette on the 20 and 26 July respectively.

<sup>111</sup> The ECSL informed the EU EOM that in each polling centre all but the last polling station (PS) has 300 registered voters, and only the last PS in a PC can have a maximum of up to 400 voters. Kailahun district has 679 polling stations, of which 94 have more than 300 voters; 435 PS have 300 voters and the rest less than 300. If the ECSL had included all the 94 PS with more than 300 voters and 313 with 300 voters the maximum of votes cast could have been 126,687 votes, 26,981 short of the number announced by the ECSL in their first batch. Similar patterns were observed in Bo (11,225 votes more than the maximum number of possible voters) and Bonthe (5,111 votes more than the maximum number of possible voters). In Kenema to obtain reported number of voters only 161 of them should not be present on the election day, which constitutes 0.05 per cent of all voters in the district.

When comparing the turnout between parliamentary and presidential elections,<sup>112</sup> further statistical inconsistencies become apparent.<sup>113</sup> Four districts (Falaba, Bo, Bonthe and Moyamba) registered a parliamentary turnout that was substantially lower than for the presidential elections, with a decrease ranging from 13.7 per cent points to 23.9 per cent points.<sup>114</sup> Sharp parliamentary turnout increases as compared to the presidential turnout were registered in Western Urban and Western Rural, by some 14 percentage points, bringing the turnout in Western Rural to the highly improbable level of 98.5 per cent. Also, Pujehun (south) had an increase of 5.5 per cent points, bringing the turnout to the 97.9 per cent, also questionable. The highly improbable turnout figures and the statistical inconsistencies between the two races, compounded by a very low number of invalid votes, further increased the doubts among stakeholders and the public about the credibility of the results as announced by the ECSL.

The SLPP won 4 mayoral seats and 8 local chairpersons, while the APC gained 3 mayorship, including Freetown, and 7 local chairpersons.

### b. Post-election developments

The immediate post-election period gave credence to concerns about the shrinking of the civic and political space and was characterised by high tensions. There was an unprovoked use of force by the security agencies against the APC, firing tear gas canisters and live ammunition at the party headquarters on 25 June when the APC leadership, including the presidential candidate, was in the building; standoff resulted in one fatality.<sup>115</sup>

The NEW faced a coordinated disinformation campaign aiming to discredit the organisation, underpinned by a range of intimidating public pronouncements from state and non-state actors.<sup>116</sup> On 27 June NEW published the results of its PVT, indicating that neither presidential candidate secured 55 per cent of the votes in the first round and that a run-off would have to be expected. NEW reportedly tried in vain to engage the ECSL prior to the publication of the results. Instead, the organisation came under heavy attacks on traditional and social media, as well as by some national CSOs and the SLPP. On 29 June, the Office of National Security (ONS) issued a press release against the publication of PVT on the potential implications to national security. The ONS qualified the publication as an act against the Constitution intending to provoke undue tension by arbitrarily interpreting constitutional provisions. It was viewed by many, including by the EU EOM, as intimidating and possibly foreshadowing an arrest. ONS's undue intervention led to the NEW leadership fleeing the country and was viewed by some civil society actors as going beyond the ONS powers.<sup>117</sup> Threats of arrest based on standard observation activities

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<sup>112</sup> The results data for the presidential election by district was released on 27 June. The document was not signed or stamped by ECSL, but the sum for all districts for all candidates matches with the numbers read out by the ECSL Chairman during the announcement of presidential results. The ECSL never debunked this results data.

<sup>113</sup> Voters added to the supplementary voter lists may cause some disparities, yet such a notable difference would indicate that many voters had cast the ballot for one election and not the other. The EU EOM observers did not observe such practices.

<sup>114</sup> Falaba (north) with a turnout decrease of 23.9 per cent points (from 80.2 to a 56.3 per cent); Bo (south) with minus of 13.7 per cent points (to 78 from 91.6 per cent), Bonthe (south) with a minus of 15.4 per cent points (to 80.3 down from 95.6 per cent), Moyamba (south) with minus 15.9 per cent points (to 73.3 from 89.2 per cent).

<sup>115</sup> Police denied using live ammunition during the standoff. Independently verified video footage as well as eye-witness accounts give very strong credence to the claims that live ammunition was fired.

<sup>116</sup> [ACDEG](#), art. 22 stipulates that “*State Parties shall create a conducive environment for independent and impartial national monitoring or observation mechanisms.*” [ICCP](#), art. 9.1 states that “*Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention.*”

<sup>117</sup> The Press Release refers to [Constitution](#), s.93 (Committees in Parliament) which is irrelevant to the election process; [Constitution](#), s.33, which refers to the powers of the ECSL, does not include any provision stating that “the ECSL is the sole state organ recognized by law to proclaim election results in Sierra Leone” as alleged in the Press Release. Notably, NEW did not claim to provide official election results, only disclosed the results of the PVT.

implemented with a professional methodology and in the framework of a MoU with the ECSL directly contravene regional and international principles on the right and opportunity to participate in public affairs and freedom of expression.<sup>118</sup>

Most media reported extensively on post-election developments, including violent incidents. The public broadcaster SLBC and the largest commercial broadcaster AYV did not cover post-electoral violence and refrained from news reports that could be perceived as critical to the ECSL, ONS or other governmental bodies. However, both provided space to invited experts for their negative assessment of the EU and NEW observation activities.

The APC leadership rejected the result, calling for a fresh election within six months “to be overseen by credible individuals and institutions who will ensure a fair and transparent process.” The APC also demanded the resignation of the ECSL commissioners and the heads of security bodies and judiciary as well as the imposition of travel bans on those officials, the President, and several members of government. The party also declared that none of their elected officials would take up their seats in the parliament or as a mayor or a local council chair, including the elected mayor of Freetown. All but one APC member of the parliament did not participate in the first seating on 13 July.<sup>119</sup> Citing lack of trust in the Judiciary and absence of clear timelines for such cases, APC decided not to challenge the presidential election in court.

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<sup>118</sup> [ACDEG](#), art. 22 stipulates that “*State Parties shall create a conducive environment for independent and impartial national monitoring or observation mechanisms.*” [ICCPR](#), art. 9.1 states that “*Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention.*”

<sup>119</sup> Mohammed Bangura elected on the APC ticket from Karene took the Oath of office of Members of Parliament and subsequently was expelled from the party.

**XX. RECOMMENDATIONS**

NO.	FR page #	CONTEXT	RECOMMENDATION	SUGGESTED CHANGE IN LEGAL FRAMEWORK	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL / REGIONAL PRINCIPLE / COMMITMENT
<b>LEGAL FRAMEWORK</b>						
1	13	Legal provisions are not sufficiently elaborated, several sections of the law still are lacking clarity, and other vaguely drafted provisions that leave undue scope for arbitrary interpretation. These include provisions on the announcement of election results, campaign finance issues related to or enforcement of sanctions for campaign violations, as well as on mechanisms for certain aspects of dispute resolution. Other laws lack significant term definitions leaving room for arbitrary enforcement.	<i>Ensure legal certainty for all aspects and stages of the electoral process by removing from the Constitution and PEA conflicting sections and ambiguities that leave undue scope for arbitrary interpretation, through an inclusive revision process.</i>	PEA Constitution	Parliament ECSL	<p><b>Rule of law</b></p> <p><b>ICCPR, art.25.</b> ICCPR, HRC GC 25, para. 20: “...This implies that voters should be protected [...] from any unlawful or arbitrary interference.”</p> <p><b>UNCAC, art.7(4):</b> “Each State Party shall, [...] adopt, maintain and strengthen systems that promote transparency and prevent conflicts of interest.”</p> <p><b>ACDEG, art.2:</b> “Promote and enhance adherence to the principle of the rule of law premised upon the respect for, and the supremacy of, the Constitution”</p>
<b>ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION</b>						
2	14	ECSL commissioners are appointed by the president upon consultation with the heads of all political parties and subject to parliamentary approval. The appointment procedure has always been criticised by whichever parties are in the opposition for	<i>Establish an inclusive appointment process for ECSL commissioners including formalised consultations. Considerations could be given to introducing criteria and measures to ensure equal and merit-based access to the election</i>	Clarifications/ Precisions in PEA, s.2	The President Parliament	<p><b>Taking steps to give effect to rights.</b></p> <p><b>Freedom from discrimination</b></p> <p><b>Prevention of corruption</b></p> <p><b>ACDEG, art.17.1:</b> “State Parties shall Establish and strengthen independent and impartial national electoral bodies.”</p>

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		impinging on the ECSL institutional independence. The consultation process is not formalised, and alongside questions over the parliamentary approval, does not ensure inclusivity. It negatively affects trust in the ECSL and perception of its institutional independence.	<i>administration.</i>			<p><b>ICCPR, GC 25, p.20:</b> “An independent electoral authority should be established to supervise the electoral process and to ensure that it is conducted fairly, impartially and in accordance with established laws .”</p> <p><b>ECOWAS Protocol, art.3:</b> “The bodies responsible for organising the elections shall be independent or neutral and shall have the confidence of all the political actors.”</p>
3	15	The ECSL did not publish most of its decisions, regulations, procedures. This reduced the transparency in the process and information about decisions made, as well as diminished institutional accountability.	<i>Introduce a legal obligation for the ECSL to publish timely, including online, all ECSL decisions, regulations, and procedures, while also guaranteeing their continued online accessibility.</i>	ECSL regulation or procedures  Possibly inclusion of new article in the PEA	ECSL Parliament	<p><b>Transparency and access to information</b></p> <p><b>ICCPR, art.19.2</b> “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive [...] information.”</p> <p><b>ACDEG, art.15.8</b> “Transparency and fairness in the management of public affairs.”</p>
4	16	Civic and voter education rarely targeted women, youth, and various vulnerable groups, and most stakeholders noted that voters were not fully aware of various aspects of the electoral process. For example, first-time voters were not aware of	<i>Conduct continuous campaigns to ensure all eligible voters are duly recorded in the civil register and develop targeted civic and voter education with a continued collaboration between the ECSL other governmental institutions,</i>	No legal reform needed	ECSL Ministry of Information Media Organisations CSOs	<p><b>Right and opportunity to participate in public affairs.</b></p> <p><b>Freedom from discrimination</b></p> <p><b>UNCAC, art.13:</b> “State parties shall promote active participation [through] measures as: (b) Ensuring that the public has</p>



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		the necessity to be included in the civil registry to register as a voter, many voters did not know how under the PR system their votes would translate into the parliamentary and local council seats, many were not fully familiar with the gender quota. Broader civic education related to responsible participation in elections was also lacking.	<i>civil society, and media.</i>			<i>effective access to information” ICCPR, GC 25, p.11: “Voter education and registration campaigns are necessary to ensure the effective exercise of Article 25 rights by an informed community.”</i>
<b>VOTER REGISTRATION</b>						
5	17	Despite existing legal provisions, no arrangements were made to registering and subsequently for voting of persons in pre-trial detention for 2023 elections.	<i>Ensure the right to vote by making arrangements to facilitate registration and voting for prisoners on remand.</i>	No change in legal framework required	ECSL	<b>Right and opportunity to vote.</b> ICCPR, art.25. ICCPR, HRC GC 25, para. 11: “...Where registration of voters is required, it should be facilitated and obstacles to such registration should not be imposed [...].” ACHR, art.3: “Every individual shall be equal before the law...Every individual shall be entitled to equal protection of the law”
6	18	The final voter register per polling station was neither published nor shared with stakeholders. Also, voters were not provided the opportunity to correct misspelled names or erroneous dates of birth,	<b>PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION</b> <i>Publish the final voter register per polling station and per polling center in a timely manner and allow voters to verify and correct</i>	ECSL regulation or procedure	ECSL	<b>Right to vote</b> UNCAC, art.13.1: “state parties shall promote the active participation of individuals and groups [by] ensuring that the public has effective access to information.”



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		reducing the accuracy of the voter register.	<i>all their details.</i>			<p><b>ECOWAS Protocol, art.5:</b> “The voters’ lists shall be prepared in a transparent and reliable manner, with the collaboration of the political parties and voters who may have access to them whenever the need arises.”</p> <p><b>ICCPR GC 25 para 11:</b> “States must take effective measures to ensure that all persons entitled to vote are able to exercise that right”</p>
<b>CANDIDATE REGISTRATION</b>						
7	19	Undue restrictions on the right to stand for election include the ban of independent candidates for presidential office, and requirement for civil servants who would like to contest the presidential, parliamentary and/or local council election to resign 12 months before the polls.	<i>Protect the right to stand by removing undue restrictions, including the requirement for civil servants to resign from public office 12 months before election, and allow for independent candidates to run for presidential office.</i>	PEA, Constitution	Parliament	<p><b>Right and opportunity to participate in public affairs.</b></p> <p><b>ICCPR, art.25, para. (c)</b> “To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.”</p> <p><b>ICCPR, HRC GC 25, para.17,</b> “The right of persons to stand for election should not be limited unreasonably by requiring candidates to be members of parties or of specific parties.”</p>
<b>CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT</b>						
8	21	Political violence a week before the polls disrupted the playing field in at least six districts. Districts most affected by political violence were	<p><b>PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION</b></p> <p><i>Ensure safety and security for all candidates through a timely</i></p>	No change in legal framework required	Security Agencies	<p><b>Freedom of expression, assembly and association</b></p> <p><b>ICCPR, art.19.2:</b> “Everyone shall</p>

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		<p>Kailahun, Pujehun, Kenema, and Bo in the south and east, as well Kambia in the north-west, all of them except for Kambia strongholds of the SLPP. Most assaults of party supporters and attacks on party offices or private properties of politicians went unpunished. The PPRC also noted that sanctions for campaign violations cannot be enforced before the police have concluded their investigations. It shrank the space for political participation in south and south-east.</p>	<p><i>conclusion of investigations, holding perpetrators of violence accountable, and enabling the PPRC to act effectively upon violations of campaign rules.</i></p>			<p><i>have the right to freedom of expression”.</i>                      ICCPR, art.21: <i>“The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized.”</i>                      Art.25: <i>“Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;”</i></p>
9	22	<p>The abuse of state resources and public office during rallies as well as campaign by government officials gave an undue advantage to the ruling party. Official websites and social media accounts of ministries and the presidency were also used for campaign purposes. Neither the PPRC nor any other state authority took action to ensure adherence to the PPA and the PEA, which explicitly prohibits use of state resources, facilities or officials for campaigning.</p>	<p><b>PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION</b>  <i>Ensure enforcement of legal restrictions on the misuse of state resources and explicitly prohibit the use of official functions, as well as government websites and social media accounts for campaign purposes.</i></p>	PEA	PPRC ECSL	<p><b>Prevention of corruption</b>  <b>Fairness in the election campaign</b>                      ACHR, art. 13(2) &amp; (3): <i>“Every individual shall have the right of access to public property and services in strict equality [...] .”</i>                      ECOWAS Protocol, art.38(1) <i>“Member States undertake to fight corruption and manage their national resources in a transparent manner, ensuring that they are equitably distributed.”</i>                      ICCPR, HRC GC 25, par.19 <i>“Persons entitled to vote must be</i></p>

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						<i>free to vote for any candidate [...] without undue influence or coercion of any kind which may distort or inhibit the free expression of the elector's will."</i>
<b>CAMPAIGN FINANCE</b>						
10	23	The PPA neither provides for interim reporting nor introduces fair ceilings on income or spending. The PPRC did not apply its statutory powers to impose such limits or require disclosure of information. Media, contrary to legal obligations did not offer the same advertising prices for all contestants and price lists were not public. Overall, many aspects of campaign finance, such as obligations for accounting and reporting, are inadequately elaborated, and compounded by limited enforcement during elections did not ensure equal opportunities for contestants.	<b>PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION</b> <i>Ensure transparency in campaign finance by introducing caps for campaign revenues and expenses and clear rules of reporting and public disclosure before, during, and after the elections, including by the media, and by implementing robust sanctions for noncompliance.</i>	Introduction of regulations by PPRC pursuant to PPA, s.45(3) or amendment of PPA	PPRC Parliament IMC	<b>Transparency</b> <b>Prevention of Corruption</b> <b>ICCPR, HRC GC 25, para.19:</b> <i>"Reasonable limitations on campaign expenditure may be justified where this is necessary to ensure that [...] the democratic process is not distorted by the disproportionate expenditure on behalf of any candidate or party."</i> <b>UNCAC, art.7(3):</b> <i>"Each State Party shall also consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures [...] to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office."</i>
<b>MEDIA</b>						
11	25	The Chairman of Independent Media Commission is appointed by the President and the financial	<i>Protect the independence of the media regulator by granting in the law financial independence and</i>	IMC Act (2020)	Parliament IMC Ministry of	<b>Freedom of opinion and expression</b> <b>Right to access to information</b> <b>The Declaration of Principles on</b>

