

Chapter 2

Political Background

Sierra Leone is a democratic state run by the arms of Government that include the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. The Executive is headed by the President who is elected by popular vote (and must achieve 55% of the poll) for a five year term (eligible for a second term). The President is both the Chief of State and head of government. The legislative arm is made up of a unicameral parliament with a total of 124 members. Out of these, 112 are ordinary members who are directly elected by universal suffrage by secret ballot every five years. The remaining 12 are seats are reserved for the Paramount Chiefs. The Judiciary is made up of the Supreme Court, Appeals Court and the High Court.

The 17 November 2012 elections in Sierra Leone, being the third since the decade-long conflict ended in 2002, were an important benchmark, both for the consolidation of peace and as a means of demonstrating the maturity of political leadership and institutions. They were the first elections Sierra Leone had organised itself. These were also the first time that four elections (Presidential, Parliamentary, Chairperson/Mayor and Local Council) were conducted simultaneously and a new Voters' Register was introduced by the National Electoral Commission, capturing biometric data.

The return of full national ownership for the administration of the elections after the largely UN managed 2002 elections meant that for the first time in the country's post-civil war history national institutions were solely responsible for organising and supervising elections.

The 14 May 2002 Parliamentary and Presidential elections were the first to be held after a long civil war (1996–2001). They were held in difficult conditions, with many Sierra Leonean citizens still displaced. The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) offered significant advisory and operational support to the NEC in conducting these elections and the international community provided considerable financial and technical support.

In May 2004, and for the first time in 30 years, Sierra Leone held local government elections in which the people elected councillors to represent them in their local governing councils. The 2004 Local Government elections marked the reintroduction of local government after its abolishment in 1972, and were held through the Local Government Act of 2004. The Local Government Act devolves significant powers to local councils in an effort to reduce the centralisation of power and decision-making in the capital. Key areas which local government are mandated to oversee are education, primary health care, social welfare, works and technical maintenance, and financial management. Chiefdom councils are according to law part of the local government system in the country. Paramount Chiefs remain responsible for upholding custom and tradition which includes local justice in the

Northern, Southern and Eastern Areas.

In 2006 a new political party, the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC), was established, whose leader left the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) prior to the elections. This resulted in increased competition between political parties. The creation of the PMDC proved to be a decisive factor in the results of the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections as it challenged the SLPP's hegemony in its traditional heartlands in the southern and eastern districts and divided the vote in these areas with voters moving away from the SLPP.

The 2007 elections were landmark elections in Sierra Leone. They were the first election since independence in which power was transferred peacefully from one elected civilian government to another. Parliamentary Candidates in these elections were elected to Parliament on the basis of a constituency-based first-past-the-post system. This system, which was in existence prior to and immediately after independence, was abandoned after Sierra Leone converted to a one-party state, and in the unstable aftermath of the war, was replaced by a list proportional system. Despite the noted irregularities and isolated incidents of violence in the run-off Presidential elections, the elections were generally hailed by both international and local observers as free and fair. Only seven out of the nine registered political parties contested both parliamentary and presidential elections.

The 2008 Local Government elections were held on 5 July 2008. These elections were a crucial step in the consolidation of the peace process and to the Government of Sierra Leone's programme of decentralisation. This was also a further test of NEC's operational capacity to conduct elections in a professional manner. These elections marked the first time that there were direct elections of Mayor and Chairpersons as well as Councillors for multi-member wards.

Political parties

The Constitution provides for the establishment of a Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) to register parties. In 2002, Parliament adopted the Political Parties Act which gave the PPRC additional functions including the supervision of the conduct of parties. In order to participate in the election, political parties must register with the PPRC.

In November 2006, the PPRC developed a political parties' code of conduct, which all registered parties have signed. Following adoption of the code of conduct, the PPRC established District Monitoring Committees (DMCs) throughout the country. Political parties registered by the PPRC as of 1 October 2012:

1. All People's Congress (APC)
2. Citizens Democratic Party (CDP)
3. People's Democratic Party (PDP)

4. Peace and Liberation Party (PLP)
5. People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC)
6. National Democratic Alliance (NDA)
7. Revolutionary United Front Party (RUFP)
8. Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)
9. United Democratic Movement (UDM)
10. United National People's Party (UNPP)

All People's Congress

The APC is the current governing party having won the 2007 elections with 59 seats and President Ernest Bai Koroma as its flag bearer having been elected in a run-off. In 2009 President Ernest Koroma was re-elected by the APC as the party's presidential candidate for the 2012 presidential election. His running mate was Samuel Sam-Sumana, the current Vice President. The APC was founded by Siaka Stevens in 1960. The APC traditional base is among the Temne and Limba people in the north. It is the popular party in the North and West of the country.

Sierra Leone People's Party

The SLPP is currently the main opposition party. It was established in April 1951 through the merger of the People's Party (PP), the Protectorate Education Progressive Union (PEPU) and the Sierra Leone Organisation Society (SOS). Its traditional constituents are the Mende People in the Southern parts of the country. It is popular in the South and East of the country.

It was the incumbent's party in 2007 with Solomon Berewa as its flag bearer who was to take over from President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah who stepped down after serving two terms.

In 2011 Julius Maada Bio was designated as SLPP presidential candidate. His running mate was Mrs Kadie Sessay, a former minister under President Tejan Kabbah.

