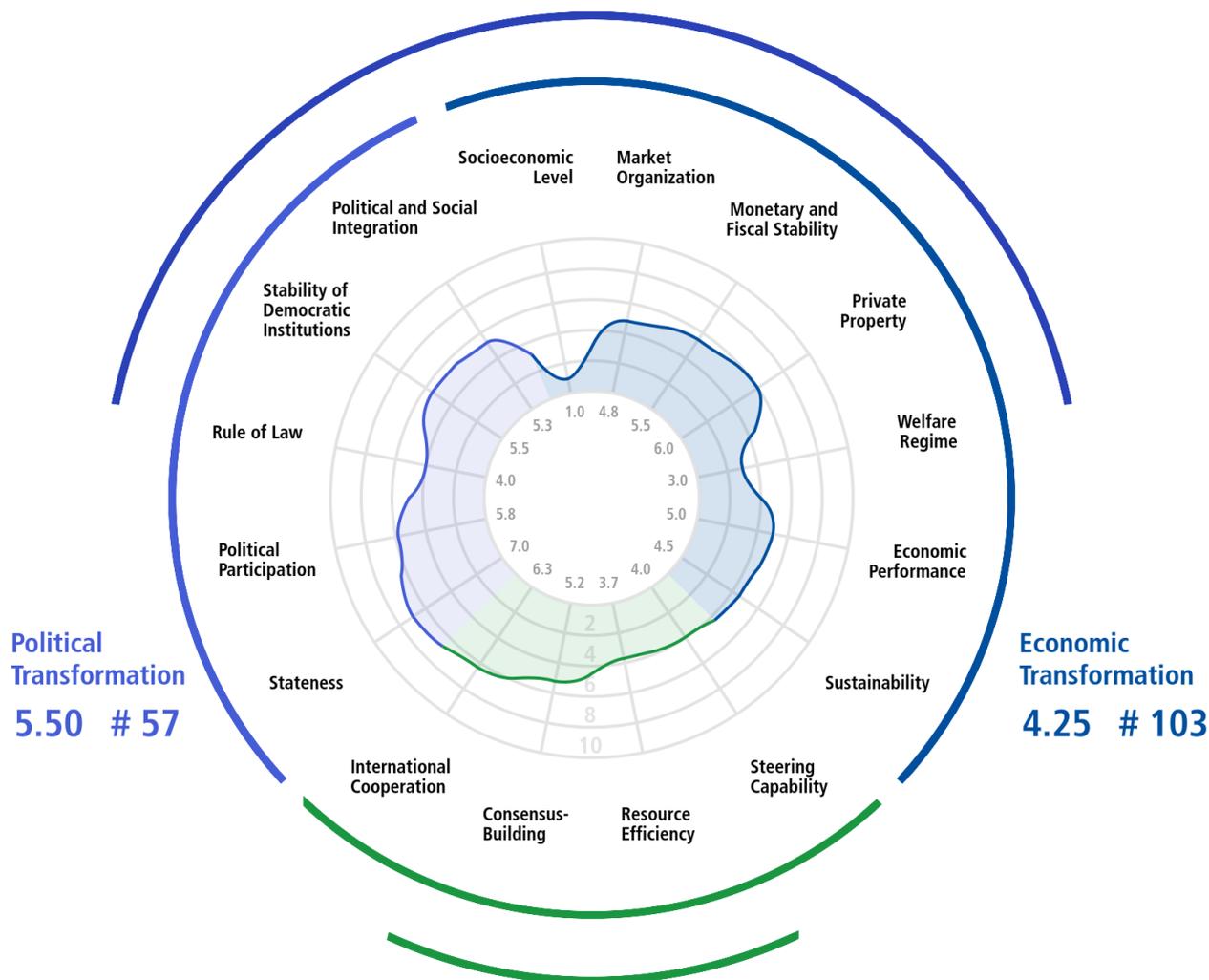


Sierra Leone

Status Index

4.88 # 74

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
5.50 # 57

Economic Transformation
4.25 # 103

Governance Index

4.56 # 71

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2026**. It covers the period from February 1, 2023 to January 31, 2025. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	8.6	HDI	0.467	GDP p.c., PPP \$	3516
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	2.1	HDI rank of 193	185	Gini Index	35.7
Life expectancy	years	61.8	UN Education Index	0.370	Poverty ³	% 64.3
Urban population	%	44.8	Gender inequality ²	0.566	Aid per capita \$	58.8

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2025. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

Sierra Leone experienced controversial general elections and an alleged coup attempt in 2023. The resulting political instability and rising social tensions, combined with preexisting factors such as systemic corruption, a lack of accountability, a weak rule of law and inefficiencies at all administrative levels, have created an increasingly challenging socioeconomic environment for the population. The country's fragile stability has not faced this much pressure since the end of the war more than 20 years ago.

Sierra Leone held a presidential election July 24, 2023. Incumbent President Julius Maada Bio and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) won against the All People's Congress (APC) and its flagbearer, Samuel Kamara, and Bio was re-elected for another five years in office. International election observers expressed grave concerns over a lack of transparency in the tabulation process, statistical inconsistencies and severe logistical shortcomings, among other issues. The APC rejected the election results and initiated a boycott of parliament and other governmental institutions. To end the ensuing political stalemate, mediated dialogues were facilitated by international organizations, among them the Commonwealth, the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These efforts culminated in the signing of the Agreement for National Unity and the formation of the Tripartite Committee, comprising members of the SLPP, APC and international mediators. One outcome of the mediation process was the constitution of a Cross-Party Committee on Electoral Systems and Management Bodies Review, tasked with examining electoral irregularities and recommending reforms.

In the early hours of Nov. 26, 2023, armed individuals attacked the Wilberforce military barracks and Pademba Road Prison in Freetown, among other key locations. The coordinated assault resulted in the deaths of more than 20 people, and approximately 2,000 inmates escaped the prison. The government accused elements of the APC and renegade security forces of having attempted a coup; several individuals were arrested and sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Former President

Ernest Bai Koroma, who led the country under APC rule between 2007 and 2018, was arrested and charged with treason, but was later allowed to travel to Nigeria for medical reasons. A former military officer, Amadu Koita Makolo, was identified by authorities as the ringleader and sentenced to 182 years in prison. Members of the opposition and the public alleged that the incidents were staged by the government to justify a crackdown on the APC and delay investigations relating to the election results. The arrests were described as politically motivated, and government critics considered the incarcerated individuals to be political prisoners.

In July 2024 the Cross-Party Committee published its report. This contains 80 recommendations as well as “areas of divergence” in which SLPP and APC representatives could not reach an agreement. The main area of divergence concerns the most decisive aspect of the entire process – the election result. While SLPP claims to be the rightful winner, many APC representatives and followers consider the election result to be invalid. The APC itself is divided in this regard, with some segments collaborating with the SLPP-dominated authorities, and others insisting that the current government is illegitimate.

In this increasingly challenging political environment, the government published its new national development agenda in January 2024, again called the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP), this time covering the years 2024 to 2030. Food security has been identified as one of the main strategic goals, with more than two-thirds of the population living under conditions of food insecurity. Since the end of the war in 2002, Sierra Leonean governments have failed to successfully diversify the economy, leaving it extremely vulnerable to fluctuations in international market demand and heavily dependent on foreign investments and international donors.

Overall, the consolidation of democratic structures and processes suffered setbacks due to the contentious 2023 election and its aftermath, and the prospects for economic transformation in the near future remain poor.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

Sierra Leone gained independence from Great Britain in 1961, its political and economic prospects burdened from the outset by structural constraints.

In the first free elections in 1962, the SLPP, which had existed since 1951, took over from the British and ruled the country until 1967, when it lost the election to the breakaway APC under Siaka Stevens.

The APC governed the country from that point until 1992 (between 1978 and 1991, following a controversial constitutional referendum, as the sole legal party). One-party rule ended in 1991, but at this point, social eruptions were no longer containable. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), originally supported by disillusioned university students, had started a war against the government in Freetown. With military support from Libya, Burkina Faso and, most notably, neighboring

Liberia, the RUF brought large parts of eastern and southern Sierra Leone under its control. The Sierra Leonean military disagreed with the political leadership over how to address the crisis and replaced the civilian government in a military coup in 1992.

The Sierra Leonean military, led by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), managed to push back the RUF and free elections were held in 1996, won by the SLPP. However, a peace accord did not hold and fighting resumed. Another military coup brought a different faction of the military to power, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The AFRC joined forces with the RUF and formed a shared government.

ECOMOG forces under Nigerian leadership retook Freetown for the exiled civilian Sierra Leonean government in 1998, and the Lomé peace accord was negotiated in 1999. However, disagreements continued and, in 2000, the RUF was advancing toward Freetown again. The former colonial power, Great Britain, intervened and, in 2002, the war was declared over.

The Sierra Leonean war resulted in more than 75,000 casualties, displaced 2.6 million people, was characterized by war crimes such as the use of child soldiers, mutilations, torture and systematic rape, and largely destroyed the country's existing infrastructure.

With massive international support – at its height, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) had a maximum authorized deployment strength of 17,500 military personnel – reconstruction and reconciliation efforts began. In the following years, international partners provided significant financing and expertise, and a fragile stability returned.

The SLPP won the first postwar elections in 2002. In the next elections in 2007, the APC returned to power and was re-elected in 2012. The latest elections in March 2018 brought the SLPP back into office.

The political landscape has remained static since 1961, with the bipolar political system interrupted only by the disastrous war between 1991 and 2002.

Likewise, the country's economy has in principle remained unchanged since independence. Sierra Leone continues to rely on the export of a small number of agricultural and mineral goods.

Sierra Leone's economy began to grow slowly after the war, based mainly on rutile, diamond and bauxite exports. Between 2012 and 2014, growth gained momentum due to the reemergence of iron ore as an export product.