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		<p>independence is not ensured either by law or in practice. The IMC does not receive necessary funding in a timely manner, which makes it difficult for the regulator to fulfil its duties. Furthermore, allocation of funding depends on the government's decisions, which makes the institution vulnerable to political pressure.</p>	<p><i>sustainability of the IMC, as well as by further facilitating the autonomy of the IMC, with the Chairman being appointed by an independent board of media professionals and legal experts, through an open, inclusive and competitive pre-selection process.</i></p>		<p>Information and Communications</p>	<p><b>Freedom of Expression in Africa (DPFEA), principle 17.1.</b> “A public regulatory authority that exercises powers in the areas of broadcast [...] shall be independent and adequately protected against interference of a political, commercial or other nature. 2. The appointment process for members of a public regulatory body [...] shall be independent and adequately protected against interference. The processes shall be open, transparent and involve the participation of relevant stakeholders.”</p>
12	26	<p>The Director General of the SLBC is appointed by the President and approved by the Parliament. The SLBC funding, approved by the Parliament, did not always reach regional offices, impeding their operations. Such legal and operational standing makes the SLBC subservient to the government, which was evidenced by public broadcasters' election coverage. Some 90 per cent of all prime-time news were devoted to</p>	<p><i>Ensure the citizens' right of access to information by transforming Sierra Leone Broadcast Corporation into a genuine public service broadcaster. This includes a clear legal separation of SLBC from any government institution, and an open and competitive pre-selection process for the appointment of the management, with the participation of industry professionals, and by an independent board.</i></p>	<p>The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation Act (2009)</p>	<p>Parliament President  The Ministry of Information and Communications SLBC</p>	<p><b>Freedom of opinion and expression</b> <b>DPFEA, principle 13:</b> “States shall establish public service media governed by a transparently constituted and diverse board adequately protected against undue interference of a political, commercial or other nature. 2. The senior management of public service media shall be appointed by and accountable to the board. 3. The editorial independence of</p>

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		the president, the government and the SLPP.				<p><i>public service media shall be guaranteed. 4. Public service media shall be adequately funded.”</i></p> <p><b>ICCPR, art.19, HRC GC 34, para.16</b> “States parties should ensure that public broadcasting services operate in an independent manner, [...] guarantee their independence [...] provide funding in a manner that does not undermine their independence.”</p>
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL RIGHTS</b>						
13	28	<p>Low levels of education and very limited digital skills of most social media users were among the key reasons why misleading or manipulated information was shared so broadly. Only 47.7 per cent of adult population know how to write and read, but 60 per cent have access to 3G technology which is sufficient to share WhatsApp messages. The newly established national fact-checking initiative made a positive contribution to safeguarding the information environment, it did not have sufficient time to educate social media users on the danger of disinformation. Also Meta did not</p>	<p><i>Promote the independent formation of voters' opinions by developing inclusive media and digital literacy programmes in close collaboration with civil society, fact-checking initiatives, professional media organisations and tech platforms.</i></p>	<p>No legal changes required</p>	<p>Ministry of Information Ministry of Education</p> <p>Civil Society Organisations Media outlets Meta, Google and TikTok</p>	<p><b>Right to participate in public affairs</b></p> <p><b>Freedom of expression and opinion</b></p> <p><b>ICCPR, GC 25</b> “Voters should be able to form opinions independently, free of violence or threat of violence, compulsion, inducement or manipulative interference of any kind.”</p> <p><b>UN, OSCE, OAS, ACHPR Joint declaration on freedom of expression and “fake news”, disinformation and propaganda, 3 March 2017, 6(a):</b> “All stakeholders – including</p>

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		carry out any digital and media literacy programs prior to 2023 elections.				<i>intermediaries, media outlets, civil society and academia – should be supported in developing participatory and transparent initiatives for creating a better understanding of the impact of disinformation and propaganda on democracy freedom of expression, journalism and civic space, as well as appropriate responses to these phenomena.”</i>
14	27	The 2021 Cyber Security and Crime Act (CSCA) contains vague definitions for various cybercrimes. It does not accord with international standards and leaves room for law enforcement bodies and politicians to exert pressure on critical voices and trigger self-censorship.	<b>PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION</b> <i>Protect freedom of expression by clearly aligning the definitions of “cyber-terrorism”, “cyber-stalking”, “cyber-bullying” and “incendiary information” with relevant regional and international standards.</i>	Amendment of CSCA	President Parliament Ministry of Justice	<b>Freedom of expression and opinion</b> <b>ICCPR, art.19:</b> “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression [...]” <b>ICCPR, art.19, HRC GC 34, para.35</b> “When a state party invokes a legitimate ground for restriction of freedom of expression, it must demonstrate in specific and individualized fashion the precise nature of the threat, and the necessity and proportionality of the specific action taken, in particular by establishing a direct and immediate connection between the expression and the threat.” <b>DPFEA, art.13(1)</b> “States shall



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						<i>review all criminal restrictions on content to ensure that they serve a legitimate interest in a democratic society.”</i>
<b>PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN</b>						
15	32	New legislation introduced gender quota for elected and appointed offices, but political will was lacking to meaningfully enhance women participation in politics. Women were rarely placed in electable positions in the party lists and media rarely featured female candidates. Positively there is strong commitment from the civil society to push for a genuine inclusion with the adoption of the Sierra Leone Women Manifesto being the first step toward greater gender parity.	<i>Advance gender parity through a clear commitment by political parties to appoint women to decision-making positions within their structures at all levels. A continued, cross-sectoral capacity and awareness building would further enhance women participation in political life.</i>	No legal change needed	Political Parties PPRC CSOs	<p><b>Women’s participation in public affairs</b></p> <p><b>ICCPR, art.3:</b> “[...] Equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights [...]”</p> <p><b>CEDAW, art.7:</b> “State parties [...] ensure to women [...] the right [...] to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy.”</p> <p><b>CEDAW Committee, GR 23 para.22:</b> “[...] Political parties must embrace the principles of equal opportunity and democracy and endeavour to balance the number of male and female candidates.”</p>
<b>PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES</b>						
16	34	The ECSL’s efforts to enhance the participation of persons with disabilities were limited by the lack of general accessibility of public	<i>Ensure meaningful access to the electoral process for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, by targeted voter</i>	PEA PPA 2011, Persons with	Parliament ECSL	<p><b>Right and opportunity to vote</b></p> <p><b>CPRD, art.29,</b> “States Parties shall [...] undertake to: a) Ensure that</p>



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		buildings and insufficient targeted voter education. Polling centres were not accessible for persons with reduced mobility in more than a half and tactile ballot guides were available in half of the polling stations observed. The public television did not translate news in sign language. Provisions related to participation of persons with disabilities are not harmonised across various legal and regulatory instruments.	<i>information campaigns, by granting independent access to polling stations, and by providing various assistive tools for independent voting.</i>	Disability Act		<i>persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life [...] by: i. Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use.”</i>
<b>ELECTORAL DISPUTES</b>						
17	36	Adjudication of complaints and appeals does not guarantee effective or timely remedies especially for pre-election cases. Given the short time between the nomination of candidates and the election day, decisions on objections to presidential aspirants may be delivered very close to the election day, whereas objections on parliamentary and local council candidates may be challenged in court only after the elections.	<i>Allow for expedited adjudication of all election-related disputes before election day by adjusting court regulations and timelines and by permitting challenges to parliamentary candidates’ registration to be brought to court before election day.</i>	Supreme Court Rules PEA	Judiciary Parliament	<p><b>Rule of law</b></p> <p><b>Right to an effective remedy</b></p> <p><b>UDHR, art.8:</b> “Everyone has the right to an effective remedy [...]”.</p> <p><b>ICCPR, art.2(2):</b> “[...] to adopt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights [...]”.</p> <p><b>ICCPR, art.19(2):</b> “[...] freedom to see, receive and impart information [...]”.</p>
18	37	The law does not specify the grounds	<i>Introduce timelines ensuring</i>	PEA,	Parliament	<b>Rule of law</b>

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		<p>on which an election may be invalidated or detail the threshold of evidence required to substantiate such claims. Provisions for possible challenges to presidential election do not allow for an effective and timely legal redress since no specific deadlines for court ruling are foreseen. Notably, in the event of a run-off there is no legal provision for challenging the results of the first round, which combined with recent jurisprudence leaves a gap in the law.</p>	<p><i>speedy consideration of petitions against presidential election results before assumption of office. Provide for the possibility of challenging the results of the first round in the event of a run-off.</i></p>	<p>Constitution</p>		<p><b>Right to an effective remedy</b>  <b>UDHR, art.8:</b> “Everyone has the right to an effective remedy [...]”  <b>ICCPR, art.2(3)(a) 3.</b> Each State Party [...] undertakes to ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy.”  <b>ICCPR, GC 32, p.27</b> “An important aspect of the fairness of a hearing is its expeditiousness.”  <b>ACDEG, article 17(2)</b> “Article 17(2) State Parties shall [...] Establish and strengthen national mechanisms that redress election related disputes in a timely manner.”</p>
<b>POLLING, COUNTING, TABULATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS</b>						
19	40	<p>The ECSL presented result management system to party representatives a week prior to the polls yet tally and result announcement procedures were not published. Projection screens were not used. No progressive release of information was provided on polling station results received,</p>	<p><b>PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION</b>  <i>The ECSL to establish and publish detailed procedures for the tabulation and announcement of results, as well as put in place a robust, transparent, and easily verifiable results processing system well ahead of election day.</i></p>	<p>ECSL regulation or procedure</p>	<p>ECSL</p>	<p><b>Transparency and the Right to information</b>  <b>ICCPR, art.19.2</b> “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas”.  <b>UNCAC, art.13.1:</b> State Parties shall “promote the active</p>

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		processed, audited, and excluded per district. The reasons for the exclusions, or number of registered voters in affected polling stations were not disclosed.				<i>participation of individuals and groups [by] ensuring that the public has effective access to information.”</i>
20	41	The ECSL did not publish online disaggregated results and turnout by polling station, preventing voters, observers and parties from comparing the result forms provided at polling station level with final results data, limiting stakeholders’ ability to challenge the results.	<b>PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION</b> <i>Publish on the ECSL website comprehensive election results data by polling station, including results per candidate and per party, the number of registered voters and of valid and invalid votes, in a timely manner and in an easily trackable and downloadable database format.</i>	ECSL regulation or procedure	ECSL	<p><b>Transparency and the Right to information</b></p> <p><b>Right to effective remedy</b></p> <p><b>UNCAC, art.13.1:</b> state parties shall “promote the active participation of individuals and groups [by] ensuring that the public has effective access to information.”</p> <p><b>ACDEG, art.3.8:</b> State Parties commit to “Transparency and fairness in the management of public affairs.”</p> <p><b>ICCPR, GC 34, p.18 on art.19:</b> “State parties should proactively put in the public domain Government information of public interest. State parties should make every effort to ensure easy, prompt, effective and practical access to such information.”</p> <p><b>ICCPR, GC 25, p.20:</b> “There should be independent scrutiny of the voting and counting process”.</p>

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21	41	The RRFs do not include the number of voters registered, added to the supplementary voter list and who signed/thumb printed the voter list, preventing reconciliation with the number of votes cast and reducing the transparency and accountability of turnout data.	<i>Enhance the transparency and integrity of the elections by including in the results form reconciliation between votes cast and the number of voters included in the final register of voters and added on the supplementary voters list, and voters who received ballots as confirmed by signatures or thumbprints in the final register of voters.</i>	ECSL regulation or procedure	ECSL	<p><b>Transparency</b></p> <p><b>Right to effective remedy</b></p> <p><b>ICCPR, art.19.2:</b> “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, [...] information”.</p> <p><b>ICCPR, GC 34, p.18</b> “State parties should proactively put in the public domain Government information of public interest.”</p>

**ANNEX 1 – ELECTION RESULTS**

Table 1: Presidential results

Candidate	Party	Votes	
		Number of votes	Per cent
BAH Mohamed Chernoh	National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	<b>21 620</b>	<b>0,77%</b>
BIO Julius Maada	Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP)	<b>1 566 932</b>	<b>56,17%</b>
COKER Prince	Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	<b>5 981</b>	<b>0,21%</b>
JONJO Mohamed	Citizens Democratic Party (CDP)	<b>2 367</b>	<b>0,08%</b>
KABUTA Saa Turay	United National Peoples Party (UNPP)	<b>4 059</b>	<b>0,15%</b>
KAKAY Iye	Alliance Democratic Party (ADP)	<b>4 336</b>	<b>0,16%</b>
KAMARA Nabieu Henry	Peace and Liberation Party (PLP)	<b>7 717</b>	<b>0,28%</b>
KAMARA Samura Mathew Wilson	All Peoples Congress (APC)	<b>1 148 262</b>	<b>41,16%</b>
MARGAI Charles Francis	Peoples Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC)	<b>16 012</b>	<b>0,57%</b>
SACCOH Abdulai Dougakoro	Revolutionary United Front Party (RUFPP)	<b>6 796</b>	<b>0,24%</b>
SANDY Jonathan Patrick	National Unity and Reconciliation Party (NURP)	<b>1 369</b>	<b>0,05%</b>
SOWA-TURAY Mohamed	United Democratic Movement (UDM)	<b>1 665</b>	<b>0,06%</b>
WILLIAMS Beresford Victor	Republic National Independent Party (ReNIP)	<b>2 692</b>	<b>0,10%</b>
Total number of valid votes cast		<b>2 789 808</b>	<b>100%</b>
Invalid votes		<b>10 883</b>	<b>0,4%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2 800 691</b>	
<b>REGISTERED VOTERS</b>		<b>3,374,258</b>	

Table 2: Parliamentary results

	APC	SLPP	Other	Valid votes	Invalid	Total number of votes	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	Invalid (%)
Kenema	11,541	271,066	2,921	285,528	1,166	286,694	318,306	90.1%	0.4%
Kono	32,067	74,290	17,539	123,896	233	124,129	174,036	71.3%	0.2%
Bombali	140,566	10,361	2,469	153,396	715	154,111	206,380	74.7%	0.5%
Kailahun	6,813	171,622	0	178,435	660	179,095	192,333	93.1%	0.4%
Falaba	16,606	19,646	2,461	38,713	245	38,958	69,170	56.3%	0.6%
Koinadugu	33,127	16,036	3,812	52,975	298	53,273	85,209	62.5%	0.6%
Tonkolili	125,051	20,299	10,121	155,471	743	156,214	207,525	75.3%	0.5%
Kambia	57,970	35,164	9,714	102,848	545	103,393	152,642	67.7%	0.5%
Karene	54,058	19,540	1,499	75,097	375	75,472	100,296	75.2%	0.5%
Port Loko	101,142	60,071	8,992	170,205	831	171,036	237,021	72.2%	0.5%
Bo	24,148	215,025	7,380	246,553	815	247,368	317,216	78.0%	0.3%
Bonthe	4,154	81,894	0	86,048	363	86,411	107,645	80.3%	0.4%
Moyamba	18,825	85,759	5,075	109,659	533	110,192	150,402	73.3%	0.5%
Pujehun	4,961	105,413	2,450	112,824	632	113,456	115,925	97.9%	0.6%
Western Area Rural	175,410	151,670	8,085	335,165	1,499	336,664	341,870	98.5%	0.4%
Western Area Urban	307,479	239,403	10,910	557,792	1,596	559,388	598,282	93.5%	0.3%
TOTAL	1,113,918	1,577,259	93,428	2,784,605	11,249	2,795,854	3,374,258	82.9%	0.4%

