

Cost of Politics in Sierra Leone: Understanding Violence & Divisions

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES OF GOVERNANCE VOL 7 – Aug 2016



This report is a background paper for a national conference organised by civil society, media and the Political Parties Registration Commission in Freetown (August 23 2016) on Building Tolerant Society: The Bedrock for Good Governance in Sierra Leone. The paper illustrates how politically motivated violence and impunity is preventing citizens from coming together to address growth-retarding policies and rent seeking behaviors. The conference was organised to respond to growing incidences of violence and political tensions in the lead up to the 2018 general elections.

1. Introduction

On August 16th 2016, a protest march by youth of kabala town, Northern Sierra Leone against a “decision by authorities to relocate a proposed Youth Village from Kabala to Tonkolili District degenerated into violence. Some youth were shot dead and four seriously wounded. The houses of the police Local Unit Commander and Police Prosecutor in the town were reportedly burnt down and quite a few government buildings and the ruling party’s new office were partly vandalised. Other parts of the country have experienced similar incidences of violence since 2007.

This paper illustrates how national polarisation and politically motivated violence and impunity can prevent citizens from coming together to address growth-retarding policies and rent seeking behaviour. The paper provides evidences showing the media, police and state own enterprises as critical agents in promoting violence and financing divisions.

Even though the Global Peace Index ranks Sierra Leone as the most peaceful country in West African, political violence is a common phenomenon in the country¹. Without closely examining the role of the police, media and financiers, many policy actors easily blame young people and youth unemployment as the main driver of violence and have failed to produce a sustainable strategy to respond. Even after the ravages of Ebola in 2015 and the launch of the recovery programme in 2016, violent clashes continued between party supporters in Kailahun in the East and Lunsar in the North. Violence and division increases spending on security agencies and diverts funds from poverty related investments.

There are fears that the 2018 elections could be hugely violent. Postulations about political violence in 2018 are well founded. “Most often than not, boundary, family and chieftaincy disputes *‘and allocation of resources’* are done under the veneer of party issues and political parties are used as a medium to settle personal vendetta” (Fanthorpe 2011). Political parties also mobilise votes on identity lines and use ethnicity as a manipulative tool to maintain hold on their respective constituents.

This paper provides some intellectual foundation for thinking about ways the country can redefine itself to promote national cohesion and ensure that electoral growth translate into greater policy support for economic advancement and stability. The scope for change could be greater if Sierra Leone reorients its current institutional cultures which are revolving around the legacy of hate politics to building cohesive institutions that brings citizens collective agenda to engage with the sloppiness in institutions.

¹ UNECA 2011 – 80% of Sierra Leoneans believe that violence is a common phenomenon in politics

2. Is Sierra Leone really a divided country?

Compared to many African states, Sierra Leone cannot be considered an ethnically divided state (Jimmy Kandeh 1996, Yusuf Bangura 2015). Rather Kandeh argues that ethnicity is in fact politicized by both opposition groups wanting to propel themselves in political office and ruling parties trying to consolidate power. Some CSOs and media actors interviewed for this paper confirmed Kandeh's view by accusing government officials of deliberately labelling and dismissing voices and views of citizens, especially those with origins from opposition controlled areas, as views of the opposition. Such dismissals have succeeded in weakening the rule of law and political institutions meant to create effective checks and balances. Easterly et al (1997) lend support to this debate arguing that high levels of ethnic divisions coexist with governments that for long periods successfully suppress overt political opposition.

Beneath the false sense of division, the 2016 World Peace Index rank Sierra Leone the second most peaceful country in West Africa. This result was not achieved by coincidence. It was the years of investment in social cohesion that has built stronger tendencies to temper intolerance (Yusuf Bangura 2015). High levels of inter-ethnic marriages, integrated schools and professional bodies, uniform culture in key dimensions and trade have helped to build bridges of tolerance in the post war country.

What typically marks Sierra Leone from many African countries is that people holding different religious beliefs are not only tolerant of different faith but region itself is a critical force of integration. Just as mission schools unite children from different backgrounds, the United Methodist Church for example serves as a critical force for integrating for Temnes and Mendes in Southern Tonkolili, Northwestern Moyamba, Bo and Bonthe districts. Harford School for Girls in Moyamba (southern Sierra Leone), the first protectorate single sex school in the 1900s, has over a century history of uniting girls from the south, north and west many of whom got married to northern elites. Evidently, Sierra Leone has never had a democratically elected president without multiple identities by marriage or birth.