The “twin shocks” occurring between 2014 and 2016 led to a significant economic setback for the country. The Ebola virus disease epidemic led to the death of around 4,000 people, paralyzing the country for over a year, and commodity prices on the world market went down in 2015, which resulted in the economy shrinking by more than one-fifth. However, from 2016 on, the economy recovered, largely thanks to international debt relief. In 2020, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the local economy once again, and with the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian War in early 2022, the overall socioeconomic environment deteriorated further. As 2025 began, economic growth forecasts were uncertain and fragile democratic structures were increasingly under pressure.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

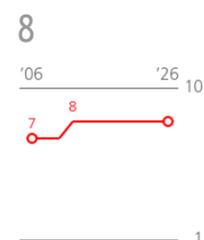
1 | Stateness

Despite donor-supported security sector reform processes since the end of the war in 2002, the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) remain dysfunctional. The SLP is considered to be one of the most corrupt institutions in the country, and has repeatedly been accused of human rights violations and the disproportionate use of force, as in the wake of the August 2020 protests when at least 21 demonstrators were killed by security forces. Overall, the SLP used to present itself as loyal to the ruling party of the time – to the SLPP between 2002 and 2007 SLPP, to the APC between 2007 and 2018 APC, and to the SLPP since 2018 – but in the aftermath of the 2023 elections and the subsequent armed attacks on barracks and prisons, a different picture emerged. The government has accused active and former members of the SLP and the RSLAF of an attempted coup d'état.

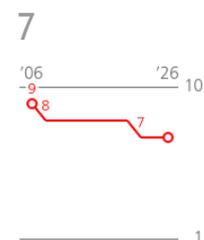
In principle, the constitution provides citizenship rights to all people living in Sierra Leone, and the concept of the nation-state is officially recognized. De facto, however, members of non-African minority groups, such as the economically influential Lebanese and Indian communities, face discrimination. Dual citizenship remains a contentious political issue, especially given that members of the Sierra Leonean diaspora could potentially enter the political arena if citizenship legislation were amended accordingly. Most importantly, the ethnic affiliations of both the APC and the SLPP contrast with an inclusive Sierra Leonean national identity. The state apparatus remains one of the main providers of comparatively stable employment, and positions in ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) as well as in the security forces are allocated along ethnic lines. When the SLPP took power from the APC in 2018, it accused the former administration of tribalism; since then, parts of the Sierra Leonean public perceive the SLPP administration as systematically favoring Mende in appointments to government positions.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force



State identity



Especially in rural areas, traditional authorities wield significant influence. Paramount chiefs and chiefs not only apply customary law through chieftaincy courts, but also have historically controlled most of the land. The new land laws aim to shift power to local communities, but the extent to which this will make decision-making processes more inclusive remains to be seen.

The constitution provides for the separation of state and religion, and the legal framework prohibits religious discrimination and protects people's rights to practice their religion and change religions without interference from authorities or other religious groups.

Sierra Leone is a predominantly Muslim nation, with an estimated 80% of the population identifying as Muslim and the remaining 20% considered Christian. Most Muslims follow the Sunni tradition of Islam, while about 10% adhere to the Ahmadiyya sect.

Ethnic and religious identities correlate to some extent, but most ethnic groups follow more than one religion. For example, the Temne of the north and the Mende of the south each make up about 30% of the overall population and are respectively considered 85% and 70% Muslim, with the remaining 15% and 30% being Christian.

The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) and various civil society organizations (CSOs) collaborate to promote the acceptance of religious diversity. Relations between followers of different religions are amicable in principle but not without friction. Tensions between Muslim and Pentecostal groups do occur, and the Ahmadiyya community has reported Tablighi Jamaat missionaries spreading a hard-line doctrine and agitating against them.

Basic civil functions of the state remain highly deficient, and the delivery of public services is overall insufficient. More than half the population suffers from food insecurity. An ongoing cost-of-living crisis has resulted in higher prices for staples – for rice, the most important staple, prices rose another 13% to 15% over the second half of 2024 – and fuel. Only about a fifth of the population has access to basic sanitation services. According to World Bank data, 65.3% of the population has access to a basic water source and 10.3% to a safely managed one.

Overall, 29.4% of the population has access to electricity, while in rural areas, eight out of 10 people lack access to a reliable power supply. Since 2018, Turkish energy provider Karadeniz Energy Group has covered most of the country's energy demand – 80% according to the firm's website – via two floating power plants anchored off the coast of Freetown. Due to unpaid debt, the energy supply has been switched off repeatedly since then, forcing the government to make the overdue payments. The lack of reliable energy sources hinders economic development and negatively impacts the health, education and ICT sectors.

No interference of religious dogmas

9



1

Basic administration

4



1

2 | Political Participation

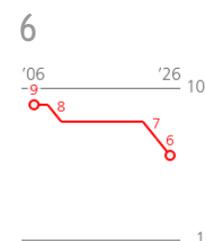
General elections have been held regularly since the end of the war (in 2002, 2007, 2012, 2018 and 2023) and, as a result, formal and democratic processes have been strengthened. International observers deemed the first four elections in this series to be free and fair overall, despite election violence and recurring controversies surrounding the results.

This was not the case in the aftermath of the 2023 elections. In a joint statement, the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany and France voiced concerns over a lack of transparency in the tabulation process, and the European Union Election Observer Mission (EU EOM) concluded in its final report that the tabulation process was opaque and that meaningful observation had been impeded. The mission criticized the fact that no disaggregated results per polling station were published and reported statistical inconsistencies as well as mathematical improbabilities. The fact that the president appoints the commissioners of the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) perpetuated distrust in state institutions and created the perception of political bias.

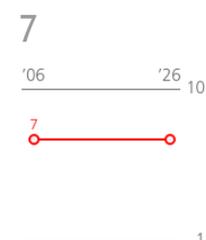
The oppositional All People's Congress protested and rejected the declaration of President Bio as the winner of the elections, arguing there were irregularities in the process. After the elections, the All People's Congress refused to participate in the national legislature and local councils as a sign of protest. The All People's Congress and the ruling SLPP eventually signed a national unity agreement that allowed the opposition to join parliament, while the government agreed to electoral reforms.

Democratically elected political representatives hold effective power to govern in the capital and political strongholds. Formally legitimized and with access to government-controlled resources, these representatives are able to formulate and execute policies with varying degrees of authority. Power relations between the central government and district councils are dynamic. The central government controls the transfer of funds to the district councils and legally oversees their operations, but implementation of policies formulated by the central government depends on collaboration with local political representatives. At the district level, the country is divided into two zones of political dominance – the APC holds the majority in the north, including the Western Urban district where Freetown is located, while the SLPP has its stronghold in the south. In addition to the district councils and local ward committees, paramount chiefs, subchiefs and traditional healers act as political stakeholders at the local level of the chiefdoms, and must be considered veto powers. Complementing this, secret societies – Poro for males and Sande for females – wield considerable influence, and it can be assumed that a number of political representatives hold dual roles as elected officials as well as traditional authorities and/or members of secret societies.

Free and fair elections



Effective power to govern



Freedom of association and assembly is guaranteed by the constitution. Citizens are legally entitled to form parties and civil society organizations and to hold public assemblies.

De facto, however, only a minority of people have the resources and capacities – knowledge, skills, connections, networks and financial means – to organize assemblies or to form parties or CSOs.

The authorities have at times imposed significant restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly, especially but not only during the 2023 election period. Breaking with a long political tradition, the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) banned political street rallies, a measure criticized by the opposition as interference in free and fair elections.

The security forces used excessive force to disperse peaceful protests on several occasions during the review period. For example, one protester died when police forcefully confronted a crowd protesting discrepancies in the election results in front of the APC headquarters in June 2023, and in September that year at least two people died during demonstrations in Freetown and other areas.

Overall, despite constitutional guarantees, authorities have not upheld the right to association and assembly, and peaceful protests against the government were often met with disproportionate use of force.

The constitution provides a legal framework for the freedom of speech and press freedom, and Sierra Leone has a diverse media landscape featuring multiple newspapers, radio and television stations, web portals, and the national Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). Most media outlets are not under direct political control; however, because they lack material, financial and logistical resources, they are vulnerable to political manipulation. Independent and investigative reporting does take place, but despite the 2020 abolition of the “defamation law” (section 5 of the Public Order Act), journalists are under constant threat of intimidation. In the Reporters Without Borders ranking of freedom of expression, Sierra Leone declined 28 places between 2022 and 2023 – falling from 46th to 74th place globally. In the 2024 ranking, however, it regained some ground, and was ranked 64th out of 180 countries.

In general, print media is losing influence, and for most of the population, radio and social media are the main sources of information. An estimated 60% of people have access to the internet; audio and video files are distributed via social media platforms, and the potential for political manipulation via such channels is growing. Given that roughly half of the population is illiterate, and that information generated on social media is passed on orally to isolated communities without internet access, the spread of misinformation and fake news has been amplified.

Association / assembly rights

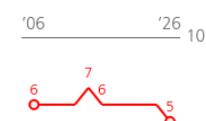
5



1

Freedom of expression

5



1

3 | Rule of Law

The principle of separation of powers is established under the 1991 constitution. Each branch of government is intended to operate independently, providing checks and balances. In practice, however, the executive is the dominant branch.

The legislature's capacity to serve as an effective check on the executive is limited, because the ruling party holds the majority of seats and opposition members of parliament are frequently co-opted and align with the executive's agenda. The paramount chiefs generally conform with the dominant political force.

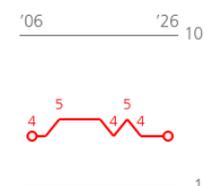
The judiciary, while constitutionally independent, is not in a position to counterbalance the executive. The president appoints judges, including members of the Supreme Court, based on proposals by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission, whose members are also appointed by the president and judges. As a result, the executive has significant influence over the composition of the judiciary and, ultimately, over judicial decisions as well.

The independence and functionality of the judiciary are limited due to the influence of the executive branch, a shortage of judicial professionals, and inadequate infrastructure with regard to factors such as buildings, ICT and transport. The modern judicial system is concentrated in Freetown and some urban centers but remains difficult for most people to navigate; high fees further limit accessibility. Moreover, the judiciary is vulnerable to political manipulation. In the aftermath of the events on Nov. 26, 2023, hundreds of APC functionaries and followers were arrested, brought before court and sentenced. According to the APC, between 300 and 500 "political prisoners" were incarcerated in 2024.