Table 3: Chairmans and Mayors results

	APC	SLPP	Other	Valid votes	Invalid	Total number of votes	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	Invalid (%)
Kenema (Chair)	9,134	140,279	797	150,210	653	150,863	318,306	72.0%	0.4%
Kenema (Mayor)	10,138	66,838	1,100	78,076	385	78,461			0.5%
Kono (Chair)	18,391	45,592	9,632	73,615	539	74,154	174,036	69.8%	0.7%
Kono (Mayor)	14,669	25,423	6,817	46,909	380	47,289			0.8%
Bombali (Chair)	92,027	7,679	1,413	101,119	462	101,581	206,380	69.6%	0.5%
Bombali (Mayor)	39,122	2,358	414	41,894	197	42,091			0.5%
Kailahun	9,386	143,056	1,791	154,233	666	154,899	192,333	80.5%	0.4%
Falaba	17,257	21,077	2,447	40,781	247	41,028	69,170	59.3%	0.6%
Koinadugu	37,935	17,857	3,052	58,844	325	59,169	85,209	69.4%	0.5%
Tonkolili	129,832	21,087	5,682	156,601	720	157,321	207,525	75.8%	0.5%
Kambia	45,429	20,267	5,463	71,159	376	71,535	152,642	46.9%	0.5%
Karene	63,330	10,319	1,349	74,998	359	75,357	100,296	75.1%	0.5%
Port Loko (Chair)	128,549	20,941	2,855	152,345	754	153,099	237,021	71.0%	0.5%
Port Loko (Mayor)	12,310	2,528	259	15,097	77	15,174			0.5%
Bo (Chair)	7,438	124,265	2,570	134,273	568	134,841	317,216	68.3%	0.4%
Bo (Mayor)	14,608	65,121	1,728	81,457	392	81,849			0.5%
Bonthe (Chair)	3,013	77,681	584	81,278	341	81,619	107,645	79.3%	0.4%
Bonthe (Mayor)	404	3,341	0	3,745	18	3,763			0.5%
Moyamba	21,750	85,851	3,979	111,580	530	112,110	150,402	74.5%	0.5%
Pujehun	4,096	97,108	0	101,204	422	101,626	115,925	87.7%	0.4%
Western Area Rural	157,164	135,079	7,072	299,315	1,096	300,411	341,870	87.9%	0.4%
Western Area Urban	288,683	268,213	5,153	562,049	1,954	564,003	598,282	94.3%	0.3%
TOTAL	1,124,665	1,401,960	64,157	2,590,782	11,461	2,602,243	3,374,258	77.1%	0.4%



Table4. Council and Cities Council results

	APC	SLPP	Other	Valid votes	Invalid	Total number of votes	Registered voters	Turnout (%)	Invalid (%)
Kenema (Council)	10,072	155,719	1,036	166,827	571	167,398	318,306	79.6%	0.3%
Kenema (City)	12,249	64,011	9,071	85,331	504	85,835			0.6%
Kono (Council)	19,375	45,249	9,071	73,695	567	74,262	174,036	68.7%	0.8%
Kono (Koidu)	14,957	23,558	6,725	45,240	41	45,281			0.1%
Bombali (Council)	88,882	7,292	1,033	97,207	108	97,315	206,380	71.2%	0.1%
Bombali (Makeni)	46,418	2,802	222	49,442	89	49,531			0.2%
Kailahun	11,260	147,811	0	159,071	210	159,281	192,333	82.8%	0.1%
Falaba	16,060	19,747	2,330	38,137	247	38,384	69,170	55.5%	0.6%
Koinadugu	32,594	16,408	3,734	52,736	325	53,061	85,209	62.3%	0.6%
Tonkolili	123,012	18,666	7,724	149,402	721	150,123	207,525	72.3%	0.5%
Kambia	46,153	19,265	6,153	71,571	377	71,948	152,642	47.1%	0.5%
Karene	62,780	11,218	0	73,998	349	74,347	100,296	74.1%	0.5%
Port Loko (Council)	128,022	22,038	4,245	154,305	53	154,358	237,021	71.7%	0.0%
Port Loko (City)	13,208	2,076	206	15,490	73	15,563			0.5%
Bo (Council)	7,160	117,163	1,238	125,561	410	125,971	317,216	59.6%	0.3%
Bo (City)	11,986	48,533	2,250	62,769	406	63,175			0.6%
Bonthe (Council)	3,491	77,549	0	81,040	384	81,424	107,645	79.0%	0.5%
Bonthe (City)	442	3,168	0	3,610	51	3,661			1.4%
Moyamba	21,604	86,519	4,024	112,147	535	112,682	150,402	74.9%	0.5%
Pujehun	4,145	95,096	1,353	100,594	832	101,426	115,925	87.5%	0.8%
Western Area Rural	171,232	130,631	3,008	304,871	1,150	306,021	341,870	89.5%	0.4%
Western Area Urban	300,958	240,066	2,743	543,767	1,741	545,508	598,282	91.2%	0.3%
TOTAL	1,146,060	1,354,585	66,166	2,566,811	9,744	2,576,555	3,374,258	76.4%	0.4%

## ANNEX 2 – MEDIA MONITORING RESULTS

Starting from 23 May, the EU EOM systematically monitored a sample of national and regional media. The sample comprised 12 outlets with a close to a nationwide reach. Those were public TV and radio, two private TV channels, four private radio stations and four newspapers, including their online versions and official Facebook accounts.<sup>120</sup> As radio is the key type of media in Sierra Leone, the EU EOM, also used *Radio Garden* app for online live monitoring of the selected radio stations, especially after the E-Day when the provisional results from regions were broadcast via radio stations.

Media monitoring included quantitative and qualitative analysis of the coverage of campaign and other socio-political issues, assessing the amount of time and space allocated to candidates, political parties, public officials, and other politically relevant subjects, as well as evaluation of the tone of the coverage and the gender balance across the media landscape. The latter contributed to the EU EOM's assessment of female participation in the public and political life. The monitoring also registered voter education campaigns in the media.

All monitored media broadcast in both English and Krio, depending on a programme. Similarly, print media's posts on Facebook were also either in English or Krio, helping the voters to acquire election-related information in a timely manner.

### 1. The EU EOM monitoring results for broadcast media with a nation-wide reach

The quantitative monitoring was done from 23 May to 22 June, and was stopped during the campaign silence, on election day and during the announcement of results for Presidential, Parliamentary, Mayoral and Local Council elections, when only qualitative analysis was performed. On campaign silence day, 23 June, only voter education content was coded.

The broadcast media monitoring focused on programs aired during the prime-time hours:

- For radio stations – from 06:00 to 08:00 and from 18:00 to 00:00.
- For television channels from 18:00 up to 00:00.

#### 1.1. Total time allocated to political communication in national broadcast media's primetime programming

During the 30-days' monitoring period, the EU EOM coded TV broadcasts lasting 754 hours in total, with 45 hours of political and election-related content. Media poverty and technical challenges related to the rainy season influenced the volume of the media recordings sample. For example, *Star TV* regularly stopped their programmes due to technical problems, amounting to some 13 per cent of all prime-time broadcasts. Such instances reduced the information on which voters could make their choices.

The EU EOM coded radio broadcasts lasting 1,488 hours in total with 59 hours of political and election-related content. The *Star Radio*, originally included in the sample, did not produce any editorial programmes due to the financial and technical difficulties. Due to the rainy season and the power cuts, several broadcasters often switched off their equipment for long periods thus further decreasing the monitoring sample.

Chart 1 demonstrates the amount of inaudible or absent broadcast from the recording sample as well as political communication share.

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<sup>120</sup> TV: AYW, SLBC, Star; radio: AYW, Culture, Democracy, SLBC, Star; newspapers: Awareness Times, Awoko, Concord Times and Standard Times.

Chart 1

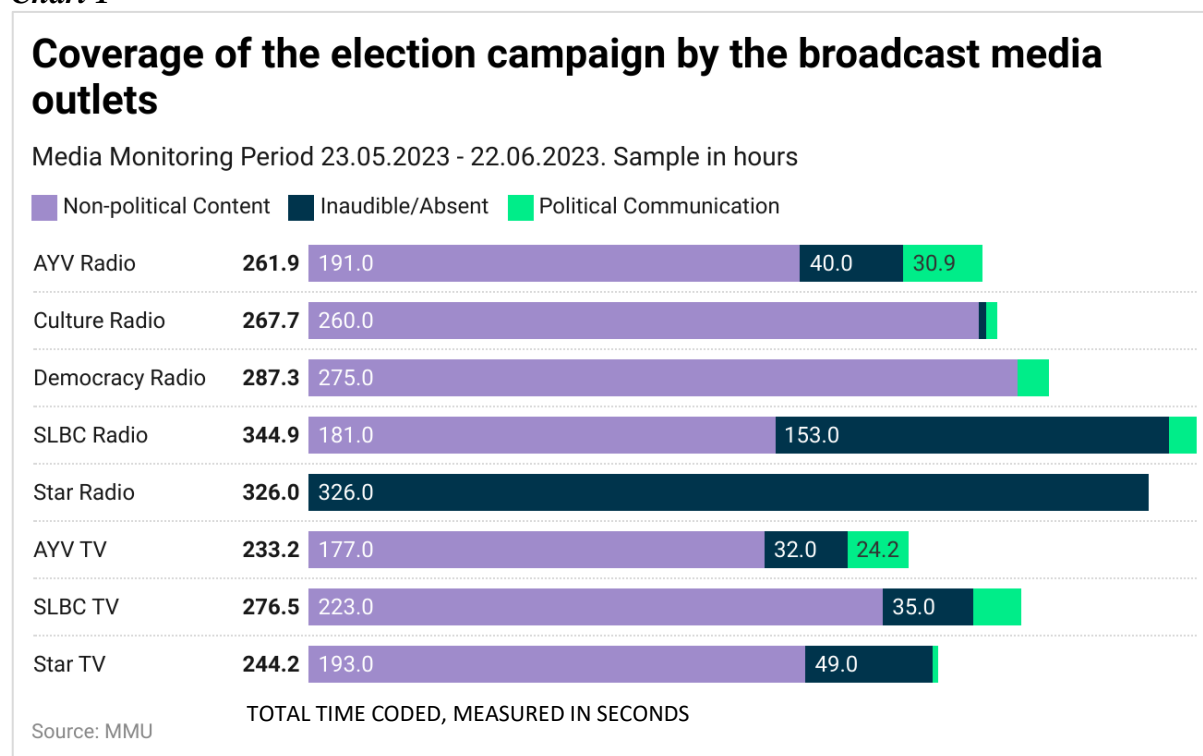


Table 2 shows how much airtime media outlets devoted to the coverage of electoral and other socio-political issues. On average outlets devoted some 5 per cent of their prime-time broadcasts to issues related to politics and election, with the AYV TV and radio having most extensive election coverage.

Table 2

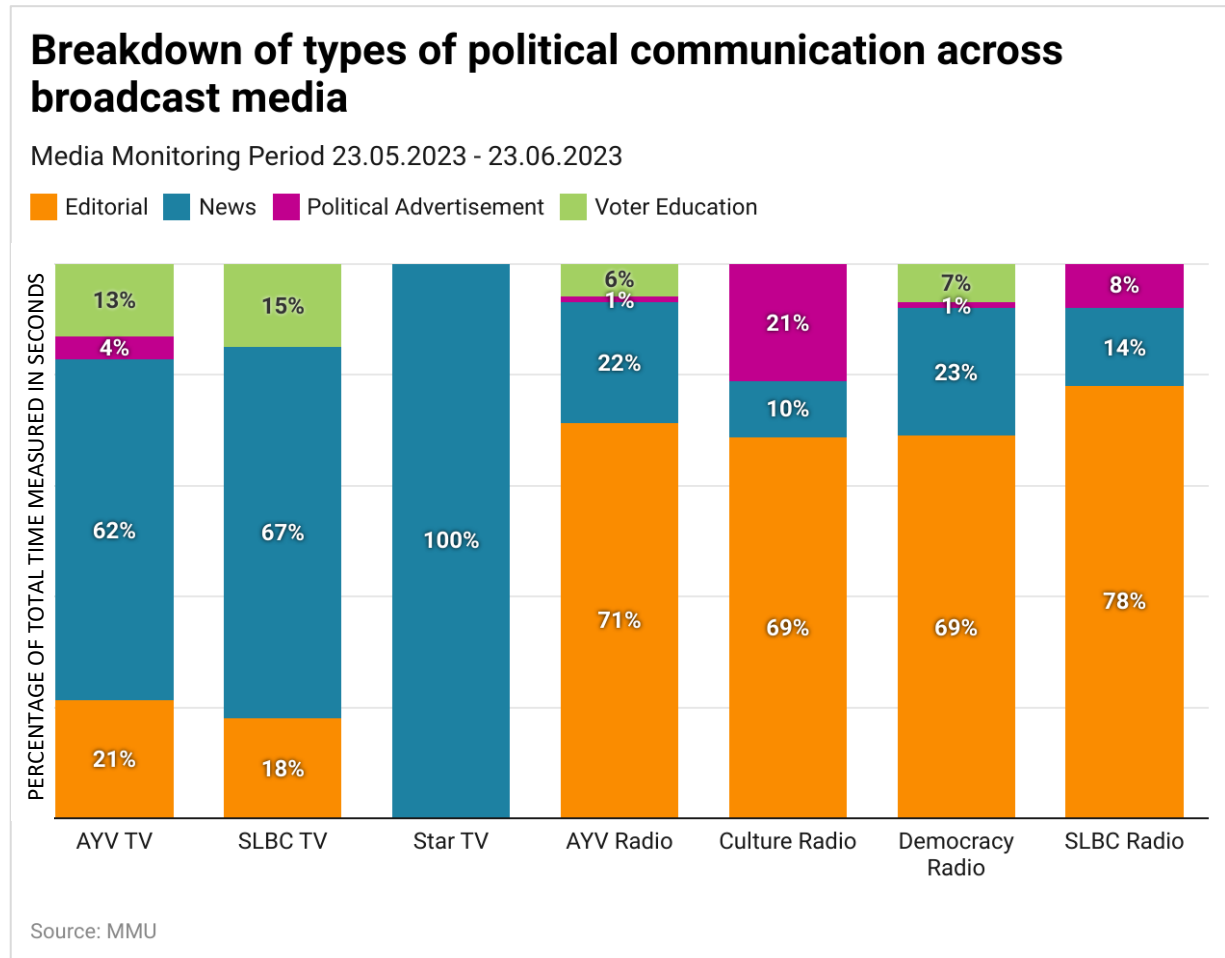
Media Outlet	Percentage of total time coded	Time Allocated to Political Communication
<b>Television Channels</b>		
AYV TV	12 per cent	24 hours 13 minutes
SLBC TV (public)	7 per cent	18 hours 28 minutes
Star TV	1 per cent	2 hours 10 minutes
<b>Radio Stations</b>		
AYV Radio	13 per cent	30 hours 53 minutes
Culture Radio	2 per cent	4 hours 42 minutes
Democracy Radio	4 per cent	12 hours 20 minutes
SLBC Radio (public)	3 per cent	10 hours 52 minutes
Star Radio	0 per cent	0 hours 0 minutes

Chart 3 demonstrates the breakdown of types of radio and TV broadcasts containing political communication. Editorial programmes include political discussion shows, interviews with electoral stakeholders and call-in programmes. Voter education programmes include short voter information clips produced by ECSL, and civil society organisations.