Fourah Bay College (founded in 1827), Prince of Wales (1925) and Bo Government Secondary school (1906) have been the strongest forces of integration for Sierra Leonean youth. Until the recent division between what has emerged as Black and White camps on campuses, student unions and clubs were veritable forces integrating the vertical polarities of ethnic identities. There are many anecdotal evidences supporting this. For instance two senior officials from the current Koroma government who are of northern origin were presidents of District Student Unions for Bo (South) and Kono (East) Districts during their days in Fourah Bay. While the Prince of Wales in Freetown provided a ground for education of Krios and boys from the protectorate in 19th century, the Bo Government Secondary school established for training the sons of chiefs and their nominees contributed to building a strong network of ruling houses across Sierra Leone. There is hardly a ruling family that does not have a relationship with the Bo school. It was therefore not surprising for a joint European Union, DFID Country Assistance Strategy to note that ethnicity may not overburden the country because most

Sierra Leoneans are of mixed ethnicity.² One can hardly meet a Sierra Leonean who does not have ties of friendship, family or trade relations with people from other regions or tribes. In many Sierra Leonean communities there are established settlements of immigrants from other regions peacefully coexisting with host communities. To a point, when in 1967 Prince Williams, a Krio pharmacist who had settled in Bo for years was denied SLPP symbol to contest for parliament he was encouraged by natives to quit the party and choose another symbol. The Mendes wanted to reciprocate Prince Williams generosity for his good medical service and so elected him an MP.

3. Where has the National Cohesion Gone?

When in 2013 Pope Benedict XVI appointed a Sierra Leonean priest, Bishop Henry Aruna a Mende from the east to head the Diocese of Makeni in the North, what followed were months and years of reproach and opposition from local priests, with the new Bishop not being allowed to make his entry into the Northern city of Makeni whose inhabitants are largely Temnes (31% of Sierra Leone). Matters were only resolved when Pope Francis elevated an Italian Rev. Father Natale.

The question for public policy actors is how did Sierra Leone arrive at this point of growing division and ethno-regional rivalry? We take a quick detour ethnicity and divisions in Sierra Leone. In the period leading to independence the Colony Krio and people from the Protectorate were pitched in bipolar ethnic mobilization over the question of who takes over from the British. At independence Milton Margai of Southern origin became prime minister. Sierra Leone was later engulfed in intense ethnic rivalry following the death of Sir Milton in 1964. Sir Albert Margai who took over as Prime Minister was accused of strong tendencies towards Mende hegemony. Consequently, Siaka Stevens and other leaders mobilized the APC as a rallying platform for northern ethnic groups. As Jimmy Kandeh notes, “although the APC was stigmatized from its inception as a party of northerners, it was the elitism and corruption of the SLPP, the political disaffection and anxieties of Creoles, the regional deprivation of the north, the abuses and excesses of northern chiefs and the relative openness of the political system at the time that combined to contextually favor the emergence of the APC as a dominant force in the post-independence politics of Sierra Leone”.

When Stevens however took office in 1967 and throughout his reign, he preferred to exploit his multi-identities as a base for political control. Although the northern identity tag remained with the APC, ethnic groups from other parts of the country never saw a deliberate agenda to discomfort them. However, it was Joseph Saidu Momoh who took over as President in 1985 that demonstrated an orchestration of such agenda. Momoh’s era was significantly marked by the political pre-eminence of his ethnic Limba organization, Ekutay.

² Sierra Leone- European Community. Country Strategy Paper and National Indicative Programme for the Period 2008-2013

As Yusuf Bangura points out however, if political intolerance “is not well managed, it can easily affect other facets of society and poison relations between people in their everyday lives”. It is precisely this point that Sierra Leone seem to be arriving. Since the 2007 elections there has been a prevailing ethos in both the APC and SLPP that seek to enmesh the population into two identities: the entitled and the aggrieved. The rhetoric and real actions of politicians on both sides push for the “entitled and the “aggrieved” to hate each other. As it takes ridiculously low levels, “Red” and “Green” have been appropriated by the “entitled” and the “aggrieved”, so that Sierra Leoneans today make deliberate calculations as to what colour they wear when going into certain public offices. A government Minister even had a donor-funded project building re-painted because it carried the colour that his eyes cannot stand. The country has now been collapsed into two new regions that have never existed in any literature on Sierra Leone- Southeastern and Northwestern. The citizenry and public institutions have tagged along with this new ethos. For the citizens there is no more anything called public interest to defend. They defend what their bipolar camps tell them to defend. Public institutions on their part, are owned by the “entitled”.