Neighborhood or barray courts operate outside the formal judicial system, and these informal community-based institutions provide dispute resolution mechanisms for most of the population. In urban areas, community elders may preside over these courts; in rural areas, they are often led by traditional authorities. These do not use codified procedures, and are not based on a legislative framework; rather, customary law may vary between ethnic groups and locations. Neighborhood courts do not necessarily align with human rights standards, and certain groups such as women and younger people might face discrimination. However, in the absence of a functioning formal judicial system, the barrays provide crucial, grassroots, self-organized conflict resolution mechanisms.

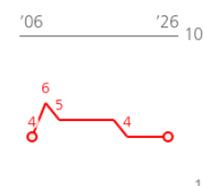
Separation of powers

4



Independent judiciary

4



Holding officeholders accountable for corruption, abuse of power or human rights violations is legally possible but extremely challenging due to systemic issues such as limited resources, political interference and a weak institutional framework. A legal framework (Anti-Corruption Act) is in place, and institutions (Anti-Corruption Commission, Office of the Ombudsman, the Independent Police Complaints Board, Legal Aid Board, Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone) do exist. However, the abovementioned systemic dysfunctions, combined with widespread corruption and a lack of public awareness, result more often than not in impunity for officeholders who abuse their power. Like earlier governments, the current administration has identified the fight against corruption as one of its primary political goals, but the measures it has taken are inconsistent and have been biased against members of the opposition.

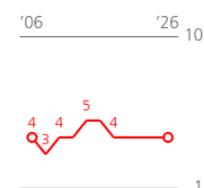
In the past six years, there has been almost no prosecution of senior officials in the current administration. Allegations against the Office of the President and the first lady have gone unanswered; in fact, the auditor-general was dismissed for raising these allegations. The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has also developed a pattern of asking perpetrators to repay stolen funds instead of prosecuting them.

De jure, Sierra Leone has made significant progress on the issues of civil rights, and institutions, legislation and mechanisms to provide for such rights are in place. International human rights treaties have been ratified, and the government collaborates with international organizations such as UNHCR and U.N. Women. At the national level, institutions such as the Human Rights Commission Sierra Leone (HRCSL), the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee and the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC) operate. The HRCSL provides regular reports to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). A legal framework in this area is continuously evolving – for example, with the passage of the Child Rights Act 2007, the Persons with Disability Act 2011, the Sexual Offenses Act Amendment 2019, the Basic and Senior Secondary Education Act 2023, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Bill 2024 – and multiple government strategies exist, such as the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy 2020, the National Male Involvement Strategy 2020 and the fifth generation of the Justice Sector Reform Strategy (2024 – 2028).

De facto, however, civil and human rights are not upheld and are systematically violated. Equal access to justice is not in place, reports of arbitrary killings by government agents and arbitrary detentions are frequent, prison conditions are life-threatening, gender-based violence is extensive, an estimated 90% of females undergo genital mutilation/cutting, and violence against LGBTIQ+ people is common.

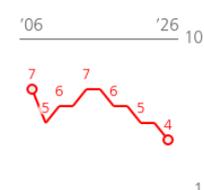
Prosecution of office abuse

4



Civil rights

4

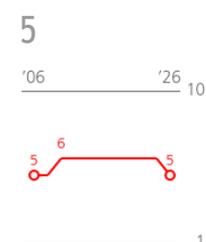


4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

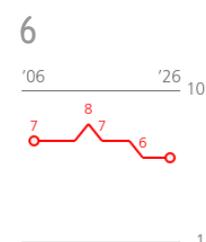
Democratic institutions exist and are formally legitimized through elections. However, substantial challenges remain. Since the release of the first national development agenda (National Recovery Strategy 2002), all subsequent governments have developed and partially implemented development agendas, but the pace of necessary and overdue reforms has been hindered by resource constraints, reliance on donor funding, corruption, a lack of public accountability, bureaucratic inefficiencies and political polarization. The competing interests of the SLPP and APC continually impair collaboration on political priorities. Tensions between the national government and district or local governments, as well as financial and human resource constraints, result in significant reform delays. The three branches of government do not work collaboratively as autonomous partners toward shared development goals; rather, due to poor coordination, political patronage, nepotism and vested interests, they create a dynamic of counterproductive friction that regularly results in reform gridlock. The public administration is tasked with providing public services, but the aforementioned dysfunctions impede its effectiveness. To end the political stalemate in the aftermath of the 2023 elections, the Cross-Party Committee on the Review of Sierra Leone’s Electoral System and the Electoral Management Bodies was created, and in July 2024 presented its report containing 80 recommendations. Among other things, these recommendations refer to constitutional reforms, political parties’ access to airtime on SLBC and insufficient progress in implementing the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act (2022). In addition to the recommendations, “areas of divergence” are outlined – that is, subjects on which representatives of the two parties could not reach an agreement. The most revealing outcome is that the Cross-Party Committee found no common ground regarding the 2023 election results – the APC rejects them, while the SLPP claims to be the legitimate winner. If, accordingly, roughly half the electorate considers the government to be illegitimate, the stability of democratic institutions must be considered under substantial threat.

Without doubt, individuals and organizations committed to a democratic political culture are part of the political landscape, and key political actors share an interest in upholding democratic institutions, but at the same time those democratic institutions are a resource to perpetuate patronage relationships and to supply elite networks with income, government positions and influence. The existence of democratic institutions is also a requirement for donor support, and as such, maintaining democratic institutions lies in the overall interest of the ruling elites. The mere existence of these institutions, however, does not mean that key political actors are committed to democratic norms and values such as power-sharing, compromise, collaborative policy development and mutual respect. For example, in all elections since 2002, the incumbent party (whether APC or SLPP) has used state resources and infrastructure to further its election campaigns, and electorates have been mobilized not based on

Performance of democratic institutions



Commitment to democratic institutions



political visions and programs but rather along ethnic and regional lines. In addition, political actors have increasingly utilized violence to further their objectives. Not only political youth organizations and party militias, but also street gangs and criminals are linked to political actors and are used in the competition for political power. Street gangs have gained significant influence since the 2018 elections, are informally connected to political players, are present in all major cities and overlap with the influential secret societies. On the other hand, the existing political system, perpetuates and instrumentalizes gang structures. However, gang activities have declined since their height in the early 2020s and their influence has waned.

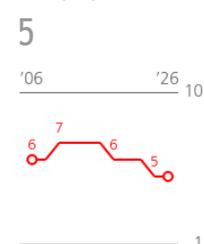
5 | Political and Social Integration

The SLPP and APC are the only parties with deep social roots, and they have dominated the political landscape since Sierra Leone's independence from Great Britain in 1961. A history of animosity and the aforementioned ethnoregional affiliations has hindered their ability to aggregate societal interests. The level of polarization is high, and increased further following the November 2023 attacks. The SLPP and APC have consistently used state resources for political purposes, instrumentalizing institutions and facilities to maintain or gain political power. As a result, state institutions have served more as vehicles for political competition than as tools for creating and maintaining societal progress and welfare. The resulting developmental stalemate led to the outbreak of civil war in 1991, and the slow pace of reform implementation since the end of the war in 2002 – due to the existing dysfunctional bipolar political system – carries increasingly destabilizing potential. So far, attempts to establish a third political force have been unsuccessful (for example, Charles Margai in 2007 with the People's Movement for Democratic Change / PMDC, Kandeh K. Yumkella with the KKY-Movement and former Vice President Samuel Sam-Sumana with the Coalition for Change / C4C in 2018).

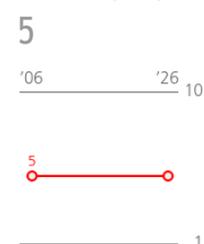
Sierra Leone's political and economic system continues to be dominated by a few interest groups. Only a small elite of political, traditional and economic actors, embedded in fluid social alliances and informal networks, has access to resources such as government jobs, land and economic opportunities.

The relationship between society and the political system is mediated to some extent by civil society organizations, professional and cooperative associations such as the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) and the Sierra Leone Labor Congress (SLLC), as well as faith-based organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), but their effectiveness is often hindered by financial, structural and political challenges. Many civil society organizations struggle with inadequate funding or depend on international partners and donors for support and assistance, and, due to political interference, face governmental co-optation or suppression. For example, the first

Party system



Interest groups

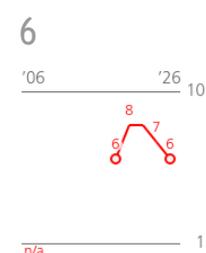


Development Cooperation Framework (DCF), which served as a regulatory framework for the NGO and civil society sector between 2019 and 2023, was criticized by civil society representatives for the lack of associated consultation and restrictive provisions such as mandatory membership with the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO), and for being a mechanism for increased government control over civil society activities. It remains to be seen what impact the new National NGO Policy Framework 2023 – 2028 will have on the operational environment for civil society actors.

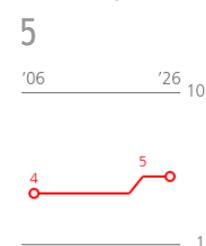
Public opinion survey data for Sierra Leone is not readily available; in fact, survey data in general are limited. Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL), the central national authority for statistical information, does not issue data regarding the public's approval of democracy. The most recent survey data come from Afrobarometer in early 2020. At that time, more than 85% of respondents stated that they preferred democracy to any other kind of government, but only 41% were satisfied with how democracy was actually working in Sierra Leone. While significant parts of the population seem to approve democratic principles and values, there is a growing concern about the effectiveness and implementation of democratic processes. Considering that democracies depend on output legitimacy, but around 70% of the population suffers from food insecurity amid an escalating cost-of-living crisis, and additionally taking into account the contentious election results in 2023, it seems fair to assume that the overall level of satisfaction with the existing democratic system is fairly low.

Social capital, which fosters cooperation and mutual support for self-help, does exist. Extended families, village communities and self-help groups such as women's groups offer social mechanisms for self-organization and provide support networks for disadvantaged members of segments within the wider society. However, the self-organizational capacities of civil society face constraints such as traditional authority structures in certain regions that potentially limit grassroots mobilization, political polarization that negatively affects the development of collaborative community initiatives, and resource limitations. Moreover, the disputed election results of 2023 weakened social cohesion, further fragmented societal bonds, strained social capital and, as a result, limited the potential for collaborative civil society action.