All TV channels primarily covered election-related issues in their news programmes. On radio stations elections on politics were mainly discussed in editorial programmes, providing more

analysis of the election campaign and the contestants, while during the call-in programmes the audience could rise issues of their concern. Overall, the radio stations had more analytical and inclusive approach for the coverage of the election content, if compared with TV. Notably, on the *Culture Radio* news were considerably shorter than paid-for political advertising, hence reducing voters access to journalistic coverage of elections. Such editorial policy also undermines the main principle of media to inform the audience on the newsworthy events in a balanced manner. Positively, the *AYV TV* and *SLBC TV* devoted a notable share of their prime-time programmes to voter education.

Chart 3



### 1.2. Exposure of political actors in broadcast media

Chart 4 shows the proportional distribution of time among various political actors within the prime-time programmes of editorial choice. Those political actors include political parties and their candidates, the president, and federal government ministers. The public broadcaster devoted much of its coverage to the ruling party and the president, while commercial broadcasters divided their airtime more equitably. The APC got considerable exposure on five out seven monitored outlets; RENIP got a meaningful coverage on three, but RUFPP on one broadcaster. Other parties (NDA, NGC, NURP, PMDC, UDP and UP) were only sporadically mentioned, leaving voters with a very limited knowledge about their candidates. *Star TV* and *AYV Radio* devoted the most substantial amount of coverage to independent candidates.

Chart 4

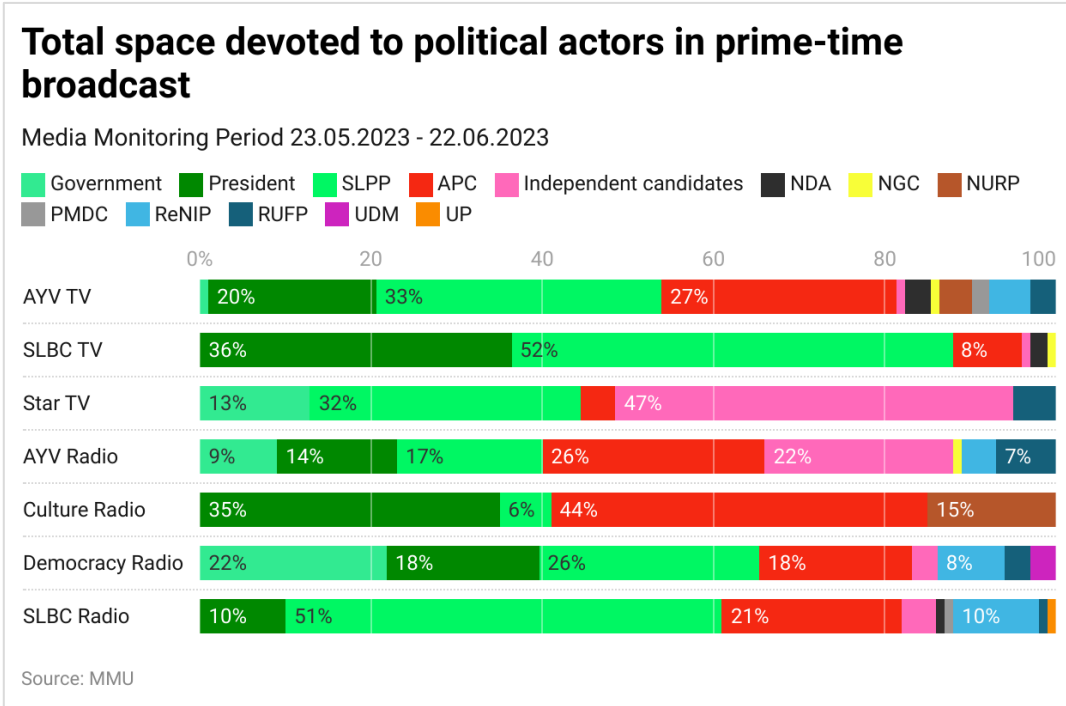


Chart 5 shows the percentage of total time measured in seconds devoted to political actors within the prime-time news bulletins. On five out of seven outlets the president and the ruling party got more than half of the airtime. Notably, the public radio reported more about the APC, than the SLPP or the president, two further broadcasters equitably divided their news coverage between the APC and SLPP. Star TV was the only station devoting a meaningful coverage to covering independent candidates within the news.

Chart 5

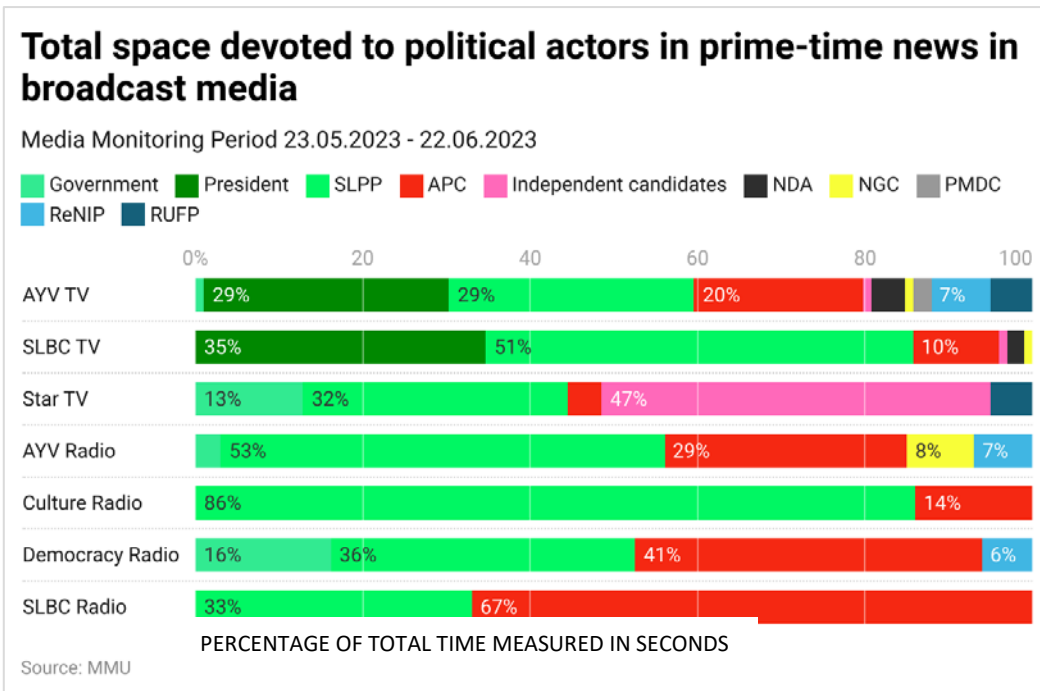


Chart 6 shows the length in seconds of the presidential candidates’ direct speech aired in broadcast media during the election campaign. The incumbent was by far the most quoted

politician, followed by the APC presidential candidate. The public radio SLBC Radio devoted almost the same amount of time to direct quotes from the APC and SLPP candidates. In contrast, the public TV devoted four times more airtime to Bio, than to Kamara. The AYV TV quoted the highest number of presidential candidates. In total only 7 out of 13 presidential candidates were given the address voters directly within the prime-time programming of in the monitored media. It which limited the voters’ possibilities to know and scrutinise the candidates.

Chart 6

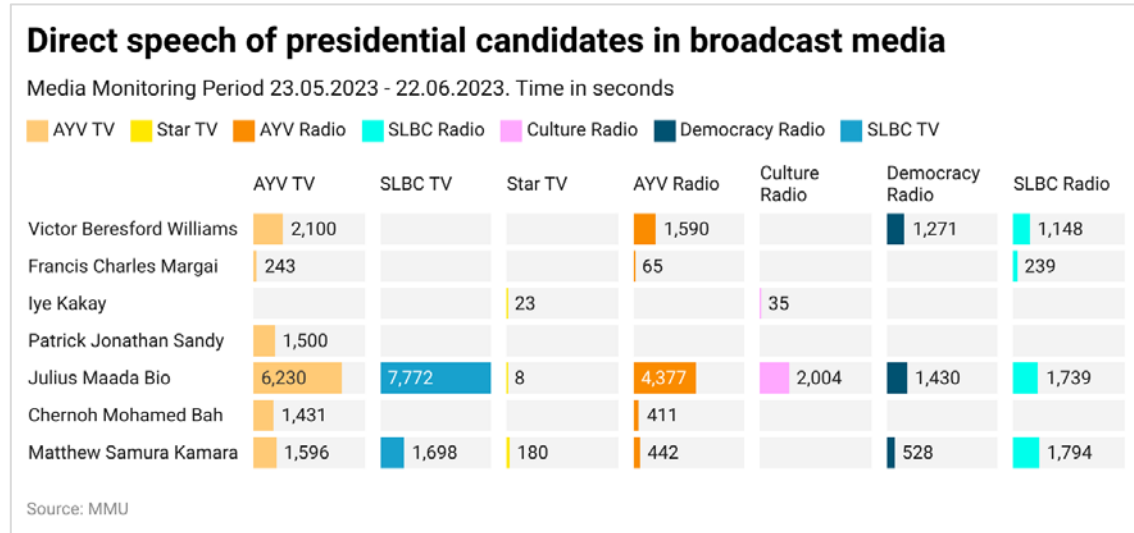
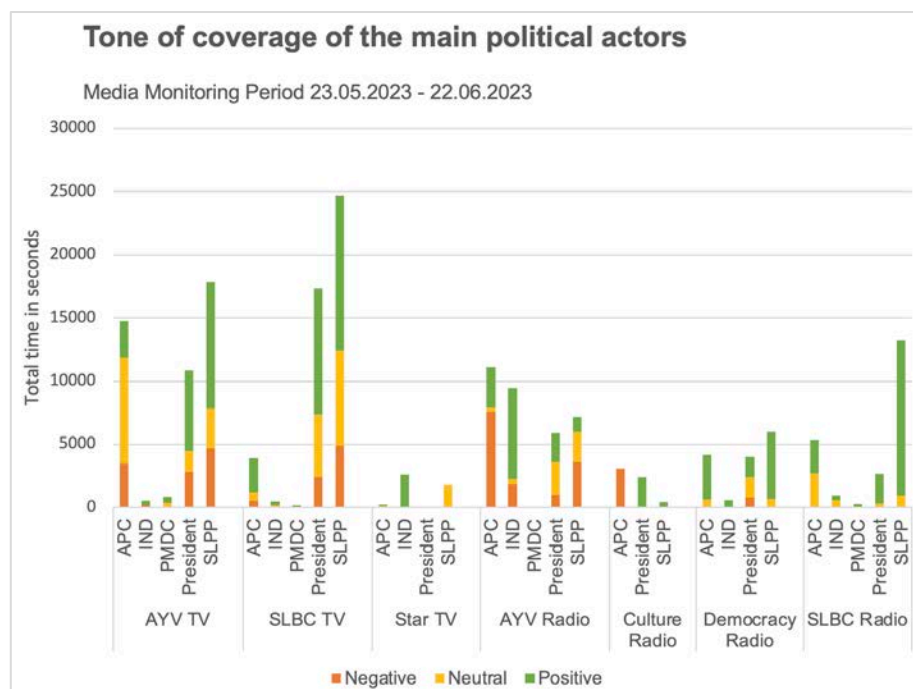


Chart 7 demonstrates the tone of coverage towards the most frequently featured political actors in news bulletins and other programmes of editorial choice. AYV TV and SLBC TV tone was mostly balanced towards key contestants; Culture Radio broadcasts featured many positive comments about incumbent, while Democracy Radio and SLBC Radio news and editorial programmes were predominantly positive in tone towards both the APC and the SLPP. Star TV and AYV Radio clearly favoured independent candidates in their coverage. These observations proved media preferences towards different political forces during the election campaign.

Chart 7



**1.4. Gender balance in broadcast media**

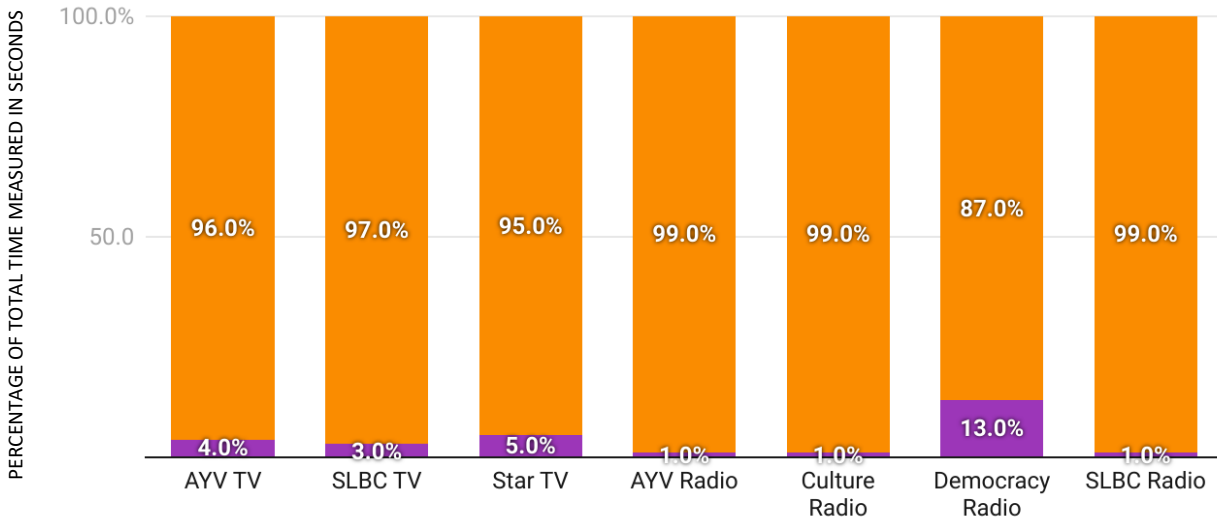
Chart 8 demonstrates the gender balance across monitored media, exemplifying underrepresentation of female candidates. The *Democracy Radio* was the only exception with 13 per cent of its editorial content being devoted to female political actors.

Chart 8

**Coverage of the candidates by gender in broadcast media**

Media Monitoring Period 23.05.2023 - 22.06.2023

Female Male



Source: MMU

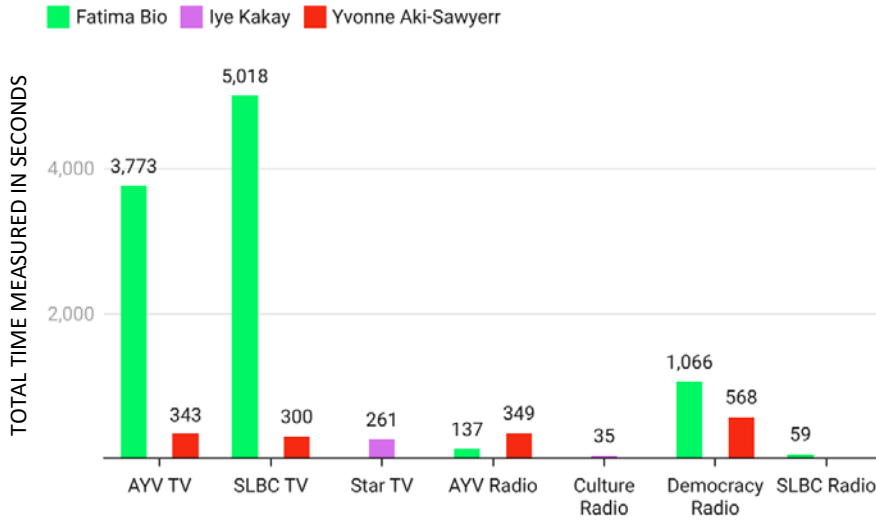
Chart 9 shows the comparison of the total time in seconds devoted to female political actors in the monitored media. Among all female politicians only three got a meaningful exposure within the news and other programmes of editorial choice, including the First Lady Fatima Bio who actively campaigned for the SLPP. Overall, First Lady got by far more coverage that the most visible APC politician, Freetown mayoral candidate Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr or the only female presidential candidate from Iye Kakay (ADP). The coverage of female political actors is another example of women underrepresentation in public and political life, while in the electoral context it shows how little information voters had about women contesting various races.