The biggest challenge for Sierra Leone is getting back to the point where it doesn't matter which party wins an election, there will be a system that cares for Sierra Leonean and can equitably allocate resources to every citizen. Retuning to this point can be resisted as “Government tend to badge all criticism as unpatriotic and take the position that you're are either for us or against us” Fanthorpe and Gabelle 2013.

4. Drivers of Violence in Sierra Leone

4.1. Mass Media: Mass Hate Message Drives Mass Violence

This section looks at the behaviour of 7 newspapers over 8 years (2005 to 2012) period and tried to establish a relationship between media financing and generating hate messages contributing to political violence. We tracked over 28,000 advert slots from government, non-governmental organisations³ and private sector agencies published in the 7 newspapers. Noting that advertorials are one of the main sources of revenue for the Sierra Leone media adverts can be a covert political tool for remote control of voices, agenda setting and financing political mobilisation. A popular journalist Olu Gordon wrote in 2004 “Adverts, especially adverts from state funded bodies, have become a gift of political interests, given to those who toe a government line; denied those who are critical or independent”⁴. Gordon is spot on; adverts are be used shapes the behaviour of journalists for better or for worse or coopted to sustain hate campaigns.

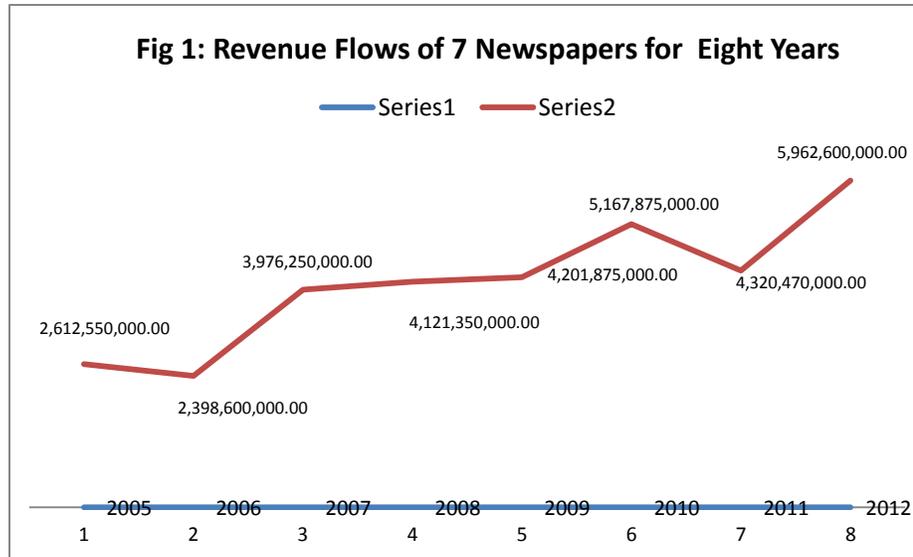
The current Director of the state broadcaster, SL Broadcasting Corporation agrees with Gordon noting that “like political parties, media houses in Sierra Leone have their strongholds and weakholds” (*Gbanabom Hallowell*)⁵. Apart from a few media outlets that

³ For the purpose of this paper NGOs include local and international NGOs and multilateral and bilateral agencies

⁴ Article: Advertising Chaos; by O.R Awoonor Gordon. Peep Magazine. Friday, August 27, 2004.

⁵ A lecture delivered at the British Council, organized by the Institute for Public Administration, University of Sierra Leone. April 17, 2008. Addressing human rights and leadership crisis in the Sierra Leone media.

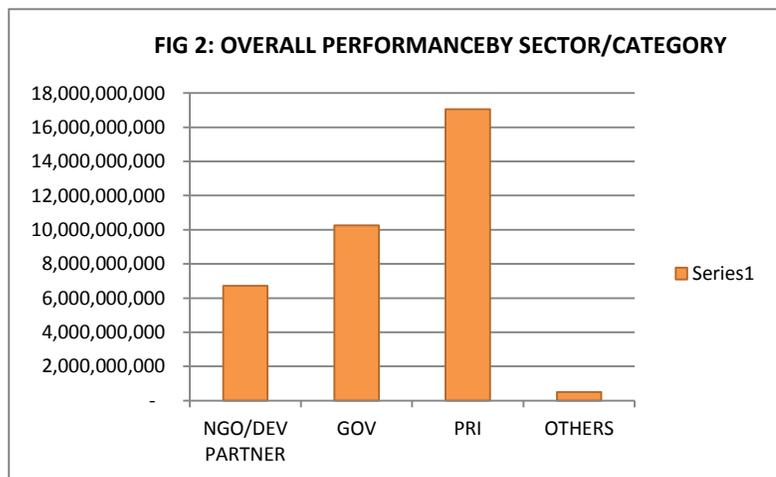
have mostly remained impartial and less biased, the sweeping majority are polarised and politicised with their outlets backing the two main ruling party and opposition camps. Some of the newspapers are even owned and operated by government ministers and opposition leaders.