Approval of democracy



Social capital



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest nations in the world. Poverty and inequality are extensive and structurally ingrained. The majority of Sierra Leoneans live in poverty, food insecurity is prevalent, educational levels are low and most people rely on subsistence farming. Thus, opportunities for socioeconomic advancement are very limited. In its 2024 Human Development Index, the UNDP ranked Sierra Leone at 184th place out of 193 assessed countries and territories.

The most recent publicly available survey data relating to the Multidimensional Poverty Index classifies 59.2% of the population as living in multidimensional poverty, while another 21.3% are vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. The overall adult illiteracy rate is around 40%, but is higher among youth, women and rural populations. The World Bank estimated the Gini Index score in its latest 2018 assessment to be 35.7, placing the country roughly in the middle among all assessed nations. The Gender Inequality Index ranked Sierra Leone at 157th place out of 166 nations in 2022. According to the WHO, life expectancy at birth was 61 years in 2021, which is below the African average, and the maternal mortality ratio was 443 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020. This represents a significant decline over the last 10 years, but remains one of the highest rates globally.

The country's food security situation has deteriorated since 2020, in part due to the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In 2024, it was estimated that 82% of the overall population was living under conditions of food insecurity, with rates surpassing 90% in some rural areas. About 75% of the population relies on agriculture for survival, either as subsistence farmers or through micro enterprises, and is extremely vulnerable to natural hazards including floods, droughts and landslides. Prospects for socioeconomic development are extremely low, especially for youth. Socioeconomic barriers exclude the majority from development.

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers

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Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
GDP	\$ M	7173.4	7124.5	6411.8	7547.8
GDP growth	%	5.9	5.3	5.7	4.0
Inflation (CPI)	%	11.9	27.2	47.6	28.6
Unemployment	%	3.6	3.2	3.2	3.1
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	3.0	2.0	3.8	3.6
Export growth	%	69.8	9.0	7.0	6.5
Import growth	%	24.0	15.8	9.3	12.0
Current account balance	\$ M	-522.8	-452.1	-606.4	-
Public debt	% of GDP	47.1	54.0	49.5	41.7
External debt	\$ M	2531.8	2400.4	2381.9	-
Total debt service	\$ M	106.7	120.8	155.3	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	8.1	6.7	5.5	5.5
Public education spending	% of GDP	5.6	4.9	2.6	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	1.9	1.5	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	0.6	0.7	0.6	-

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

About 90% of workers are employed in the informal sector. This staggering figure reflects the reality that the institutional framework for market-based competition is substantially inadequate. Competition is not free and fair, market participation is not unrestricted, and market participants do not enjoy a level playing field.

The current national development agenda, MTNDP 2024 – 2030, lists diversification of the economy, acceleration of productivity, commercialization of the agricultural and marine sectors, and development of the country’s transport infrastructure among its main goals. Institutions such as the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) and the National Commission for Privatization (NCP) are in place.

Market
organization
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Q3

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The state-owned Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Company (SLPMC) is tasked with promoting agricultural exports. In 2015, the Finance Act was enacted to enhance the tax revenue system, and the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2022 – 2026 aims to create a functioning framework for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and develop financial products geared specifically toward underserved groups such as women, youth and rural communities.

Nevertheless, market organization remains weak. In the Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom, Sierra Leone’s position was downgraded to 163rd place out of 184 countries in 2024, down from 148th out of 176 in 2023. It currently falls into the “repressed” category.

Sierra Leone currently lacks a formal competition or antitrust law. The Ministry of Trade and Industry has the mandate to regulate anti-competitive business practices, but the absence of specific legislation limits comprehensive enforcement action in response to monopolistic behavior, including mergers and dominant market positions.

In principle, foreign companies are allowed to compete on the same terms as domestic firms under the Investment Promotion Act 2004. However, Sierra Leone’s overall regulatory environment is inefficient and does not further entrepreneurial activity.

Sierra Leone is not a member of the International Competition Network (ICN) but, as an ECOWAS member, collaborates with the ECOWAS Regional Competition Authority (ERCA). ERCA develops competition and consumer protection policy and frameworks with the aim of facilitating the establishment of national competition authorities in all member states. In other words, while Sierra Leone currently lacks an independent competition authority, regional efforts are under way to further develop and implement effective antitrust regimes, and the role of the government is evolving.

Foreign trade is liberalized in principle, and efforts to streamline the investment framework and strengthen the regulatory environment are ongoing.

The country is integrated into the global economy through the export of minerals (iron ore, gold, bauxite, rutile, diamonds) as well as agricultural (palm oil, coffee, cacao, ginger) and food products (shrimps, dried fish) and the import of technology, petroleum products and food.

According to SLIEPA, export permits are required for coffee, cocoa, palm kernel oil, palm kernel cake, ginger and piassava. The export of gold and diamonds must comply with internationally accepted standards such as the Kimberley Process. Sierra Leone has duty-free and quota-free market access to the European Union under the Everything but Arms Initiative, as well as to the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act for products meeting specific criteria. Sierra Leone grants duty-free preferences to products from ECOWAS members, and several bilateral agreements for preferential market access are in place – for example, with

Competition policy

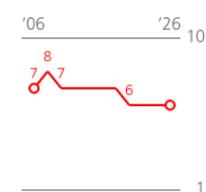
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Liberalization of foreign trade

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Australia, Canada, China and Japan. Since 2018, African countries including Sierra Leone have committed under the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) to remove tariffs, address non-tariff barriers and maximize regional economic growth potential.

Imports into Sierra Leone are subject to various duties, including import duty, goods and services tax, import excise duty, an ECOWAS levy for goods originating outside the ECOWAS region, and a declaration processing fee. Certain exemptions apply, primarily for diplomatic or United Nations institutions.

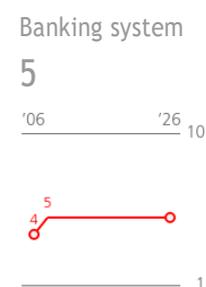
Sierra Leone has been a member of the WTO since 1995, and the WTO reported a simple average applied most favored nation tariff of 12% in 2023, essentially unchanged from 12.1% in 2020.

Sierra Leone's banking sector, supervised by the central bank (Bank of Sierra Leone, BSL), consists of several commercial banks (including local and international institutions), foreign exchange bureaus, community banks, microfinance institutions, mobile money operators, leasing and investment firms, savings and credit cooperatives (known as credit unions), and a stock exchange.

The authorities have implemented a number of measures intended to enhance BSL governance and strengthen financial sector oversight. In mid-2019, amendments to existing acts – including the Anti-Money-Laundering and Combating of Financing of Terrorism Act and the Borrowers and Lenders Act – came into effect, aimed at bolstering the central bank's accountability, improving borrowing and lending for businesses, and strengthening overall financial stability. In 2022 the BSL launched the second National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2022 – 2026) intended to promote access to financial products and services for all Sierra Leoneans.

However, the current state of banking supervision in Sierra Leone is considered rudimentary, with no explicit adoption of the Basel Accords' comprehensive risk-based approaches. While specific disclosure rules are in place, the overall framework lacks sophistication. There remains considerable room for improvement with regard to enhancing transparency and implementing robust disclosure requirements in such a way that would build trust and attract investment. The sector faces challenges with non-performing loans, which indicates asset quality concerns and serves as an important indicator of the overall health of the financial system. According to the IMF, the sovereign-bank nexus is also a concern, as banks' holdings of government securities as a share of overall assets remain high. While the system's capital adequacy ratio improved in 2023, some banks continued to face solvency challenges.

Only 12.4% of adults in Sierra Leone have a bank account, and just 19.8% of the population has access to formal financial services. Most financial institutions are concentrated in Freetown and larger urban areas such as Kenema and Bo, leaving the majority of the population cut off from the financial system.



8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

De jure, the BSL Act of 2000 lists the promotion of monetary stability as one of the main objectives of the central bank. De facto, the country suffers from high inflation rates and a deteriorating currency exchange rate.

To counter runaway inflation, the government redenominated the currency in July 2022, removing three zeros from the old leone and introducing new banknotes alongside the old ones still in circulation. While the government justified this measure by noting that rising prices had made it costly to print large quantities of banknotes, critics described it as purely cosmetic. In fact, it did not stop inflation. The inflation rate in 2022 was 27%, rose to 48% in 2023 and dropped to 32% in mid-2024. Nevertheless, food prices continued to rise, with the U.N. World Food Programme reporting that, toward the end of 2024, the price of rice, the country's most important staple, had increased by 13% to 15%.

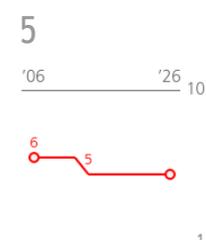
Sierra Leone has a floating exchange rate regime, with the currency's value based on supply and demand in the foreign exchange market. In the aftermath of the Ebola crisis in 2014 – 2015 and the sharp fall in iron ore prices during the same period – the so-called twin shocks – the exchange rate depreciated to 5,639 leones per \$1 in 2016, fell further to 8,596 Leones per \$1 in December 2018, was about 10,000 leones per \$1 in December 2020, 13,000 leones per \$1 in mid-2022, and around 23,000 leones per \$1 in January 2025.

The World Bank estimated the real effective exchange rate index (REER) at 112.2 in 2017, 104.8 in 2019 and 108.7 in 2021, but it fell to 95.08 in 2023, reflecting inflationary pressure from high import costs.

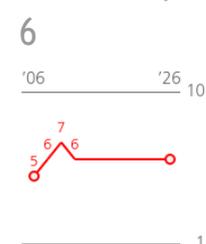
The challenges in pursuing monetary stability are also reflected in the field of fiscal policy. The government does seek to promote fiscal stability. However, institutional weaknesses, a lack of economic diversification and international dependency create an unfavorable environment for doing so.