Chart 9

### Total time devoted to Fatima Bio, Iye Kakay and Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr

Media Monitoring Period 23.05.2023 - 22.06.2023, measurement in seconds



Source: MMU

### 1.5. Voter information across the monitored broadcast media

During the 30-day campaign period a total of 112 voter information clips or jingles were broadcast by the monitored media, with 42 clips shown on TV and 70 jingles aired on radio. As the radio stations are the most popular media outlet in Sierra Leone, most government and non-government organisations opted to broadcast their jingles there.

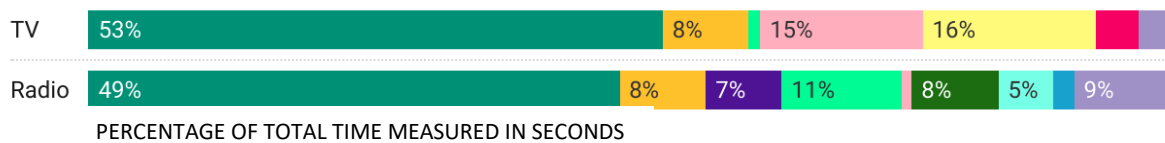
Chart 10 shows the proportional distribution of voter information clips per a sponsoring organisation, while Chart 11 demonstrates the topics of the voter education clips aired on monitored radio and TV stations. The main voter information message was a call for “peaceful elections”, which was exclusively used by the law enforcement agencies, such as the Office for National Security (ONS), the police and the army; the ECSL and CSOs also had some voter information on election day procedures. Voter information clips were rarely targeting youth, women, or persons with disabilities.

Chart 10

### Voter information across the monitored media

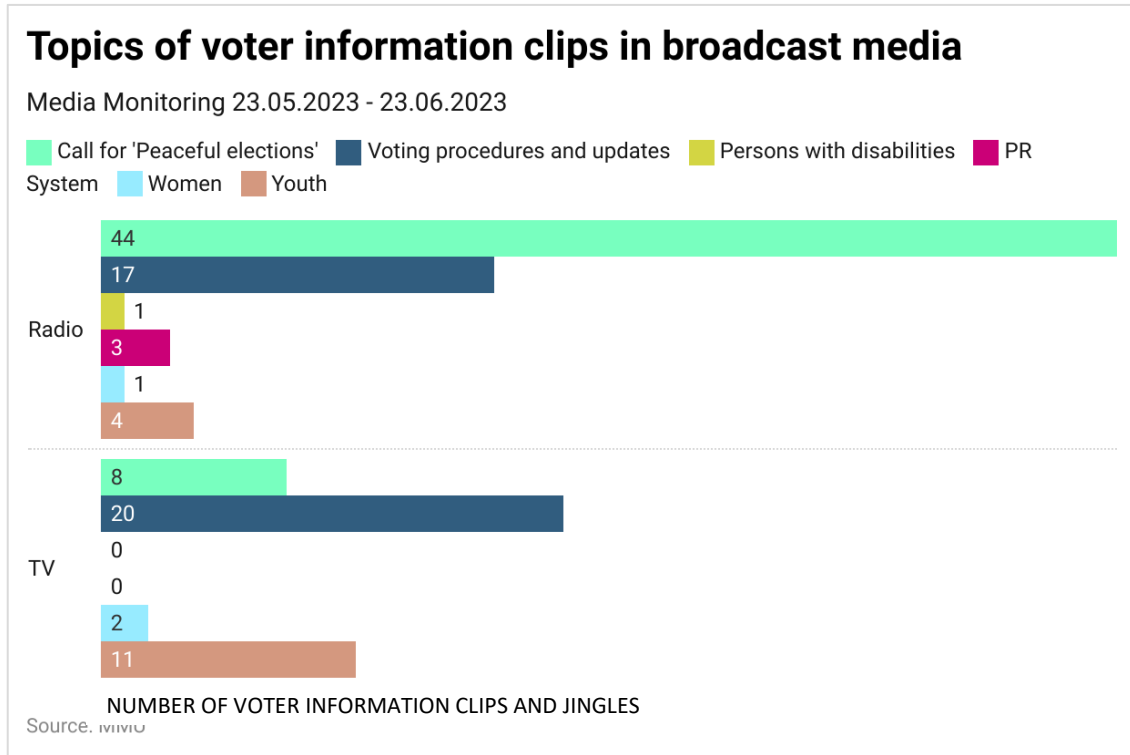
Media Monitoring Period 23.05.2023 - 23.06.2023

■ ECSL ■ NEW ■ CARL ■ Police ■ HRC ■ Army ■ ONS ■ Institute for Governance Reform  
■ Legal Link ■ Open Society Initiative for West Africa ■ Other Actors



Source: MMU

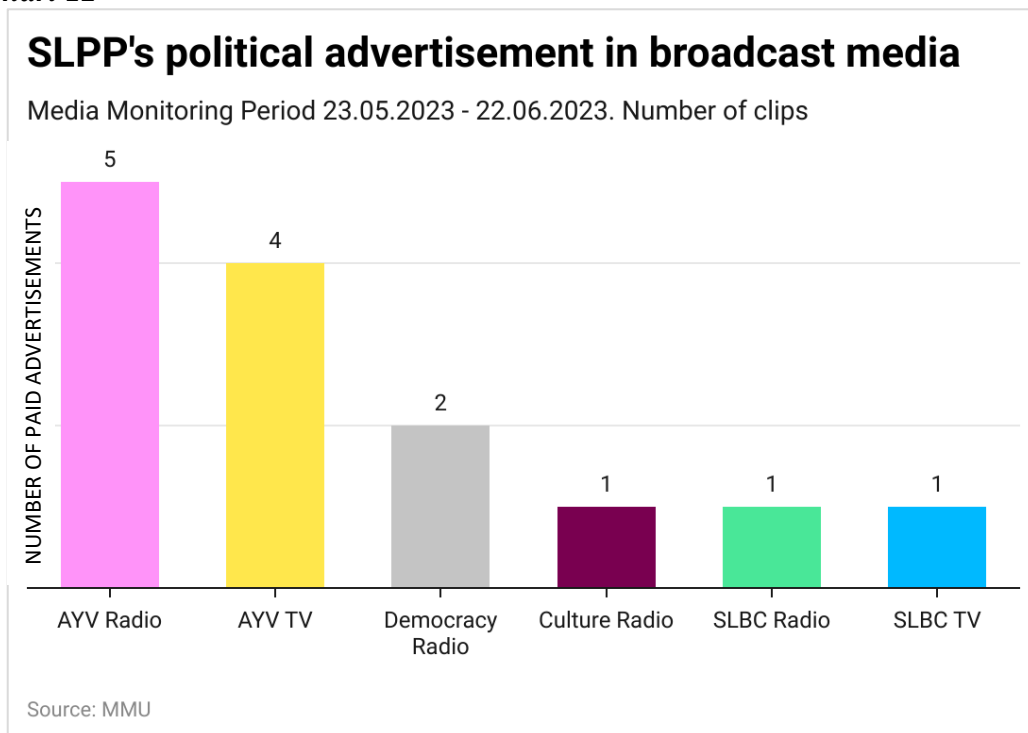
Chart 11



### 1.6. Political advertisement in broadcast media

The SLPP was the only political party who used the paid advertisement in broadcast media monitored by the EU EOM. [Chart 11](#) shows a number of paid advertisements placed in each media outlet. On average each advertising lasted for some five minutes on radio and some ten minutes on TV. The party did not use short jingles for promotion.

Chart 12



**2. The EU EOM monitoring results for print media with a nation-wide reach**

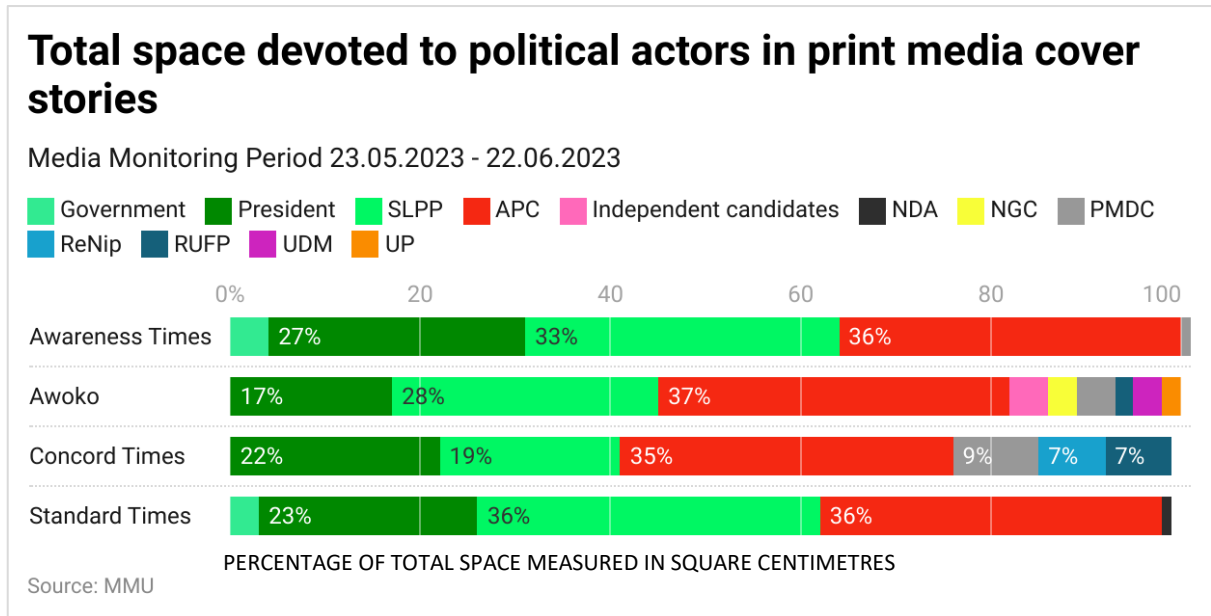
*Awareness Times*, *Awoko*, *Concord Times* and *Standard Times* were monitored from 23 May to 22 of June. All those English-language newspapers were issued daily, except for the weekends. To analyse newspapers’ coverage of the elections, media monitors measured space allocated to political actors on each newspaper’s front page, as well as the remaining part of the front-page article published inside.

Political events affected the frequency newspapers’ publication. Dues to the fear of protests and violence the *Concord Times* were not printed on 12 June 2023, whereas both the *Awareness Times* and *Concord Times* did not print their issues on 13 June 2023.

**2.1. Exposure of political actors in print media**

Chart 13 demonstrates the allocation of the space to the political actors in front-page stories. All four monitored newspapers devoted most of the coverage to the APC, SLPP and the president. However, *Awoko* and *Concord Times* also provided their readership with information on other political parties; *Awoko* featured also independent candidates, which was the most beneficial approach for voters.

Chart 13

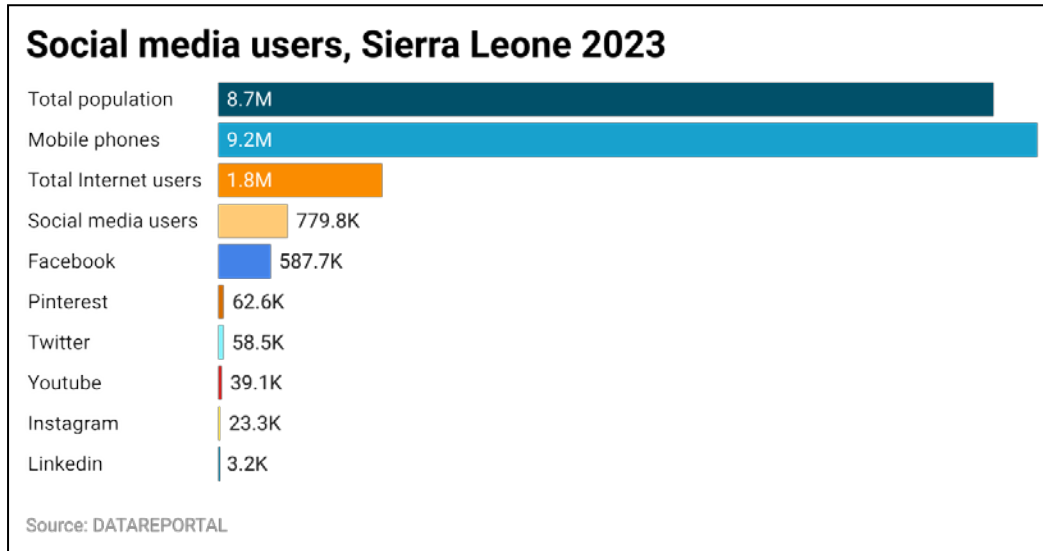


## ANNEX 3 – SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING RESULTS

### 1. Social media environment.

One out of five Sierra Leoneans have access to the Internet, while only one out of 10 has a social media account. In total some 780,000 people access social media regularly. The main social media platform is Facebook, with 75 per cent of social media users having an active Facebook account. Other social media platforms are used rarely, with some 60 thousand users of Pinterest and Twitter and around 40 thousands having a YouTube account.

*Chart 1. Social media users / population of Sierra Leone*



### 2. EU EOM Sierra Leone 2023 methodology

The EU EOM social media monitoring unit (SMMU) comprised four monitors responsible for coding of data downloaded from social networks, using following tools:

1. CrowdTangle for extracting data from Facebook and
2. SentiOne used mainly for collecting data from Twitter.

In addition, SMMU also reviewed individual posts on TikTok.<sup>121</sup>

The SMMU was fully operational and started coding of data on 21 May, two days before the start of the official election campaign.

The coding of Facebook posts and tweets was done in two ways. At first, a given monitor had to determine whether the post was or was not related to the ongoing election campaign. If the post in question was not related to the campaign, the coding of the post ended there. If the post or tweet was related to elections, the coding continued for further details.

The coding of election-related posts and tweets covered a range of subjects, such as the main and secondary topic of the post, the tone of the post, information if any party or candidate contesting the elections were mentioned in the message and whether the post contained disinformation, manipulated content or inflammatory language.

Apart from the coding made by the SMMU, statistics automatically generated by the above-mentioned social media listening tools were also considered. In the case of Facebook posts, these were the number of likes and other reactions, the number of comments and the sharing ratio. For



<sup>121</sup> For this platform, the analysis consisted of a manual check of the clip's content.

tweets, the number of reactions, comments and re-tweets were considered. The total number of followers per page (Facebook) or account (Twitter) was also analysed, in relation to the activities of the main presidential candidates in particular.

When it was necessary to determine whether a particular photo or video clip had indeed been taken in the given circumstances and during this electoral campaign, a reverse image search engines were used. The SMMU mainly used Google Images and TinEye.

For the visualization purposes Datawrapper, Gephi and SankeyMatic services were used.

**Table 1. The social media monitoring and data collection/visualization tools used.**

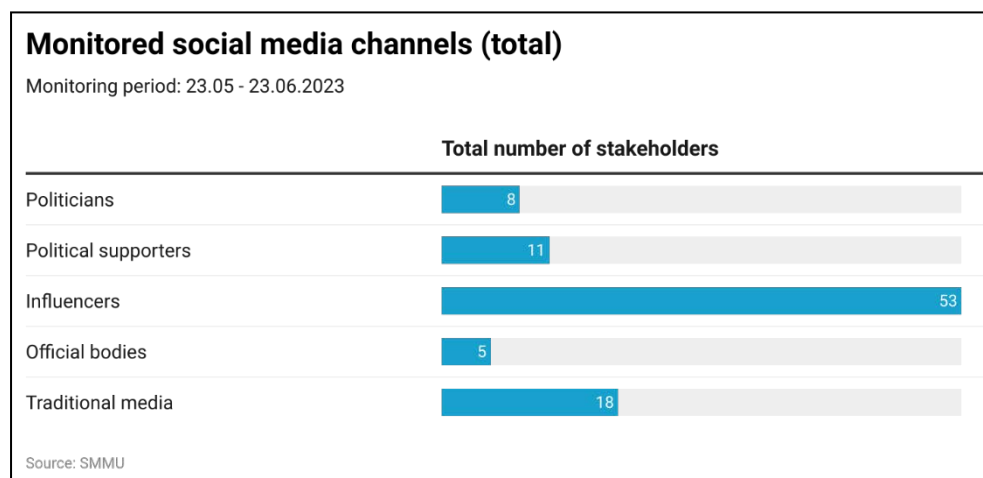
Tool		
Social Listening tools	CrowdTangle	SentiOne
Paid Advertising Monitoring	Meta Ad library; Meta ad library report	
Fact checking	Google Images; TinEye; IVerify website	
Visualisation	DataWrapper; Gephi; SankeyMatic	

### 3. Election contestants campaign online.

#### a. Number of posts

In total 24,166 Tweets and 21,405 Facebook posts were downloaded using CrowdTangle and SentiOne tools. EU EOM SMMU coded 8,926 Tweets and 8,425 Facebook posts; 6,385 Tweets and 3,201 Facebook posts were coded as “election related”. Coding scheme for the posts contained two columns for the topic, so the SMMU may code the main and secondary topic for the given post or tweet. Main topic for the Facebook and Twitter were the campaign and secondary – the government. In total 54 per cent of Facebook posts and 66 per cent of tweets had only one topic.