And so in the heated struggle for power, the media, especially the print, can demonise political opponents making it difficult to distinguish whether the media is reporting news or running PR campaigns or propaganda⁶.

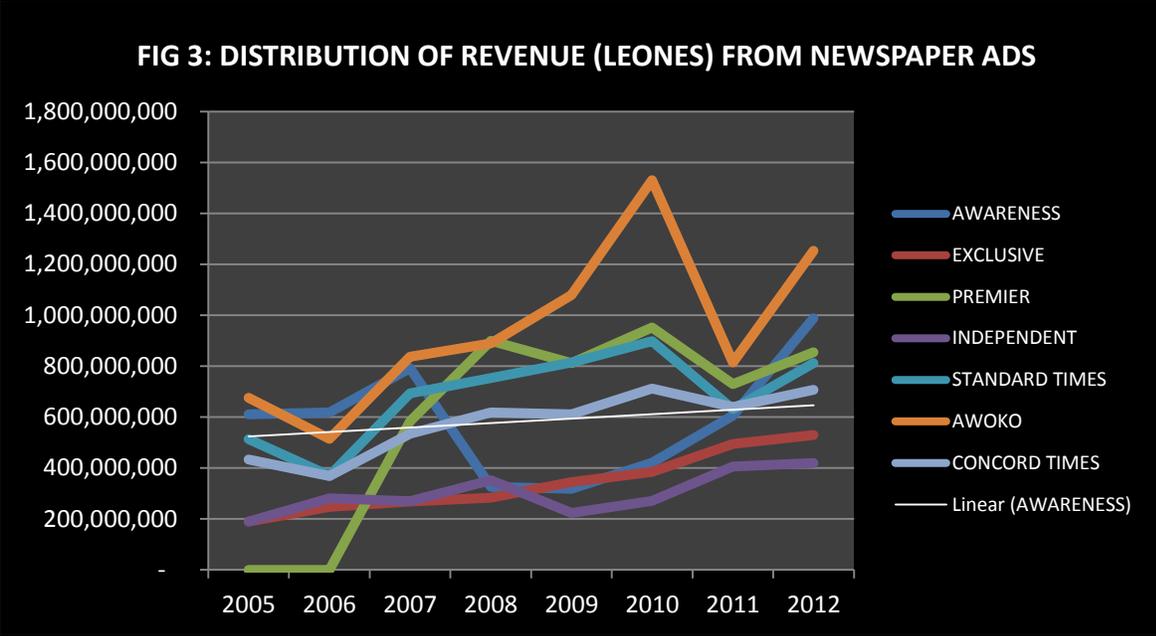
This paper tracked annual revenue of Le2.4 billion to SSL5.4 billion from adverts shared among seven media houses (see figure one below). The three dominant sources of ads are from the private sector, government agencies and NGO (including local and international NGOs, bilateral and multilateral organisations and foreign missions). The highest increases in media adverts were recorded in the election years of 2007 (by Le1.6bn and 2012 (by Le1,64bn).

The private sector especially telecoms, betting companies, gave the highest ads to newspapers amounting to about 51.5% of total advert revenue from the papers. Government agencies (30.3%) and NGOs (19.2%) have influence in determining the revenue of the media. The volume of adverts