Fiscal flexibility is increasingly limited due to the rising costs of debt service, the need to facilitate food and fuel imports, and spending intended to ease social pressures and retain an overall degree of stability. Sierra Leone's public debt rose from 79% of GDP in 2021 to 96% of GDP in 2022, while the budget deficit stood at 2.7% of GDP in 2024. Sierra Leone is and has been for years at high risk of public debt distress. In June 2022 the IMF approved the request by Sierra Leonean authorities for waivers relating to the non-observance of performance criteria originally agreed on by both parties, and in September 2024 Sierra Leone requested a new 38-month Extended Credit Facility valued at around \$253 million. Under the new facility, the IMF and Sierra Leonean authorities aim to strengthen the country's debt sustainability, address fiscal imbalances and reduce inflation.

Monetary stability



Fiscal stability



The country's fiscal outlook remains difficult, and significant fiscal gaps are certain to persist, subject to, among other things, global supply chain disruptions and the demand for iron ore from China. Under these challenging circumstances, the government and its financial institutions will require ongoing international assistance to sustain its stabilization-oriented fiscal policies.

9 | Private Property

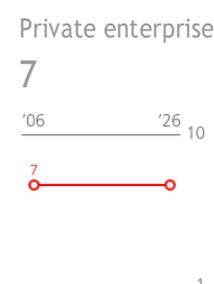
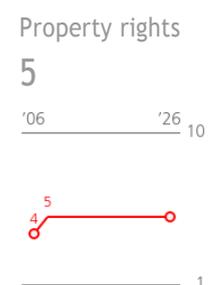
Property rights and regulations are formally defined in law, but are not implemented or enforced consistently.

A range of laws and regulations forms the legal framework, such as the Investment Promotion Act 2004, the Mines and Minerals Act 2009, the Petroleum Act 2011, the Finance Act 2015, the Fiscal Management and Control Act 2017, the Extractive Industries Revenue Act 2018, the Anti-Money-Laundering (Amendment) Act 2019, the Banking Act 2019 and the Arbitration Act 2022. In short, the legislative framework is constantly evolving, and reforms and initiatives are ongoing, but challenges remain, especially at the implementation level. The enforcement of property rights is hindered by shortcomings in the rule of law – including a deficient judiciary, weak protection of private property, very low-quality contract enforcement, inadequate property rights and law enforcement, and endemic corruption. Property rights and contracts are not adequately secure, and there is still no official land titling system in operation.

In August 2022, the parliament passed the Customary Land Rights Act and the National Land Commission Act. These acts are intended to form the basis for land reform by establishing a land titling system, formalizing land transactions while considering customary systems and providing opportunities for land acquisition. However, a report by the World Bank, which is supporting the implementation of the legislation, found significant legal shortcomings, and a consulting firm has been tasked with providing proposals for legal amendments by mid-2025.

In line with market principles and the policies of international donors, the government officially views private enterprises institutionally as important engines of economic production. Foreign and domestic private entities have the right to establish and own business enterprises, and few restrictions exist on foreign ownership of Sierra Leonean companies. Private companies are permitted to operate across various sectors. However, de facto regulatory barriers, a dysfunctional institutional landscape and deficient infrastructure impede the activities of private enterprise.

The National Commission for Privatization (NCP) was established in 2020, and tasked with reforming, supervising and privatizing public enterprises. However, more than 20 years later, key sectors of the economy remain under state control or heavy state influence. While the NCP lists the Sierra Leone Ports Authority and the Sierra



Leone Airport Authority as public-private partnerships, the overwhelming majority of state-owned enterprises are still wholly under government control (for example, the Sierra Leone National Shipping Company, the Guma Valley Water Company, Sierra Leone Postal Services, Sierra Leone Roads Authority and Sierratel). The government continues to seek investments in the form of public-private partnerships, and major investments have been secured – for example, with Turkish construction company Summa for the construction and management of a new terminal for Freetown International Airport in Lungi, and with Sherbro Alliance Partners to develop an eco-city on Sherbro Island – but in general, attracting private investors has proved difficult due to factors such as political instability, economic volatility, corruption and the influence of vested interests.

10 | Welfare Regime

Stately safety nets that compensate for the social risks of the capitalist economic system are negligible; most of the population lives in poverty.

Just as the overall economy is largely informal, social safety nets are informal as well. Public expenditure on health care amounted to 1.9% of GDP in 2021, according to World Bank data. Most people depend on family, clan, community or self-help structures as the social basis of survival.

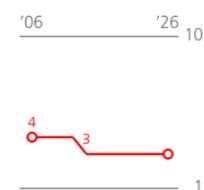
Formal social safety nets exist but are largely inadequate. The National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT) administers a basic public social insurance system responsible for the national pension scheme. Participation is mandatory for employees in the public and private sectors and voluntary for the self-employed. Given that 90% of the workforce is active in the informal sector, NASSIT's coverage is extremely limited.

The National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) has operated since 2002 and carries out projects in the social, health and education sectors. Its responsibilities include providing assistance to vulnerable communities through cash transfer programs and public works employment, coordinating stakeholders to facilitate the delivery of social protection services and building capacity in relevant institutions. However, NaCSA's reach is constrained by limited financial resources, inadequate logistics and administrative inefficiencies.

For example, no governmental strategy exists to address the needs of the estimated 76,000 street children. The single functioning stationary mental health unit in the country is understaffed and underfunded, lacking the capacity to meet the needs of thousands of traumatized victims and to address the Kush (a synthetic cannabinoid) crisis. The National Commission for Persons with Disability is chronically underfunded, as are the few existing age care homes.

Social safety nets

3



Ethnic favoritism has characterized administrations under both APC and SLPP rule since independence. As a result, ethnicity and political preference determine access to resources such as government positions, contracts and pensions. When the SLPP took over in 2018, it accused the former ruling party, the APC, of tribalism; while in office, President Bio was accused of favoring southerners. Since his re-election in 2023, the opposition has claimed that the SLPP government is systematically replacing remaining northerners in ministries, departments, agencies, state-owned enterprises as well as in the military and police with individuals of Mende descent.

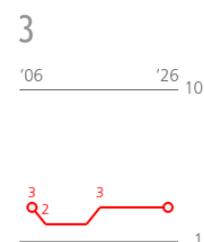
As subgroups within the marginalized majority, the elderly, youth, people with disabilities, Ebola survivors, orphans, Africans from other countries, LGBTIQ+ individuals and women face discrimination. People living in rural areas also tend to be more disadvantaged than those in cities. More than 60% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their lives, which is above the West African average. Female genital mutilation/cutting is extremely common, with an estimated 90% of females subjected to this deeply rooted traditional initiation rite. Widows are discriminated against, and early and forced marriages are common. Legal bodies and government strategies to counter discrimination exist – for example, the Domestic Violence Act 2007, the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2007, the Sexual Offenses Act 2012, the National Male Involvement Strategy 2020, the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act 2022, and the Customary Land Rights Act 2022 – however, substantial barriers persist at the implementation level.

11 | Economic Performance

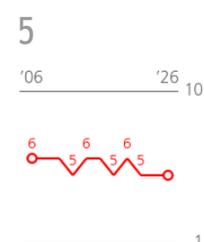
Macroeconomically, Sierra Leone remains extremely volatile, as economic diversification is limited and the country is highly dependent on foreign investors as well as fluctuating world market prices for minerals.

During the 2003 – 2014 period, the average annual growth rate was over 7.8%, largely due to mineral production. The twin shocks brought a massive decline, down to a negative growth rate of 21% in 2015. The growth rate rebounded to 6.3% in 2016, slowed to 4.3% in 2017 and further to 3.5% in 2018. In 2019, an upward trend brought annual GDP growth to around 5%, but the suspension of the licenses of major mining companies in mid-2019 and the COVID-19 outbreak brought it back to -2.0% for 2020. Resumption of iron ore production contributed to positive growth of 3.1% in 2021, 3.1% in 2023 and of around 3.5% for 2024, which was below original expectations. Over the coming years, estimates range between 4.0% and 4.5% annually, but this outlook faces substantial uncertainties, driven by inflationary pressures, potential climate emergencies, food insecurity, rising social tensions and political instability, among other factors.

Equal opportunity



Output strength



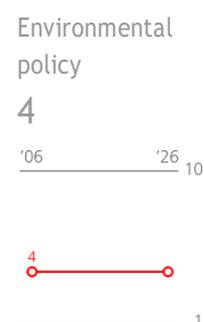
Sierra Leone’s macroeconomic volatility is exemplified by its dependence on iron ore exports, mainly to China, and on a handful of transnational companies, especially in the mining and agriculture sectors. Foreign companies have taken long-term leases on around 20% of the country’s land. For example, since 2015, the iron ore sector has been dominated by the state-owned Chinese Shandong Iron and Steel Group (SISG). As a result of disagreements between Shandong and Sierra Leonean authorities, the government suspended Shandong’s mining license in 2019, citing non-payment of royalties and other financial obligations. The Leone Rock Metal Group, another Chinese company, took over Shandong’s operations in 2020, including the country’s most important iron ore mine (Tonkolili), the company-owned harbor in Pepel, and the rail connection between the mine and the harbor.

Approximately one-fifth of the national budget consists of official development assistance (ODA). As previously mentioned, the Sierra Leonean government applied for and was granted waivers for non-compliance with the terms of ECFs by the IMF; it also requested a new ECF in 2024 to ensure the sustainability of its debt, among other objectives. Toward the end of 2024 the government signed a contract with the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) development agency for financial assistance amounting to \$500 million to upgrade the dysfunctional energy and electricity sector. Disbursement of this financial support is tied to good governance, the implementation of anti-corruption measures, the strengthening of democratic processes and, not least, efforts to address the electoral issues stemming from the controversial 2023 elections.

In summary, Sierra Leone depends to a large extent on the export of a few unprocessed world market products – facilitated through transnational companies – and on the financial assistance of development partners.