**Chart 2. Monitored social media channels – total.**



The sample was selected considering:

- The reach and impact of the page/group on the political agenda (number of followers, interaction rate per post, quotation level in traditional media and sum of shares). On the

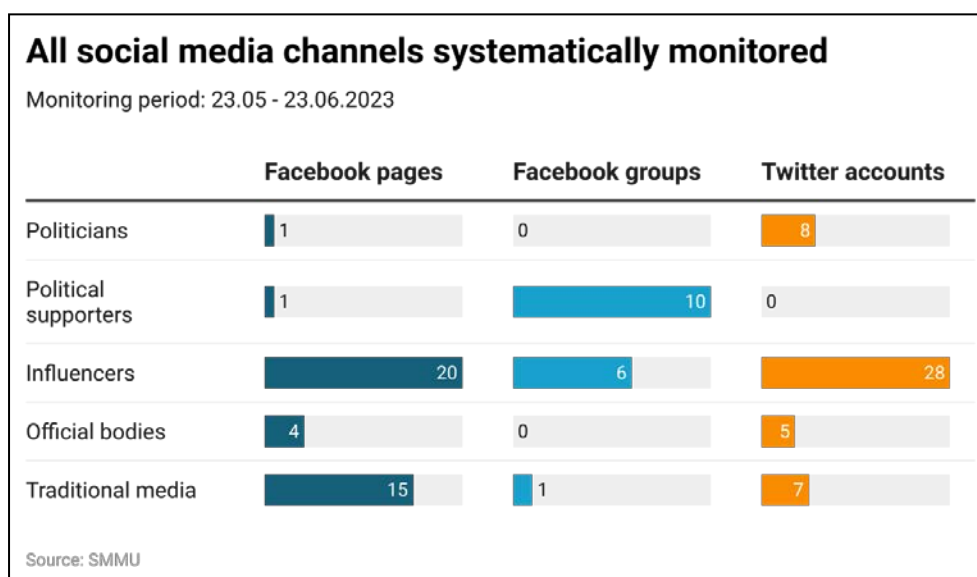
second step snowball method were used and the EU EOM selected those followers of pre-selected channels that also had many followers.

- The content of the page (are topics covering social, political, and electoral issues, is the content original or is it primarily re-shared, is the content controversial, etc.).
- Political affiliation of the account, page, or group.
- The dominant language used on the page to obtain a balanced sample of digital content in English and Krio.

Stakeholders observed during the campaigning period were divided into five main categories: Politicians (8 Facebook pages, groups and Twitter accounts), Political supporters (11 Facebook pages, groups and Twitter accounts), Influencers<sup>122</sup> (53 Facebook pages, groups and Twitter accounts), official bodies (5 Facebook pages, groups and Twitter accounts) and traditional media (18 Facebook pages, groups and Twitter accounts).

During the election campaign, only two political parties regularly engaged with voters on social media platforms: the ruling SLPP and the opposition APC. Representatives of other parties, even if they had a social media account, did not post there very often or were not posting at all.

*Chart 3. Monitored social media channels – types.*



The largest groups of pages and accounts analysed were influencers, who accounted for half of all stakeholders observed. Influencers usually run their own Facebook pages and their own Twitter accounts, relatively rarely creating discussion groups. There were only six cases in the latter category.

Influencers also tend to use accounts created for political campaigns. Both main contestants for the presidential office, used Twitter accounts, while President Bio did not use his Facebook account, unlike his opponent, who used Facebook ten times more intensively than Twitter.

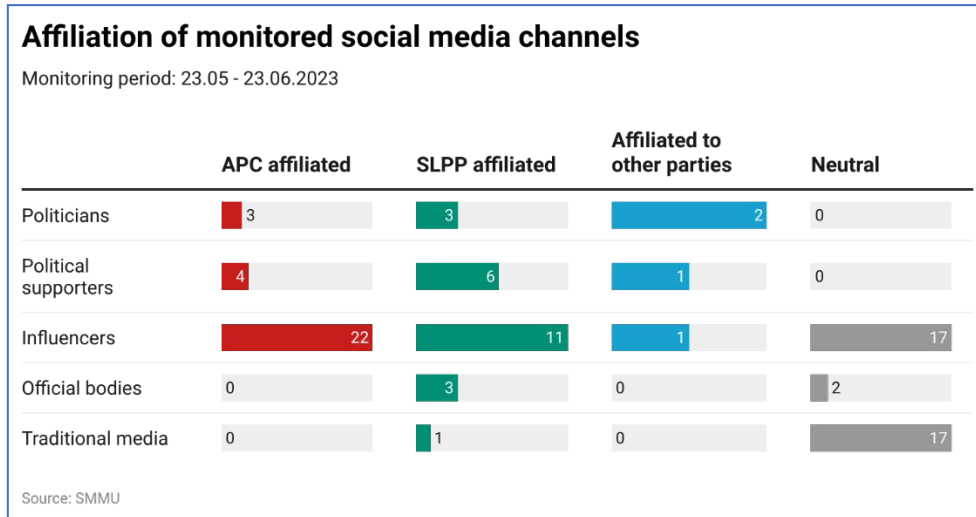
In contrast, political supporters tended to demonstrate their support for candidates on Facebook groups. All groups observed were open (anyone could post on their timelines), they were

<sup>122</sup> The “influencer” category included pages of individuals who took sides in the political arena or remained neutral, who had a large pool of online followers and who were frequently quoted by traditional media outlets. The “political supporters” category included only Facebook groups, who indicated support wither for the APC or SLPP.

moderated, and ultimately political discussions took up relatively little space there, as can be seen in this annex, [Chart 8](#).

The traditional media, with one exception, ran their own Facebook pages and Twitter accounts.

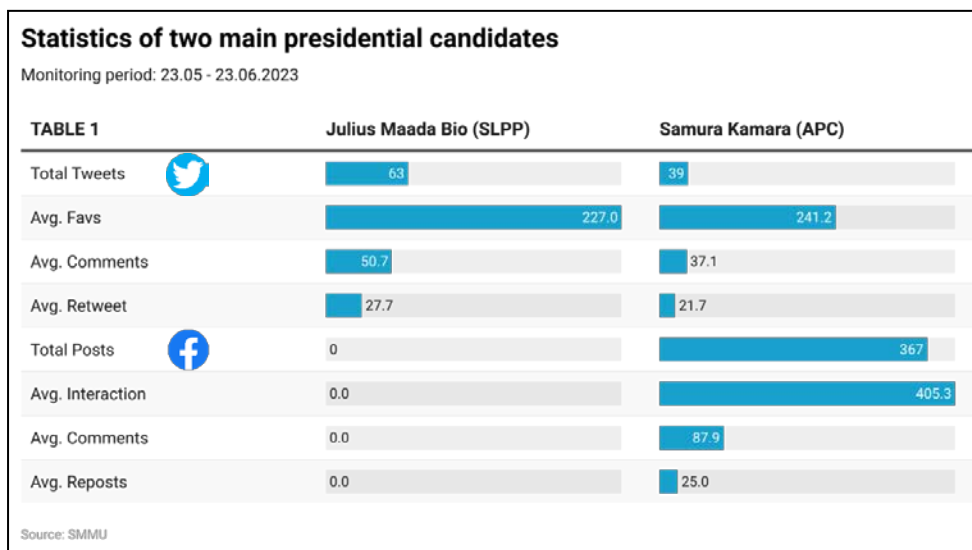
**Chart 4. Monitored social media channels – affiliation.**



As for the party affiliation it was not easy to establish. For example, APC party member, Sylvia Olayinka Blyden, at the beginning of the campaign showed growing friendship to the First Lady (SLPP) and at the same time showed growing contempt for some of the members of her own party. A similar story could be observed in affiliation of the traditional media, who tended to switch alignment from one party to another during the campaign period. The only traditional medium that was clearly aligned with the ruling SLPP, was the public broadcaster SLBC.

Influencers were showing support to their chosen party and – sometimes – even if the party itself distanced from the given influencer (as it was the case for diaspora blogger Adebayor, whose support for APC was not officially recognized by the party).

**Chart 5. Statistics for posts/tweets for main presidential contestants**

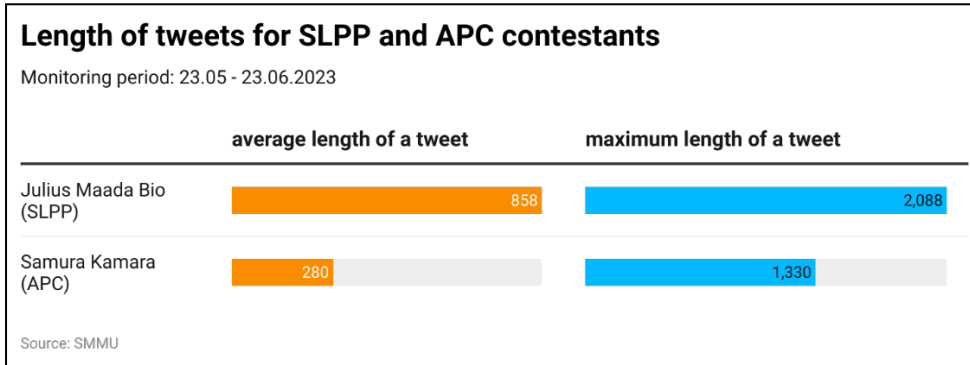


[Chart 4](#) and [Chart 5](#) show that Julius Maada Bio did not use his Facebook account during the campaign, while being very active on Twitter. Having over 170 thousands of followers on Twitter, he managed to maintain the average reactions ratio 227 per post. Samura Kamara used



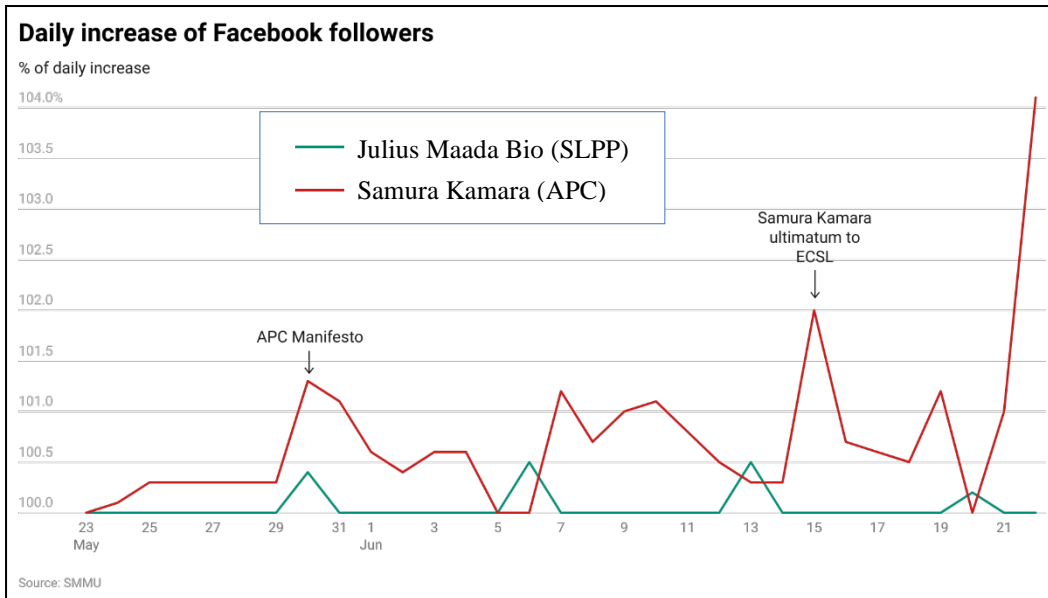
Twitter more moderately, tweeting one post per day on average. Taking into account that his base of followers on Twitter (25-27 thousand) was smaller than that of the President’s, he got bigger engagement with an average ratio of 241 reactions per post. Samura Kamara was way more vocal on the Facebook, where he put 367 posts during the campaign period, getting an average of 405 interactions, while each post was shared on average 25 times.

**Chart 6. Length of Tweets – Julius Maada Bio and Samura Kamara**



As for the Twitter accounts, both contestants used Twitter Blue feature, which allowed them to pass longer messages, which in turn could enable both to provide more detailed information. The SLPP candidate used this feature extensively, with messages from President Bio being three times longer than those of his opponent and reaching 858 characters on the average. The longest Tweet from President Bio had 2,088 characters. The longest message from Samura Kamara reached 1,330 characters with 280 characters on average per tweet.

**Chart 7. Daily increase of Facebook followers**



Analysis of followers show a sharp growth of the pool of followers on several occasions. It is possible to buy additional supporters on Facebook and Twitter, which usually results in a sharp peak of number of supporters and/or number of likes for the given page.<sup>123</sup> Usually “likes at

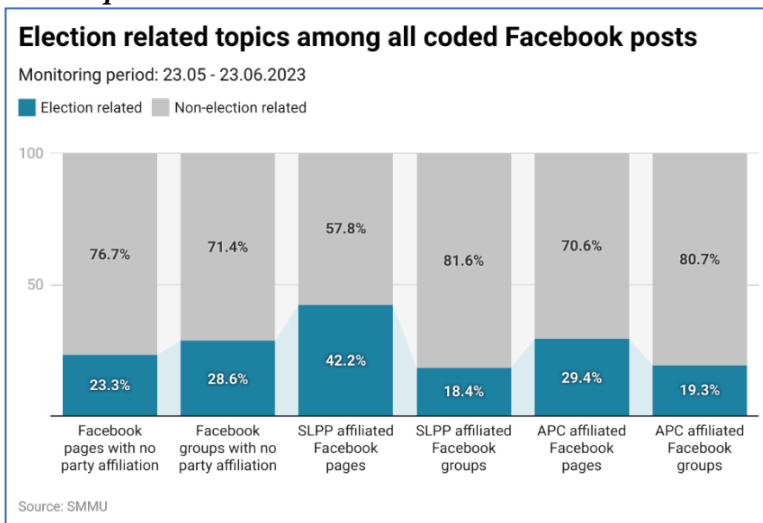
<sup>123</sup> Analysis of number of likes and followers per page was performed to assesses the extent to which online support could have been considered as genuine. Every Facebook page that posts regularly tend to get new followers and likes, as the platform provides an easy way to subscribe to the given channel, while it is rather complicated to unsubscribe.

posting” and “number of followers” are growing steadily. Numbers of likes or followers may increase with each post, but a detailed analysis can show peaks that cannot be explained by a natural influx of followers, generated by posts on key campaign events, political statements with far-reaching consequences or so like. This kind of phenomenon can be found at the last day of campaign for Samura Kamara when a simple message encouraging to vote resulted in more than 2,500 new supporters in less than 24 hours. At the same time a genuine growth of followers, triggered by political events was observed, for example after the presentation of the APC manifesto (end of May) and after the APC made an ultimatum on 15 June, which resulted in 1,000 new followers. The number of followers of Bio’s page was steady, but then there were no posts made on this account during the campaign.