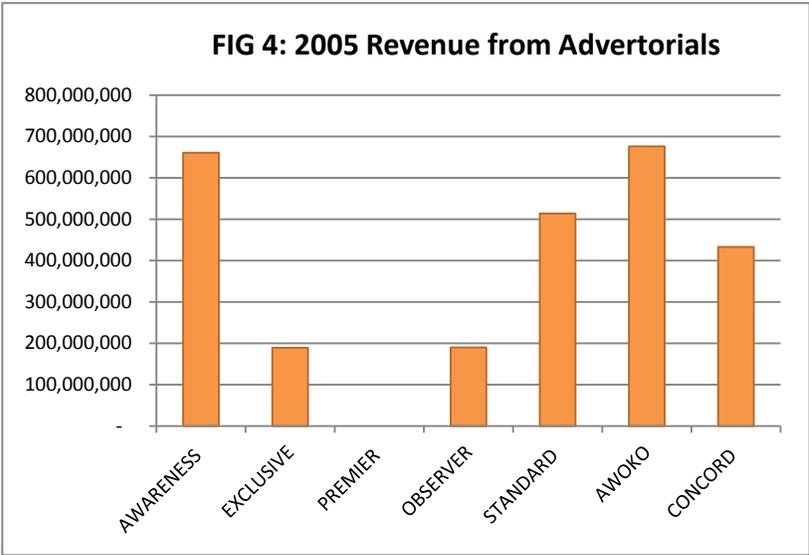


coming from the NGO and donor agencies could be small, however we noted that at least 45% of the adverts by government came from Project Implementation Units within ministries which are funded by the UN system and donor agencies. NGOs therefore make a significant contribution to daily advertorials in Sierra Leone.

⁶ Interview with A lecturer at the Mass Communication Dept. at Fourah Bay College, June 2016



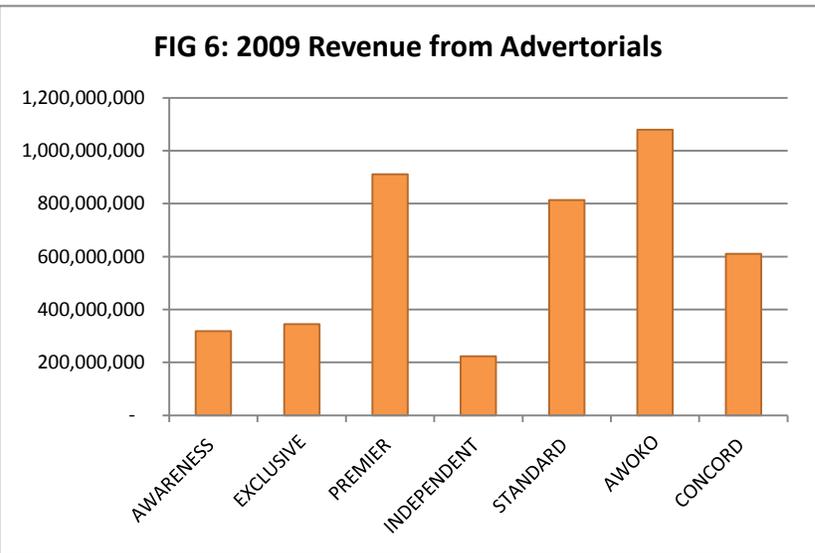
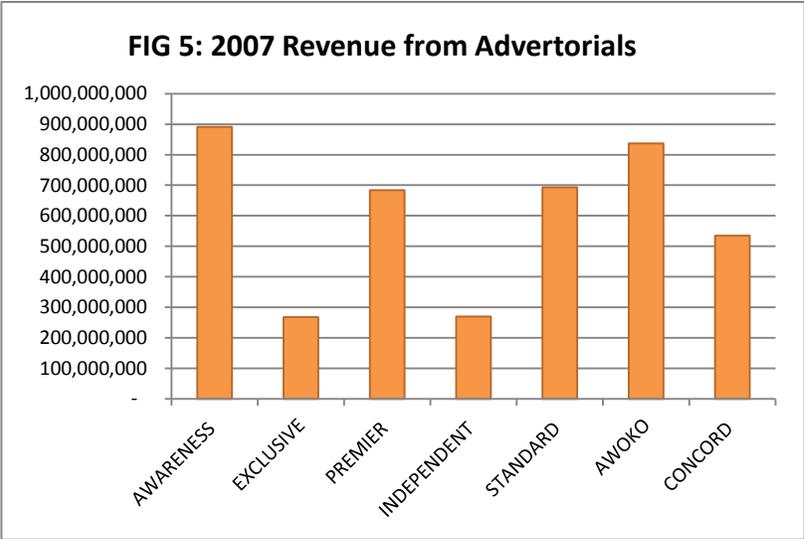
Revenue performance of Awareness Times and Exclusive from 2006 to 2012 coheres with Hallowell and Olu Gordon’s postulation that the volume of newspaper ads increases as editorials pitch tent with ruling parties. In the period leading to the 2007 election Awareness Times was in advertorial boom with their front pages sharing support for the government of the day. In the period immediately after the change of government, their advertorial fortunes dropped while they still continued to echo opposition sentiments. Awareness Times advertorial fortunes skyrocketed in 2011 when the paper renegotiated its leaning towards the ruling party. Whether under APC or SLPP, the rise in advertorial inflows has direct correlation with outflows of hate messages; propaganda and hate messages always rise to meet expectations of their political paymasters. Although change in Exclusive Newspaper revenue curve was not so dramatic, we noted that the paper had very low advertorial revenue under SLPP, but steadily increased with the change of government from 2008 onwards. There is also an interesting convergence of this rise in revenue with their front page support for the ruling party.