12 | Sustainability

The national development agenda, the Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024 – 2030 (MTNDP), aligns with ECOWAS Vision 2050, the African Union Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The MTNDP identifies five strategic goals, referred to as the “Big Five Game Changers,” and five enablers, which are bundles of measures to be taken to achieve the overarching strategic goals. Enabler 3, titled “Advancing climate resilience and environmental action,” lists environmental resilience, forestry management, wetland conservation and disaster management as priorities. A legal framework for environmental regulation exists through legislation such as the Environmental Protection Act 2000, institutions like the Environment Protection Board and strategies including the Convention on Biological Diversity membership since 1995. The government established a separate Ministry of Environment and Climate Change in 2021, and has developed both a National Framework for Climate Services and a Disaster Risk Financing Strategy and Implementation Plan (2024 – 2029).



In the SDG report 2024, the country's progress on 15 out of 17 SDGs fell into the categories "challenges remain" and "significant challenges remain." The country has achieved its goals only for SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and 13 (climate action). However, it should be noted that these outcomes are influenced by a lack of industry – and thus lower CO2 emissions – and a comparatively insignificant waste volume. For example, in terms of electronic waste, there is no export of plastic waste. This raises questions about how meaningful these positive trends are for the overall environmental outlook.

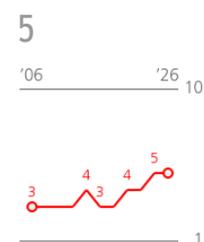
Despite existing institutions, strategies, initiatives and legislation, regulatory oversight and enforcement remain weak. Deforestation, erosion, sedimentation, environmental damage caused by mineral and sand mining, overfishing, high levels of population growth, and urbanization threaten the livelihoods of future generations. Additionally, widespread food insecurity puts pressure on natural resources as people are forced to sustain themselves, while a lack of education and awareness about environmental correlations amplifies unsustainable practices.

The government launched the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative in August 2018, declaring human capital development to be one of its main objectives. In the current national development agenda, human capital development has again been identified as a main strategic goal, with the expansion of free education from the basic level to the higher education level considered a key building block. However, in the 2024 SDG report, SDG 4 (quality education) is placed in the category of "major challenges remain." While enrollment numbers have increased in recent years, participation and completion rates have stagnated.

According to the World Bank, government expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP was 8.8% in 2022, and the literacy rate among Sierra Leoneans aged 15 and older stood at 48.64% that same year, with a considerable gender disparity. The rate among males was 56%, compared to just 41% among females.

Specific data on Sierra Leone's expenditure on research and development (R&D) is not readily available. The lack of data may indicate that investment is limited. Nonetheless, the government has demonstrated ambitions to invest in research, development and digitalization. In mid-2018, the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) was established within the Office of the President. A year later, the National Innovation and Digital Strategy 2019 – 2029 was published. The strategic pillars of the DSTI are data collection, the development of data systems and the provision of digital services to citizens, for instance with the goal of expanding internet access to the country's more than 11,000 schools. The DSTI has developed a range of apps to enhance engagement between citizens and the government; by November 2022, four digital learning hubs had opened in tertiary educational institutions, and according to the agency's website, 42 schools had been equipped with internet connectivity by the end of 2023. Although a variety of progressive digitalization projects – including distance learning models, provision of e-learning

Education policy /
R&D



materials and digital health interventions to support peripheral health units – have been developed and partially implemented, the scope of these projects appears limited given the overwhelming development needs, and progress is constrained by financial limitations and a lack of political will.

Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

Structural constraints on governance are significant. These include extreme poverty, an uneducated labor force, limited economic diversification, severe infrastructure deficiencies, endemic corruption, dysfunctional democratic institutions, and vulnerability to natural disasters and diseases.

Those structural constraints result from historical-political developments while at the same time being perpetuated by ruling elites. Informal power relations and social networks, traditionally established hierarchical relationships, and culturally rooted role expectations make it extremely difficult to effectively overcome structurally ingrained limitations to reform.

The duopoly of the SLPP and APC political parties and existing political animosities severely curtail political leverage. The bipolar political system constrains the political leadership's capacity to govern, as vested and self-serving interests too often dominate public interests for all citizens, regardless of political affiliation.

Sierra Leone remains highly vulnerable to external and unforeseen developments such as changes in commodity prices and pandemics. The disruptive shock caused by COVID-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian war has been severe, as their impact on the economy led to even higher levels of unemployment, poverty and food insecurity.

The contentious 2023 election results and the alleged coup attempt further deepened the country's political division, and will likely negatively impact prospects for future political dialogue and bipartisan reform efforts.

Civil society traditions remain relatively weak. In the more than 20 years since the end of the civil war, a plethora of civil society organizations – including development organizations, professional bodies, unions and social clubs – have emerged, generally working within specific policy arenas such as women's issues, youth issues, sustainability, legal reform, reconciliation, labor rights or industry-specific agendas. While these organizations as a whole do complement state functions in certain fields primarily at the project level, and further the interests of particular societal groups, their capacities remain limited. In most cases, local development organizations depend on international partners for financing and expertise. Many are directly connected to international organizations and serve as their implementing arms.

Structural constraints

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Civil society traditions

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The Development Cooperation Framework (DCF) in place from 2019 to 2023 underwent a review, and in 2023 the government published the National NGO Policy Framework 2023 – 2028. According to the government, the new framework incorporates lessons learned under the DCF and aims to enhance the working environment for NGOs in Sierra Leone. However, critics have argued that its main purpose remains to increase government control over the sector, as NGOs must operate in line with priorities identified by the government. The guiding principles state that NGOs should support governmental strategies and continuously optimize alignment with national development priorities.

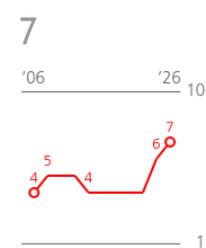
The use of violence in the struggle for political power is common. All elections since the end of the war have been – in varying degrees – accompanied by violent clashes between supporters of the SLPP and the APC, as well as between supporters of the opposition party of the time and the security forces. Political rhetoric justifies the use of violence by party supporters, and the spread of misinformation, fake news and hate speech on social media amplifies the potential for widespread violence.

Starting with the August 2022 protests, when demonstrations against rising living costs escalated into severe violent clashes between protesters and the SLP in Freetown, leaving at least 21 protesters and six police officers dead, the risk of severe mass violence further increased. As expected, in the weeks leading up to the 2023 elections, supporters of both the SLPP and APC were increasingly engaged in violent clashes and party headquarters were attacked, as were the homes of opposition politicians. Samura Kamara, the APC frontrunner, was the target of violence on several occasions while touring the country during his election campaign. Right before and shortly after election day, the APC headquarters in Freetown was attacked, several people died and more were injured.

However, the degree of political violence escalated with the armed attacks on army installations and prisons on Nov. 26, 2023. While the SLPP accused members of the APC – among them former President Koroma and one of his bodyguards – of a coup attempt in conjunction with mutinous security forces, elements within the opposition considered the event to be a false flag operation conducted to create a narrative justifying the delays in analyzing the election results and the response to the August 2022 protests, while also providing an excuse for intimidating or arresting opposition politicians and activists and shifting toward a more authoritarian style of governance.

In addition to the political violence, criminal violence poses an imminent threat to stability. The crime rate is high, especially in Freetown. Robberies, home invasions, assault and petty street crime are common throughout the country. Young men form gangs with ties based on ethnicity, neighborhoods, sports clubs or allegiance to particular rap musicians. They also assume roles as vigilantes, filling the security void left by the state and thereby generating legitimacy in the eyes of the local population.

Conflict intensity



Criminal gangs also operate across borders, engaging in smuggling activities involving drugs, weapons and endangered species, as well as in human trafficking, illegal mining, logging and poaching.

All in all, the risk of violent mass conflict has not been this high since the war ended more than 20 years ago.

II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

The current national development agenda (MTNDP 2024 – 2030) sets five strategic goals – “Feed Salone,” “Human Capital Development,” “Youth Employment Scheme,” “Technology and Infrastructure” and “Enhancing Public Service Architecture.” As such, the government prioritizes reform needs. Clearly, ensuring food security must be high on the agenda, since a society is extremely volatile and prone to instability if significant portions of the population are food insecure. The “Big 5.1 Feed Salone” goal aims at boosting agricultural productivity and promoting inclusive economic growth. However, growth of this kind depends on – and can only be achieved in conjunction with – the remaining “Big 5s.”

As under previous governments, the country’s multiple reform needs are well known. Development agendas are in place, as they have been historically as well. However, the challenge lies in implementation. The National Recovery Strategy 2002 – 2007, the Agenda for Change 2007 – 2012, the Agenda for Prosperity 2013 – 2018 and the MTNDP 2018 – 2023 all referenced human rights and economic recovery or diversification, among other priorities. However, implementation processes require excessive periods of time, and with every year that passes without sustainable reforms, social friction increases. For example, in the area of economic recovery, the very first development agenda – the National Recovery Strategy – listed food security as a primary objective. However, more than 20 years later, three-quarters of the population is considered food insecure. This indicates that reform processes over the last 20-plus years have not produced substantial development achievements. While this is partly due to external disruptions, internal factors have also perpetuated political incapability – most notably, an antagonistic political culture and deeply ingrained corruption. Ruling governments routinely replace long-term goals with short-term objectives, such as directing resources toward re-election or settling scores with political adversaries. The current polarized and antagonistic political environment does not promote the political capability needed to maintain strategic development priorities over the long term.

Question
Score

Prioritization

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The government fails to implement many of its policies. Political objectives that may be clearly defined in development strategies are too often not translated into empirical results – a consequence of the aforementioned dysfunctionalities, including the antagonistic political duopoly, ethnic favoritism, deficient administrative structures and processes (such as a lack of qualified personnel and material resources), widespread corruption, informal agendas pursued by influential interest groups, and vested domestic interests.

In some policy arenas, progress is visible, but reforms have not been, and are not being, undertaken with the necessary decisiveness. The prevailing food insecurity is the most obvious example. However, multiple ongoing reform needs reflect this condition, including the highly deficient energy sector, the lack of economic diversification and the stagnation of progress regarding the SDGs, to name a few.