**b. Topics and tone of the posts**

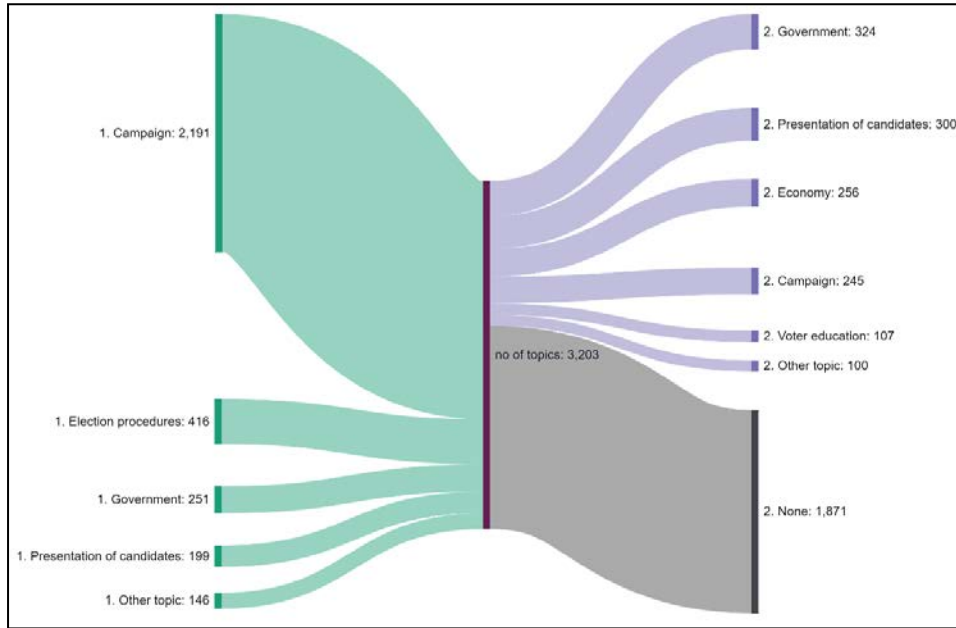
**Chart 8. Election and non-election related posts**

Among the Facebook pages those affiliated with SLPP kept the highest election related ratio of posts (over 42 per cent), as showed in Chart 7. Among APC affiliated pages only 29 per cent of all discussions were election related. Facebook groups, in general discussed everything but elections with 18 and 19 per cent of all posts featuring election-related topics on SLPP and APC affiliated groups respectively. The proportional distribution of



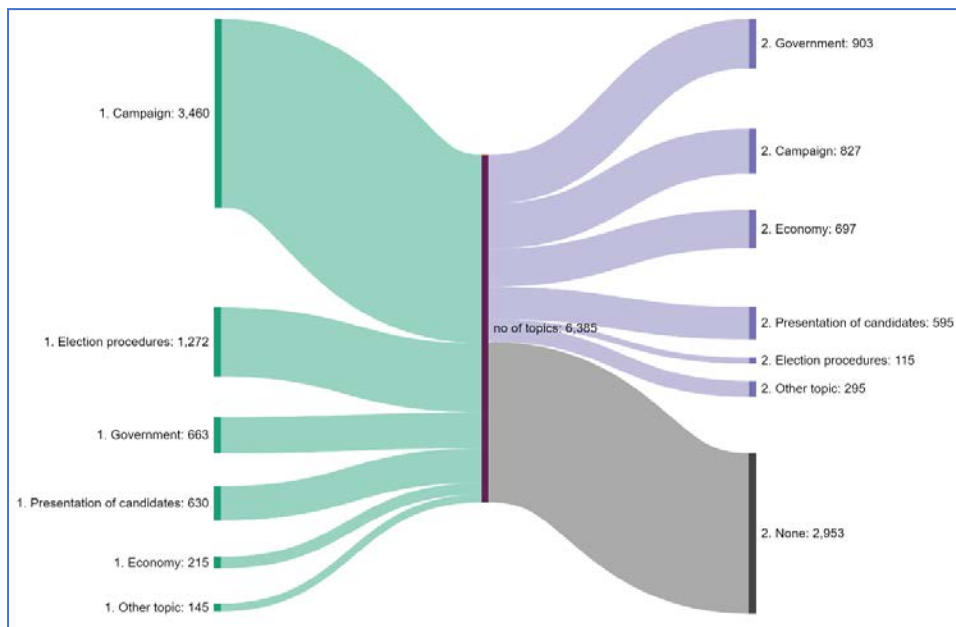
election and non-election related topics indicate that most party affiliated groups and pages primarily served as a forum for like-minded individuals to discuss a wide range of topics related to everyday life or entertainment and was not among the key campaign channels that would reach voters beyond the already established support base.

**Chart 9a Primary and secondary topics on Facebook**



For both, Facebook ([Chart 9a](#)) and Twitter ([Chart 9b](#)) posts the primary topic was the same: half of the Facebook posts that were election related started with the campaign, followed by the election procedures and topics related to the government activities and decisions. While the order of topics was the same for coded tweets, the campaign was discussed in 68 per cent as a first topic while election procedures were discussed in 20 per cent of the tweets. No secondary topic was found in 58 and 46 per cent of the Facebook posts and tweets, respectively.

**Chart 9b. Primary and secondary topics on Twitter**



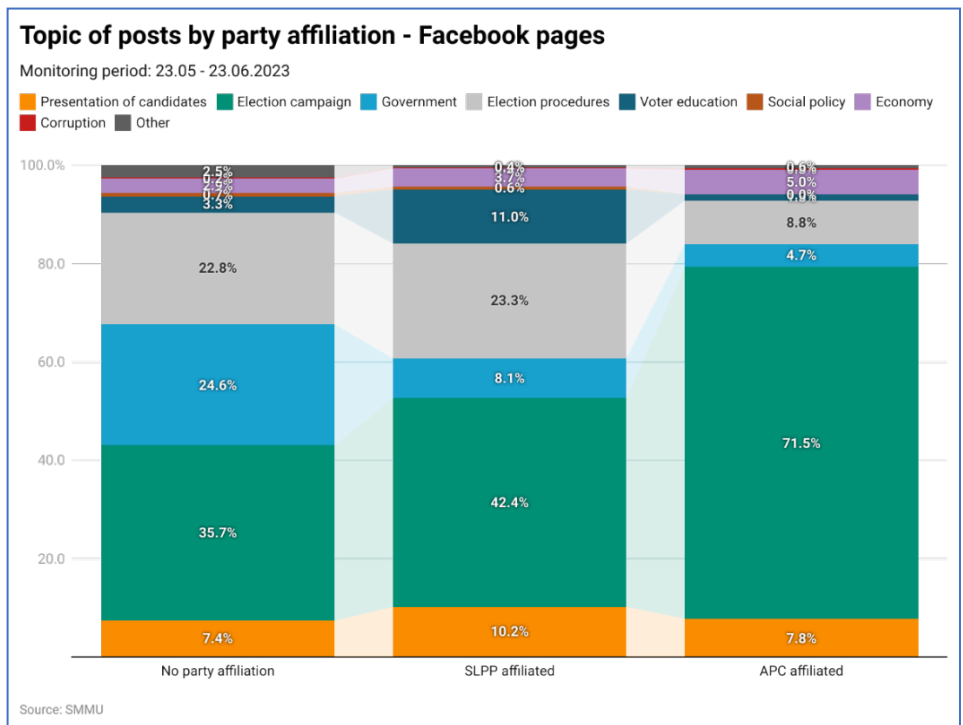
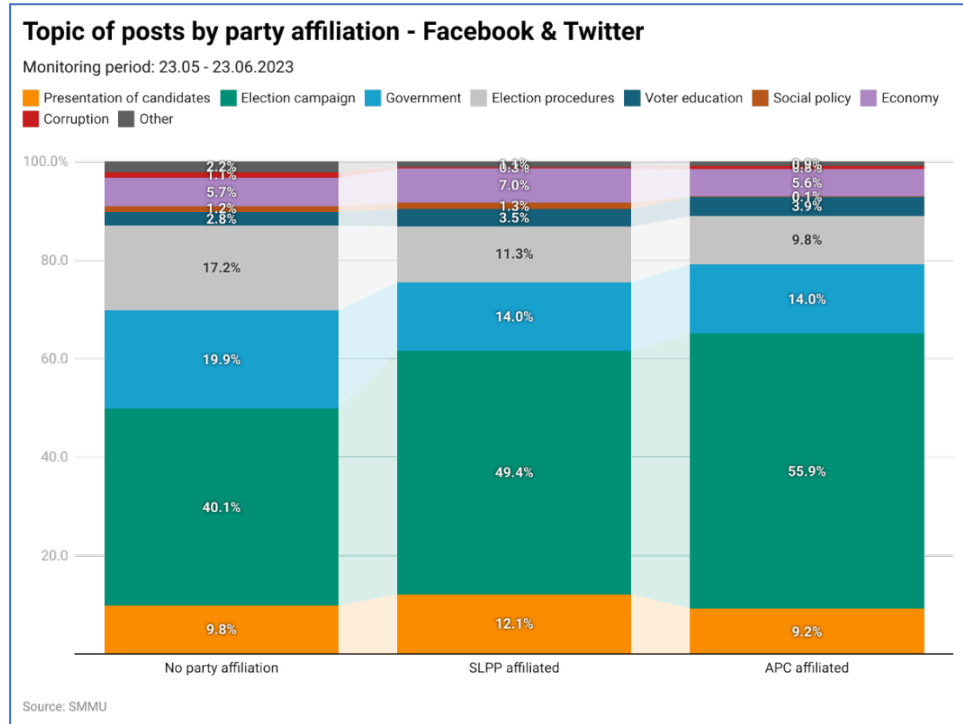
**Chart 10. Topics by party affiliation**

APC affiliated Facebook pages, groups and Twitter accounts focused on election campaign which was discussed in 56 per cent of all posts. For SLPP affiliated accounts election campaign also was very important and this topic was featured in half of the coded posts and tweets. The government was discussed in 14 per cent of all posts and tweets, regardless the party affiliation,

but this type of discussion took on different tones within posts from supporters of both parties. Other topics were not that prominent and regarded election procedures, presentation of candidates and economy in general. Topics like “voter education”, “social policy” and “corruption” were featured only occasionally.

**Chart 11. Topics by party affiliation (Facebook pages)**

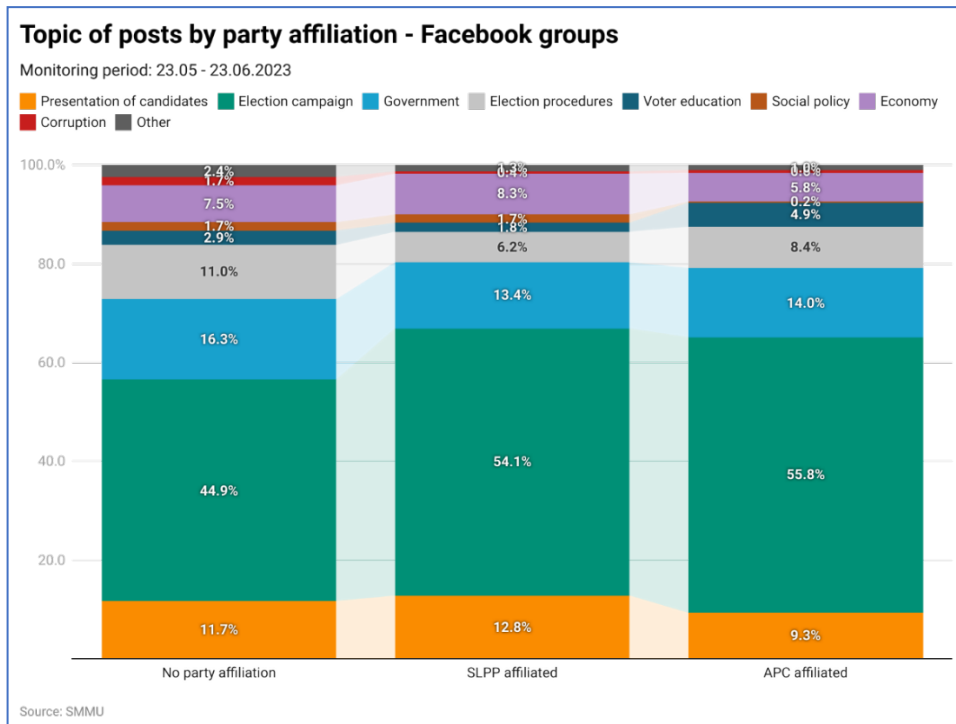
On Facebook pages affiliated to the SLPP main topic was election campaign, followed by a topic “election procedures”, which was also discussed in one quarter of the coded posts. One in 10 posts on these pages had a voter education message. For the APC related Facebook pages election campaign was discussed in 70 per cent of the time, while other topics, namely election



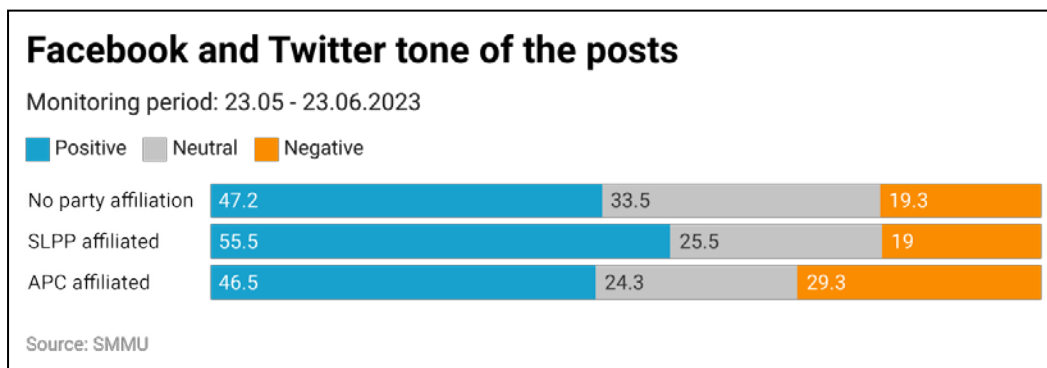
procedures and presentation of candidates were discussed in by far less frequently, as show in Chart 12.

**Chart 12. Topics by party affiliation (Facebook groups)**

If there was an election related discussion on Facebook groups, it focused on the campaign itself on the APC and SLPP affiliated groups. Supporters of both parties discussed the government and presentation of candidates. The APC supporters discussed election procedures and the SLPP supporters issues related to the economy.