People's Movement for Democratic Change

The PMDC was registered in 2006 and is a breakaway party of the SLPP. The party was founded and is led by Charles Margai, a former Minister and son of Sierra Leone's second Prime Minister Albert Margai. The PMDC in its first elections won ten seats in parliament and Charles Margai as its presidential candidate got 13.9 per cent of vote. The creation of the PMDC proved to be a decisive factor in the results of the 2007 elections as it challenged the hegemony of SLPP in its traditional strongholds. The PMDC joined the APC to form a coalition government.

Although there are other political parties that have been established, the APC and SLPP

remain dominant and most visible.

Relationship between the governing party and the main opposition

Most observers both local and international were concerned that the political environment was highly charged ahead of the 2012 elections especially between the two leading political parties. A few days after the voting, the main opposition party issued a press statement questioning the validity of the election results before its official announcement.

The Chair of the Observer Group issued an interim statement that indicated what the observers had seen when they observed elections in the various districts where the team had been deployed. It contained what they observed in the campaign period, during voting and post voting. In the end Mr Otunnu said: 'We appeal to all the people of Sierra Leone to observe the highest level of responsibility and restraint until the end of the process and the official announcement of the result' (see Annex 3).

After the voting exercise the Chair attended a meeting with the leading opposition group where he was presented with a report containing a number of allegations of electoral fraud. The statement was presented to the NEC, to which the Chairperson of NEC responded publicly on 21 November 2012.

Women's participation

In the 11 year civil war, women played a key role in bringing peace to the country. Sierra Leonean women are known to be strong, having played a key role in ensuring that peace prevailed in the country in the aftermath of the civil war. Women also play a big role in forming the backbone of the Sierra Leonean economy by working in the farms and doing trade not only locally but across the borders.

Although women are active politically, when it comes to nomination they do not receive adequate support from political parties. This could have been because of the high nomination fees that were being asked for by the NEC. To stand for a seat in Parliament and Local Government, the candidate was required to pay 10 million Leones (£1,500). This was out of reach for many women because the fees were significantly high and disproportionate when compared to regional standards.

This increase of the nomination fee by NEC discouraged many women and by the time the Government said it would pay for the difference it was already too late for women to be nominated as most parties had already selected other candidates. However, the fee was later reduced to the 2007 rates which were 100 thousand Leones (£15).

In addition, the power of the Sande and Poro Societies (secret societies), as well as the influence of paramount chiefs, also deterred women from being nominated. There were

allegations of women being deterred by these strong and powerful groups. In one state in the North, it is alleged that one of the strongest women in politics was forced out of the race by the said group.

Sierra Leonean law does not have affirmative action entrenched in it. Efforts by gender equality advocates and women's leaders to have an amendment in Parliament before the elections started, failed to take place.

In 2002 18 women were elected to Parliament but the number went down in 2007 when 16 women were elected. However, the 2007 elections also had many women who were independent candidates. For the 2012 elections, things were not any better. Since there is no quota for women in law, only 38 women ran for Parliamentary elections. For the first time in the history of Sierra Leone, a woman emerged as a running mate to a Presidential candidate.

However, women have also been elected as paramount chiefs. There are women who ran for civic positions including the role of mayor.

During the voter registration process many women were registered and this was evident in the way they turned out to vote, including pregnant women and lactating mothers.

Youth participation

Despite the long period of civil war, youth remain an important element in the political life of Sierra Leone. From the 2002 elections, the participation of youth has improved gradually since the establishment of the Ministry of Youth and the adoption of the 2003 National Youth Policy. The basic electoral administration course which was developed into the Institute for Electoral Administration and Civic Education has played a major role in training and re-training youth, employment and provision of infrastructure.

Participation of youth continued to increase as was evident in 2004 and 2008 when youth contested Local Government Elections as councillors. In 2007 many young people participated actively in the non-violence campaign on the eve of elections and demonstrated their positive contribution to the democratic process.

The 2012 elections saw an impressive participation of youth with UDM having a young presidential candidate. A good turnout of youth registered as voters and out of the total number of registered voters, approximately 60 per cent were youth and out of these, 36 per cent were first time voters.

Young people participated and played a key role in the electoral process and it was encouraging to see that the youth were part of the democratic process. Most of these youth are ex-combatants who have now embraced the new found peace in the country. While on

many occasions politicians have misused youth to create chaos and instigate violence, in the campaigns as well as during and post polling, the youth exercised restraint and played a key role in ensuring that peace prevailed.

In the campaign period, young women joined the rallies accompanying young men in support of the different political parties and they were evident as supporters for APC and the SLPP.

Young women were also recruited with young men who served as party agents and domestic observers. They were also employed as polling staff and at tallying centres to do data entry.

Sierra Leone and the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Secretariat has had a long standing engagement with Sierra Leone dating back to its independence, when the country became an independent state within the Commonwealth on 27 April 1961, with Sir Milton Margai as its first Prime Minister.

In 1999 the Commonwealth Secretariat established a Task Force on Sierra Leone to ensure a comprehensive and focused package of assistance to the country in the immediate post-war environment. The Secretariat was part of negotiations for the Lomé Peace Agreement, to which the Commonwealth was a moral guarantor.

The Commonwealth observed the 1996 and 2002 General Elections, the 2004 Local Government Elections, the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, and the 2008 Local Government elections.

Ongoing Commonwealth support to Sierra Leone includes capacity-building to strengthen the police force, judiciary, diplomatic corps and youth sectors. Assistance is currently being provided in improving debt management and recording, establishment of the Stock Exchange, maritime boundary delimitation, trade capacity building and customs modernisation.

Sierra Leone is amongst the largest recipients of technical assistance from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) including capacity-building and institutional reform activities.