It is not always possible to make a clear distinction between drivers of reform and defenders of the status quo. The executive, including the administration and the cabinet, implement reforms to an extent, but at the same time uphold the existing status quo. As mentioned before, this can partially be explained by the fact that government positions are among the few workplaces in the country that are comparatively safe, provide an income and a position of power, and are located in the formal employment sector. As such, the government apparatus is always also a resource serving particularistic interests and not necessarily or primarily the common good.

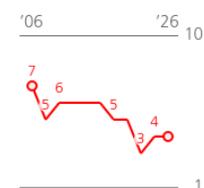
The SLPP and the APC political parties bear the primary responsibility for creating an inclusive, solution-focused, collaborative political environment in which systemic change might become possible. In this sense, the main political actors have not been guided by past experiences, and the political system has remained paralyzed.

However, in certain policy fields, a capacity for policy learning can be observed.

For example, the importance of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has been recognized, and in 2018 the National Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (NaMED) was created. In 2024, parliament passed the National Monitoring and Evaluation Agency Act, which paved the way for the National Monitoring and Evaluation Agency (NaMEA) with the goal of strengthening and further institutionalizing M&E capacities. NaMEA, in collaboration with other key stakeholders such as the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL), Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL) and the National Public Procurement Authority (NPPC), is tasked with ensuring accountability and transparency, thereby improving overall service delivery. The extent to which the creation of NaMEA will counterbalance endemic corruption and misappropriation of funds remains to be seen.

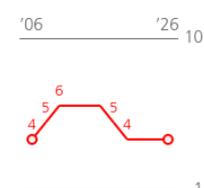
Implementation

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Policy learning

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As mentioned earlier, the establishment of free quality education has been a political priority since 2018, reflecting the authorities' recognition of the critical importance of developing human capital. However, progress in the education sector remains insufficient, as demonstrated by the slow pace of digitalization – by the end of 2023, only 42 of the more than 11,000 schools in the country had been equipped with internet connectivity.

In terms of institutional learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the swift action taken by the government, public awareness campaigns via radio, as well as efforts to include local community leaders in the emergency response all indicate a certain degree of institutional learning capability. At the same time, the experience of large-scale misappropriation of financial support during the Ebola virus disease (EVD) crisis did not prevent corruption and mismanagement during the COVID-19 response. Rather, mismanagement and corruption occurred during the COVID-19 response, much as previously during the EVD response.

Policy and institutional learning occur, but they are inconsistent, and the broader political environment hinders innovation and flexibility in policymaking.

15 | Resource Efficiency

Although international donor pressure to improve resource efficiency remains consistently high, vested domestic interests, structural economic weaknesses, bureaucratic harassment, and the functional and moral failure of public officeholders have prevented the government from using resources efficiently.

The state's personnel expenses are generally considered to be too high relative to the services provided. Thus, international donors such as the World Bank and the IMF have continually pressured the government to reduce its personnel costs.

The Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL), as part of the administration, displays autonomy and appears to operate with relative independence. It has the mandate to audit public institutions, including ministries, departments, agencies, schools and vocational institutions, enterprises in which the government holds a majority ownership stake, and commissions. The ASSL publishes reports regularly and submits them to parliament for further action. Its audits have uncovered significant deficiencies in procedures for record-keeping, protection of assets, procurement procedures, management of stores, banking and cash management, and the enforcement of tax regulations. However, more often than not, ASSL reports do not result in any political consequences.

Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL) is mandated to provide the government with the data necessary to develop and implement tailored policies, but in the past, it has been accused of being instrumentalized for political manipulation. For example, the last two population and housing censuses (2015 and 2020) identified shifts in geographical population numbers that favored the incumbent party of the time.

Efficient use of assets

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Cooperation and coordination between ministries, departments and agencies remain weak. The Sierra Leonean government faces significant challenges in ensuring policy coherence because of structural, political and institutional factors. While frameworks like the MTNDP aim to streamline objectives, frictions between central and local governments as well as among ministries, departments and agencies often undermine effective coordination.

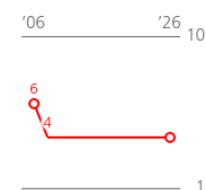
For example, while the Local Government Act of 2004 was intended to facilitate decentralization and to define the responsibilities and authorities of federal, district and local governments, frictions remain. The competencies of councilors, members of parliament, chairmen of councils, paramount chiefs and district officers are not clear-cut, resulting in inefficiencies and power struggles. When central and local governments have different political party affiliations, this can create friction, affecting coordination and policy implementation. Many local councils lack the technical and administrative capacity to fully execute their mandates, leading to overlaps and inconsistencies in policy delivery. The implementation of policies from the central government down to the local level is also hindered by a lack of oversight mechanisms and accountability.

In terms of strategic political goals, mediating conflicting interests requires a degree of political will that is often lacking due to vested interests and dependencies. One clear example is the challenge of balancing the interests of the government, the extractive sector, paramount chiefs and local communities that rely on subsistence farming. The cancellation of mining licenses in mid-2019 indicated that the government was trying to pressure mining companies with the goal of increasing tax revenue, but at the same time, the state depends on multinational companies for investment and employment opportunities. The Customary Land Rights Act and the National Land Commission Act could be game changers, but it remains to be seen which specific outcomes will materialize.

Laws, strategies and institutions to fight corruption are in place, including the 2000 Anti-Corruption Act (amended in 2019), the Anti-Money-Laundering and Combating of Finance of Terrorism Act 2012 (amended in 2020) and the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS). The Audit Service Sierra Leone (ASSL) is mandated to audit ministries, departments and agencies; an Anti-Corruption Court was set up in 2019 to facilitate quicker investigations; and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), as the primary agency responsible for investigating and prosecuting corruption cases, has broadened its activities by establishing its own special force (called Scorpion Squad). This has recovered billions of leones from corrupt officials, and regularly publishes reports and engages in public relations. However, under the APC administration, the ACC was accused of having a pro-APC bias. Similar accusations were made during the SLPP government, with the media, the opposition and CSOs questioning the objectivity and independence of the ACC, and accusing it of having a pro-SLPP bias by primarily targeting large-scale corruption by APC

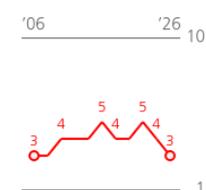
Policy coordination

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Anti-corruption policy

3



members while otherwise focusing on petty corruption. The ACC’s leader, Francis Ben Kaifala, regularly highlights his close relationship with the president on social media, and the fact that Kaifala’s wedding in 2024 was described extensively as an unforgettable, “graceful” and “grand” event on the ACC website in numerous articles, with President Bio serving as the wedding godparent, raises questions about the agency’s agenda and priorities.

16 | Consensus-Building

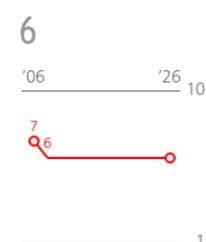
The overall objective of democratic consolidation is not disputed by any major party or its leadership. Democratic norms such as the separation of powers and the organization of credible elections are not questioned. The consolidation of peace, the rule of law, the strengthening of civil society, empowerment of marginalized groups and gender equality are proclaimed goals of both the SLPP and the APC political parties. The domestic political system is formally democratically legitimized, but patronage, clientelism and nepotism play an important role as social mechanisms affecting decision-making and policy implementation. Democratic institutions and processes are manipulated in order to further party interests, and their existence does not imply that democratic values are internalized by the ruling political elites or public administration.

The main political actors also agree on the importance of a free market economy for the country’s development. The formal economic system reflects free market norms, but the regulatory framework is unevenly applied, and the economy is to a large extent de facto informal. Economic reforms aiming at a socially and ecologically balanced market economy are again hindered by systemic dysfunctions and vulnerability to external factors. The government must balance the requirements of ODA and reliance on FDI with the social support and welfare needs of its mainly impoverished population.

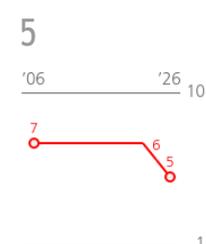
The armed attacks on military bases and prisons in November 2023 clearly indicated that anti-democratic forces are a major threat to democracy, and that segments of the security forces – the police and the military – have not been depoliticized. Both competing narratives about the alleged coup attempt point to the presence of anti-democratic actors: If the coup attempt was executed by opposition forces, it suggests a willingness and capability to use organized violence for political change. If the coup attempt was staged by the government, it implies that extreme measures have been taken to manipulate the political environment.

Sierra Leone is no stranger to coups d’état. President Bio himself was involved in a military coup against the APC government in 1992. As a member of the National Provisional Ruling Council military junta, he held several senior government positions between 1992 and 1996, when he led another coup against the head of the

Consensus on goals



Anti-democratic actors



NPRC. Following international pressure, he agreed to hold democratic elections, which brought SLPP candidate Ahmed Tejan Kabbah to power.

After the end of the war, the national police force and the Operational Support Division (OSD), which are generally aligned with the ruling party, adapted their conduct accordingly and have been accused by the opposition parties of various eras of becoming a tool of the government. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) remained on the sidelines. This changed in November 2023. It has become clear that the security forces are not a monolithic bloc under civilian leadership, and that internal power struggles have facilitated violent confrontations.

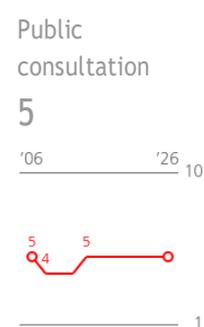
The integration of traditional authorities into a democratic system poses major challenges. Traditional authorities – paramount chiefs and chiefs – are generally successors in a patrilineal system, which by definition contradicts democratic norms. Their influence overlaps with that of the secret societies, particularly the men’s Poro. Poro is deeply embedded in society and, at least in rural regions, functions as a form of parallel government. Traditional hunter guilds such as the Kamajors are still active. While these groups are not necessarily anti-democratic actors, it is valid to assume their agendas differ from the official government agenda.