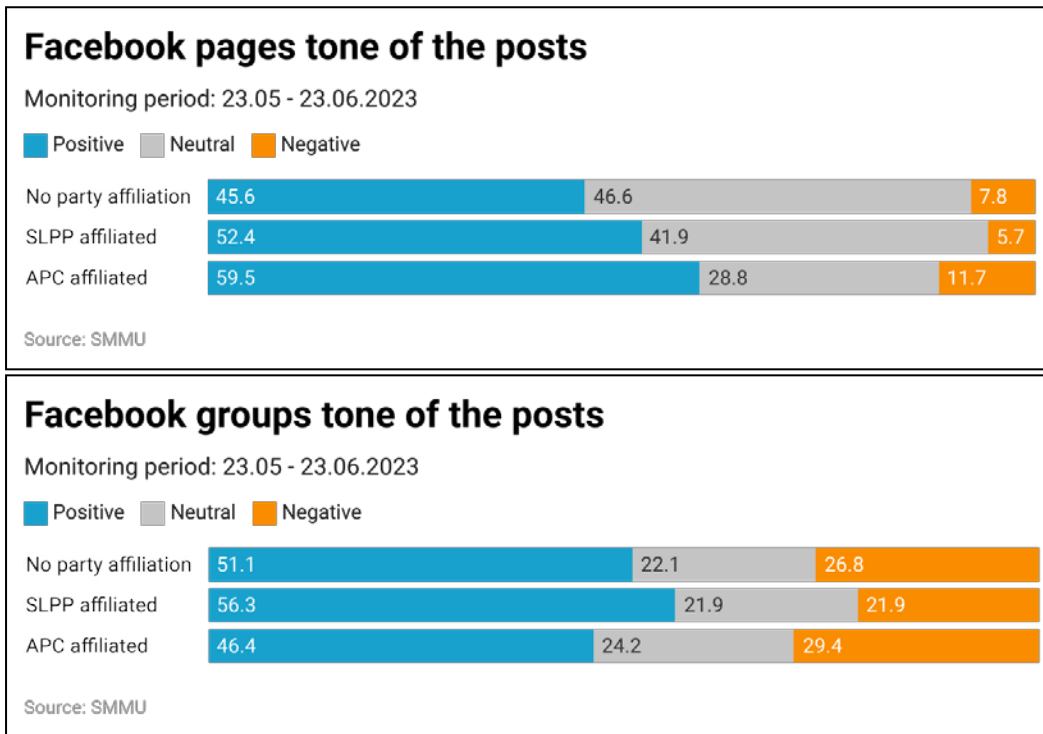
**Chart 13. Tone of the posts (Facebook and Twitter)**



The EU EOM SMMU evaluated the tone of the post towards a certain political actor or a process, featured in the post. The positive tone was assigned to the posts usually prising the party, the candidate, the campaign event, or policy proposal. The neutral tone was assigned to posts containing only factual information about a political party, candidate or event. Negative tone was assigned to the post that was giving a negative assessment of the political opponent, party, or policy proposal, contained divisive language, swear words, or was otherwise perceived in a local context as demeaning.

Chart 13 shows that election-related posts from accounts affiliated with the SLPP were primarily positive in tone (55.5 per cent), while posts and tweets from accounts affiliated with the APC were less positive (46.5 per cent), and the share of posts containing negative messages was notably higher in such posts (29.3 per cent).

Chart 14a and 14b. Tone of the posts (Facebook pages and groups)



Facebook pages are general more positive in tone than Facebook groups. While the percentage of negative content on both SLPP and APC affiliated pages are small (5.7 and 11.7 per cent respectively) the percentage of negative content on Facebook groups is considerably higher with 21.9 per cent and 29.4 per cent for SLPP and APC affiliated groups.

Chart 15. Tone of the posts (Twitter accounts)

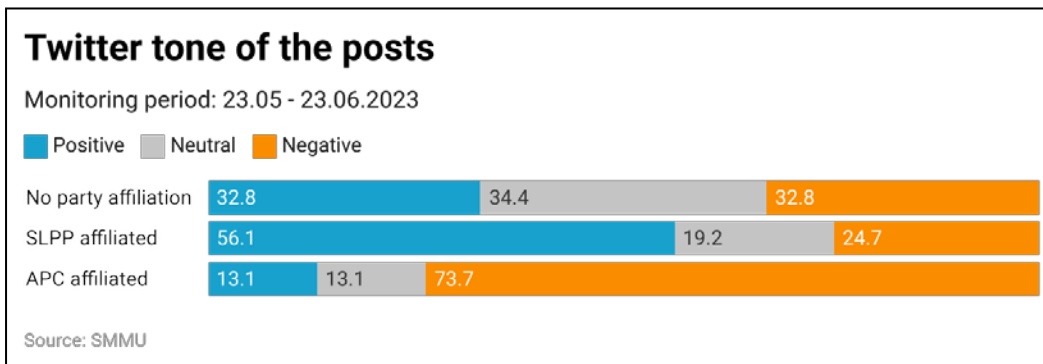
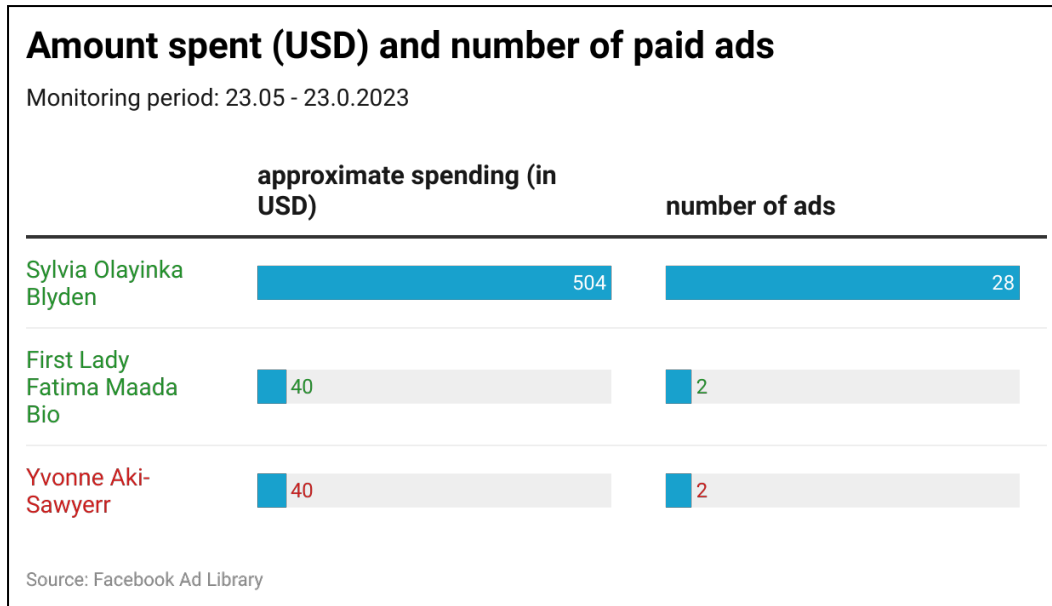


Chart 15 shows an unusually high percentage of negative content in the tweets by APC affiliated accounts, who frequently lamented the incumbent, the SLPP and various government decisions. It is worth noting that among those accounts majority of the posts come from just two very vocal opponents of the SLPP and the President Julius Maada Bio in particular.<sup>124</sup> The SLPP affiliated Twitter posts got 56.1 per cent of positive messages, that mainly praised achievements of President Bio and 24.7 percent negative ones.

<sup>124</sup> Those were @LeoneIssues with 20,000 followers on Twitter and @JustMeBeingMe4 with 15,000 followers on Twitter.

4. Paid-for content (advertising)

Chart 16. Facebook paid ads spending<sup>125</sup>



Only 32 political advertisements were bought during campaign period by the political actors, among them 28 ads were bought by the APC politician, currently aligned with the SLPP (Sylvia Olayinka Blyden). Further two adds were bought by the First Lady and two by Yvonne Aki-Sawyers, the APC mayoral candidate for Freetown. Overall spending on the advertisement on Facebook is estimated below 600 USD.

<sup>125</sup> Exchange rate USD/EUR = 0.9 as for 12.07.2023



5. ECSL communication on social media

Chart 17. ECSL activity - topics

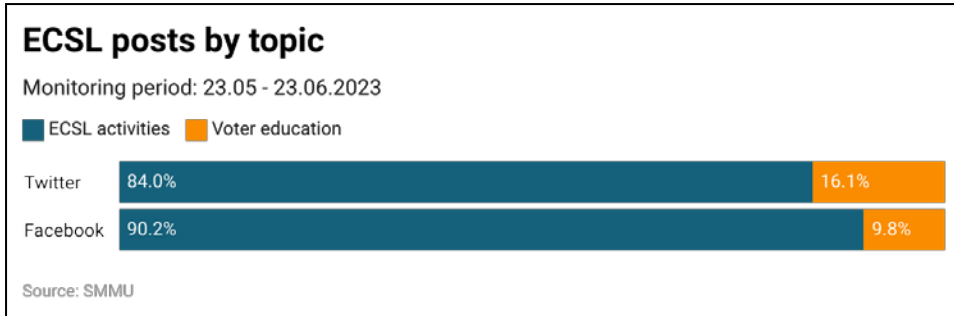
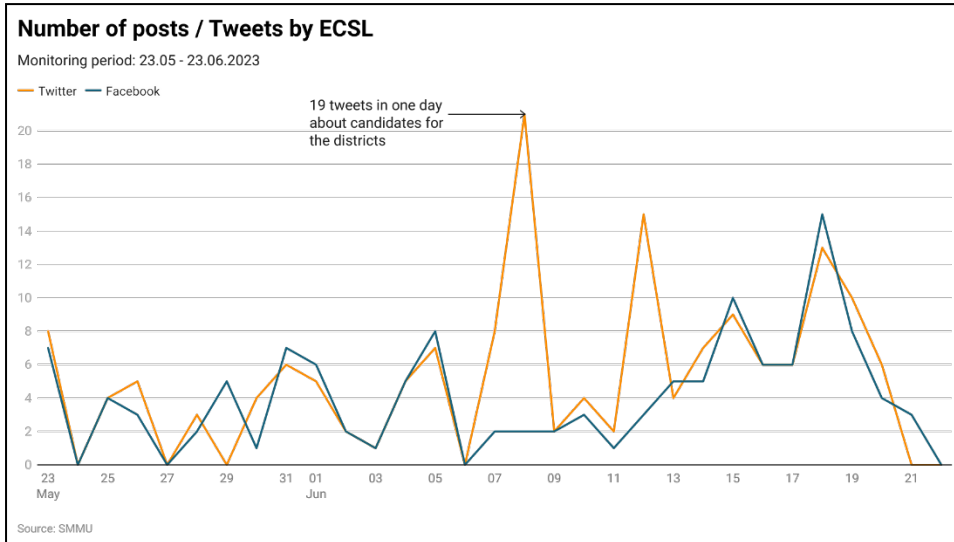
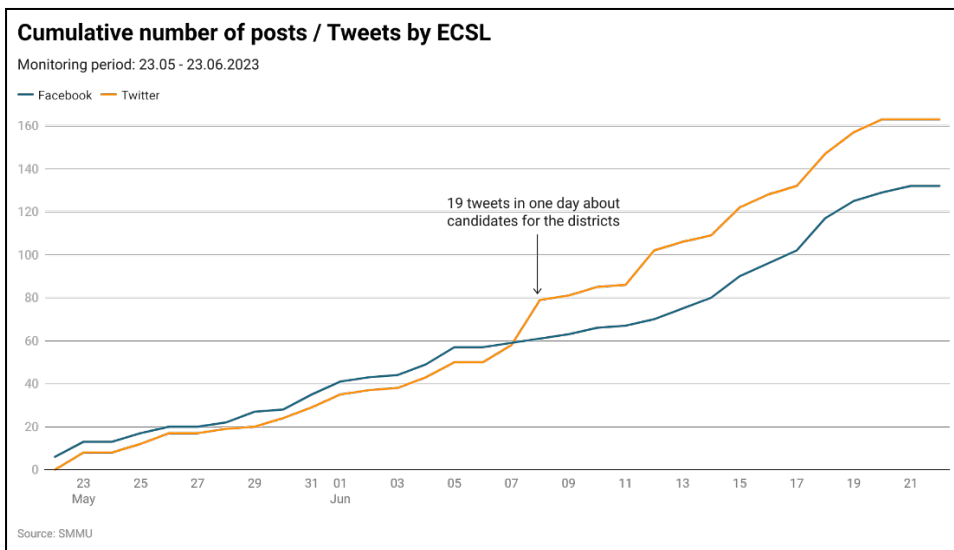


Chart 18a and 18b. ECSL activity number of posts

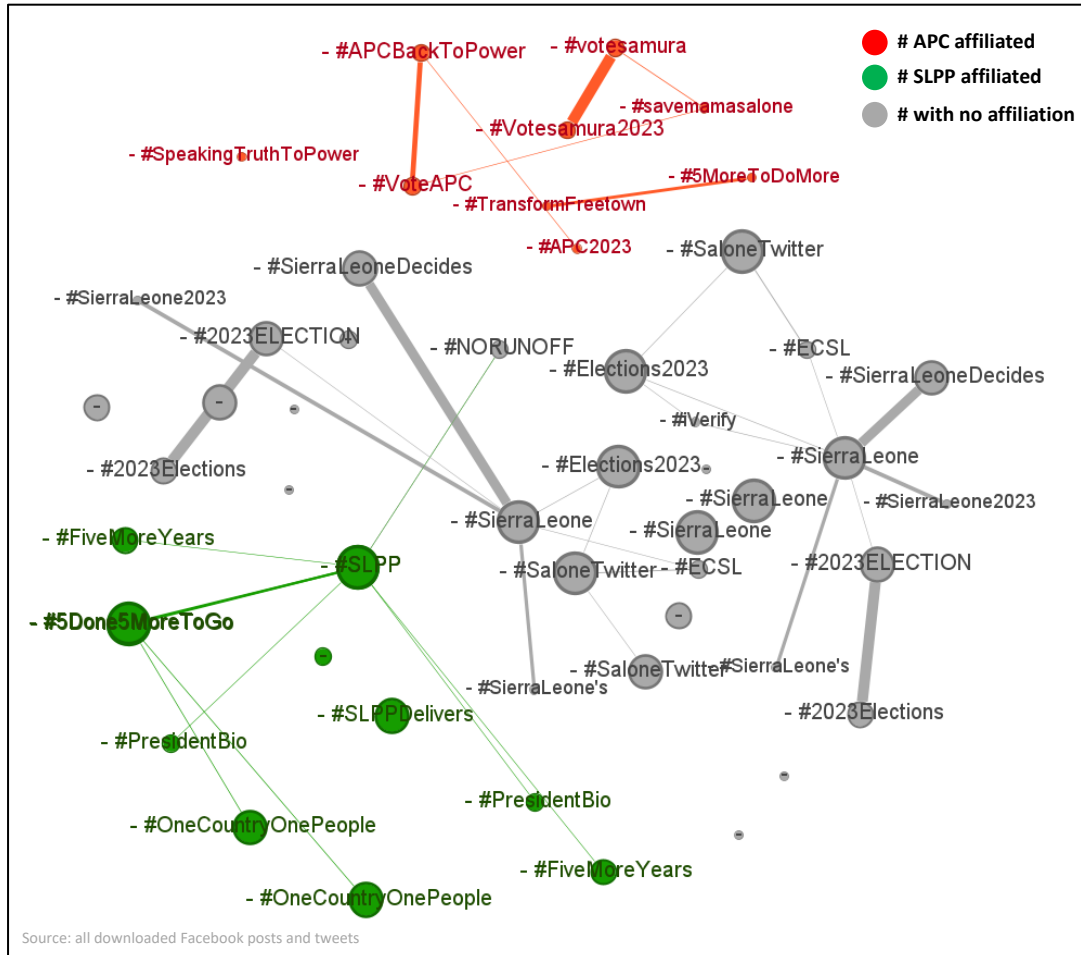


The ECSL was not very visible on the Facebook and Twitter, with only a small portion of overall communication being devoted to voter information. On Twitter 16 per cent of tweets could be considered as voter information and only 1 out of 10 posts on Facebook touched this topic. The rest of the posts were featuring various ECSL activities such as trainings, meetings and voter education posters with sample ballots for various races from across the country. Qualitative analysis of the posts evidence lacked detail and precision. For example, there is a post informing

about a delayed delivery of ballot papers, but no information on when the ballot papers to be expected.

**6. Additional analysis**

*Chart 19. Usage of hashtags on Facebook and Twitter*



Hashtags were not used in a consistent and organised manner either by the APC or SLPP to reach out to voters beyond the already established online base of followers.<sup>126</sup> As this Gephi map shows, SLPP affiliated hashtags were very often not connected with each other. Strongest connections were between #5Done5MoreToGo and #SLPP, but, for example those two were not connected with #SLPPDelivers. From the APC side strongest connections was observed between #votesamura and #VoteSamura2023. Strong connection is also between #APCBackToPower and #VoteAPC. Some election-related hashtags did not have any connection to others at all.

<sup>126</sup> Hashtags are created to hyperlink messages that feature the same topic, political party, candidate or event. Even a slight change in the hashtag redirects the recipient to a different type of message. Hashtags, if used consistently, can play a key role in political online campaigning, linking posts by political supporters, influencers, and politicians, reaching voters who usually do not follow the respective party or the political figure.