Cleavages appear in ethnic, regional and social conflicts. The political, social and economic causes that led to the outbreak of the war have persisted. In the run-up to the war, conflicting political forces in the country failed to foster stability and development. After the war, the APC and SLPP political parties mainly reorganized and consolidated in their respective strongholds. The general election in 2023 deepened the ethnoregional divide even further. Neither the APC nor SLPP have positioned themselves as representatives of all Sierra Leoneans, regardless of ethnicity. The general public perception is that one is either red (APC) or green (SLPP). The results of the last election remain contested. Neither the Agreement for National Unity nor the recommendations of the Tripartite Committee have been fully implemented. Defamation of political opponents, confrontational political rhetoric and escalating political violence are deepening existing cleavages.

Civil society actors are consulted by political leaders and participate in agenda-setting, policy formulation and implementation.

For example, numerous women’s rights groups have actively advocated for increased representation of women in decision-making and leadership roles. Their efforts have influenced discussions on constitutional reforms to address the marginalization of women and resulted in legislation to strengthen women’s rights.

As another example, in July 2024 the Parliament-Civil Society Network (ParlCSONet) was established to foster collaboration between parliament and CSOs. This partnership aims to enhance transparency, accountability and participatory decision-making by creating platforms for meaningful dialogue and joint efforts to address key development challenges. However, the extent to which ParlCSONet will



contribute to the integration of civil society voices in the lawmaking process remains to be seen. Overall, civil society actors are involved in the policymaking process to some degree, but their influence is limited due to scarce resources, political interference and varying capacities. This results in the uneven representation of societal segments in policy formulation. Additionally, governments have shown a tendency to favor civil society actors who share their own political and economic interests over those who oppose or challenge those interests.

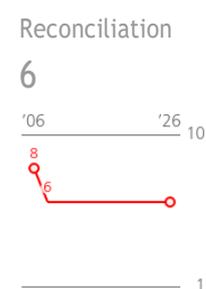
When the civil war ended after 11 years in 2002, reconciliation initiatives became a top priority on the post-conflict agenda of both domestic and international actors.

The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed as part of the peace agreement between the government and the Revolutionary United Front. It operated from 2002 to 2004, taking statements throughout the country and conducting public hearings. In its final report, it included names of individual perpetrators and numerous recommendations for the government. Among its other recommendations, the commission called for better political leadership, a fight against corruption, the implementation of a human rights culture, governmental accountability, democracy and the rule of law.

The Special Court of Sierra Leone operated from 2002 as a hybrid international criminal tribunal. Established by the Sierra Leonean government and the UN, it was mandated to try those most responsible for war crimes committed against civilians. The Special Court completed its mandate in 2013. Eight defendants from three warring parties and, most notably, former Liberian President Charles Taylor were convicted.

With international assistance, Sierra Leone has carried out multiple formal and informal reconciliation activities at the district, chiefdom and local levels. Hundreds of villages have participated in community-based reconciliation programs.

The effectiveness of reconciliation efforts at the grassroots level remains unknown. Individual cases of reconciliation and forgiveness for perpetrators have been observed. However, distrust and mutual suspicion – not least sustained by the rhetorically confrontational conduct of political elites – as well as latent tensions that repeatedly escalate into violent clashes remain pervasive. The 2023 elections and the November 2023 attacks marked a significant setback for all reconciliation efforts, with societal divisions deepening and political tensions rising.



17 | International Cooperation

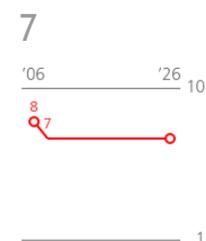
Sierra Leone has a clearly defined long-term development vision focused on human capital and sustainable economic growth, codified in the MTNDP. While the implementation of reforms has continuously faced significant hurdles such as institutional weaknesses in the past, the government has facilitated and utilized international support to varying degrees. It can be expected that future cooperative development planning and implementation will follow the same trajectory.

Domestic political actors, regardless of party affiliation, agree that good relations with multilateral actors – the IMF, the World Bank, the European Union and others – are of utmost importance to the country. Top bilateral donors include the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany and Japan. To diversify its dependency profile, the government has also established relations with alternative partners such as Cuba, Iran, Russia, India, Japan, Qatar and, in particular, China.

The government's fiscal leeway is narrowing, and Sierra Leone depends significantly on official development assistance. As described above, despite failing to meet all the requirements of previous Extended Credit Facilities, the government requested a new ECF package in 2024. In the absence of international support, the country would face significant debt distress.

President Bio promotes Sierra Leone as being investor-friendly, and encourages foreign direct investment. Sierra Leone sent representatives to the second Russia-Africa Summit in July 2023. President Bio attended the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in September 2024, where he discussed deepening cooperation in the areas of agriculture, infrastructure and energy. He additionally attended the Commonwealth Business Forum in October 2024. At this latter forum, a strategic partnership was formalized to advance Sierra Leone's leverage opportunities across the Commonwealth. Additionally, Sierra Leone sent representatives to defense expos in India in 2022 and 2023 to enhance defense cooperation between the two countries. In other words, the government displays dedication to maintaining and diversifying its portfolio of development partners. At the same time, this continued engagement also means the country remains dependent on international partners and investors to sustain reform efforts and retain a minimal degree of stability.

Effective use of support



Past administrations were committed to presenting Sierra Leone as a credible and reliable partner within the international community. The country is a loyal member of numerous international organizations, such as the United Nations, the African Union, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Bank's Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), the WHO and the WTO. Within the subregion, it is an active member of ECOWAS and the Mano River Union (MRU). Sierra Leone generally strives to comply with international agreements and works to uphold its international commitments. For example, the country actively participated in international climate discussions, including the COP27 summit in 2022, participated in UNHRC sessions, has been subject to that body's Universal Periodic Review process, and in July 2024 officially banned child marriage, thereby formally aligning more closely with international human rights standards. It benefits from preferential trade agreements and recognizes the institutions and mechanisms of international law.

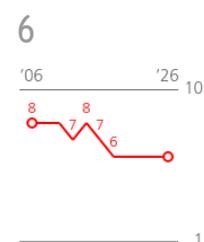
Sierra Leone's credibility and reliability is, nonetheless, always under threat. Domestic factors such as corruption, clientelism and institutional dysfunction, as well as vulnerability to exogenous or unforeseeable developments such as export price fluctuations, pandemics or natural disasters, affect the government's ability to meet and deliver on international expectations. For example, the latest report submitted as a participant of the Kimberley Process to prevent the trade in conflict diamonds dates back to 2018, and the de facto human rights situation in Sierra Leone is – according to the U.S. Department of State – characterized by arbitrary or unlawful killings, harsh prison conditions, arbitrary arrest and detention, interference with freedom of peaceful assembly, and extensive gender-based violence.

Sierra Leone maintains close relations with its neighbors and demonstrates a commitment to participating in international, regional and subregional organizations. Sierra Leonean forces have been trained by the U.K. to contribute to international peace operations, and in July 2024, 39 Sierra Leonean security personnel were deployed in international missions.

The government has a particularly strong interest in maintaining and enhancing good relations with its two direct neighbors, Liberia and Guinea, as well as with Nigeria, which, as a regional power, holds significant importance and played a major role in the Sierra Leonean war.

But overall, the conditions for international and regional cooperation have deteriorated. Over the past five years, four of the 15 ECOWAS member states have experienced military coups, weakening ECOWAS as a result. The organization demanded a return to civilian rule and threatened military intervention after the coup in Niger in July 2023. In September 2023, the military juntas in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali announced their intention to leave ECOWAS and established a new mutual defense alliance called the Alliance of the Sahel States (Alliance des Etats du Sahel – AES). Guinea did not choose sides, but refused to impose a blockade on the renegade states, keeping its harbors open for the Sahel states. This enabled the delivery of Russian fertilizer and grain to Mali, for example.

Credibility



Regional cooperation



The long-standing conflict between Sierra Leone and Guinea regarding territorial sovereignty over the border town of Yenga remains unresolved.

On the international stage, the Russian-Ukrainian War poses new foreign policy challenges for Sierra Leone as it navigates the international system, balancing its relations with the U.K. and the United States on one side and Russia and China on the other. Russia has deployed troops to Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and its influence in the region is growing. This may mean that Sierra Leone's geostrategic relevance – as a traditional ally of the United Kingdom – will increase, and that its political leadership will be challenged to carefully weigh security, foreign and trade policy implications.

Strategic Outlook

Sierra Leone's formally democratic system has been weakened. A prolonged political stalemate following the 2023 elections was avoided through mediation facilitated by international partners, and a government was formed. However, this government lacks legitimacy in the eyes of opposition members, their supporters and some external observers. To restore the credibility of democratic processes and mechanisms, it will be crucial to fully implement the recommendations of the Cross-Party Committee's review – for example, regarding party financing regulations, the opaque conduct of the Electoral Commission Sierra Leone (ECSL), and the use of state resources in election campaigns. In addition, it is critical to investigate the violent protests of August 2020 and the alleged coup attempt of November 2023. Restoring the democratic legitimacy of the political system will require a thorough and transparent analysis of these events, facilitated by a third, independent party such as the Moral Guarantors identified in the peace agreement following the civil war. However, given that government institutions and positions are misused as economic resources to serve particularistic interests, and a “winner takes all” perception prevails among political elites, it is possible that the specific context and background of these violent events will remain obscured, reducing the likelihood of free and fair elections in the future. At the same time, stagnating reform processes and the lack of an inclusive, diversified, flexible and innovative economy hinder the country's socioeconomic development, leaving the majority of the population behind. Governments since the end of the war in 2002 have not implemented reforms with the necessary decisiveness, and in 2025, most basic needs of the majority of the population remain unmet.

If the reforms identified in the current MTNDP development agenda were implemented, existing social tensions could be eased and social inequalities lessened. However, corruption remains a major obstacle to development, clientelism and nepotism work against inclusive decision-making processes, and political antagonisms run deep. In spite of these disadvantageous circumstances, the government would be well advised to implement reforms to the greatest extent possible in the shortest manageable time span. Notwithstanding the political ramifications of the contentious election and the alleged coup attempt, ameliorating social inequalities is a crucial goal. Moreover, international development partners need to supplement domestic reform efforts. In a society where the majority of the population suffers under conditions of food insecurity, most people work in the informal sector, a welfare support system is essentially nonexistent and 40% of the population is under the age of 14, the risk of major social upheavals is continuously growing.