Awoko Newspaper on the other hand enjoyed the high revenue from adverts throughout the 8 years. This is partly because the paper is widely read and is seen as a 'doer of no harm' because of the neutral stance the paper maintains.

Four newspapers dominated advertorials in 2005: Awoko, Concord Times, Standard Times and Awareness.

The situation continued onto the election year in 2007. Government advertising increased in 2007 and Awareness enjoyed the largest share of the ad (See Figure 5). The paper's revenue from advert increased by 18%. A new entrant into the newspaper industry, owned by a well connected former minister of information under ex-president Tejan Kabba contributed to an overall sharp increase in ads in by end of 2007.



By 2009 Awoko, Standard Times and Premier Media enjoyed the largest share of advertorials. Awareness joined Exclusive and Independent Observe that have been performing all time low on ads. Reduction in government ad to Awareness largely explains the paper's low levels of revenue for 2008 to 2010. A review of hate messages in the PPRC 2010 report explains the stance taken by newspapers supporting both sides of the political and the rationale for Awareness experiencing a sharp fall in ad from government. The state media regulator did not punish any of the hate messages below, rather it was advert that determined political alliances

No	Newspaper	Date	Headlines/issues
1	Unity	25th Aug 2010	"Koroma Creates Northern Security Caucus?"
2	Unity	16th Aug 2010	"Kailahun says APC is Useless"
3	Awareness Times	19th Jul 2010	"APC killed Bash Taqi, Sorie Forna etc 35 years ago"
4	Torchlight	5th Nov 2010	"Blood for blood, Fire for fire, SLPP 2012 Plan unfold"
5	Awareness Times	23rd Nov 2010	"Lord-A-Mercy' more liars from our Presidency"
6	Unity	1st Dec 2010	"APC grooms Adamu to replace Highway"
7	Awareness Times	1st Dec 2010	"APC threatens violence in Tonko Limba"
8	Torchlight	30th Sept 2010	"God has deserted Charles Margai"
9	Torchlight	4th Aug 2010	"They are all Mendes"
10	Unity	6th Aug 2010	"Limba/Loko Gov't Eliminates Temnes"

By 2012 Awareness Times joined Awoko, Premier and Standard Times in the league of papers enjoying advertorials. Below is a collection of negative stereotypes, inflammatory, abusive and defamatory headlines published in 2012⁷ that could have instigated mass violence in a society that is structurally polarised along ethnic, regional lines. Experts in the Mass Communication argue that although the headlines did not spark violence they reinforced divisions in the state especially in the management of the public sector.

Newspaper	Date	Headlines/issues
Thu, Jun 28, 2012	AWARENESS TIMES	"Some of These Mende Boys Misbehaving All Over the Land; Unchecked by Other Mendes"
Mon, May 14, 2012	AWARENESS TIMES	"SLPP Defending Fresh Tribalism"
Mon, May 21, 2012	AWARENESS TIMES	"SLPP's Tribalism Assisted AFRC's Freetown Attack"
Thu, May 17, 2012	AWARENESS TIMES	"SLPP Desperate to Deploy Temne-Loko Card"

All of these hate message above would have undermined the peace of Sierra Leone, however, none of the headlines attracted the attention of the Independent Media Commission for punitive action. The media seems emboldened to publish any emotion including appealing to the dangerous impulses of the people in the post war nation.

4.2. Security Forces, Impunity and Violence

This section focuses on the key actors and institutions promoting violence. To understand the context the table presents a calendar of major incidences of violence in the last 10 years (2007-2016) and analysed the responses of state institutions to each incident. We found some stylised facts:

- a) Violence is a disguise fight over the distribution of scarce resources.
- b) In most scenes where violence occurred ministers, presidential aspirants and senior public servants were present,
- c) There are vested interests in most incidences of violence and they went unpunished and 'not-investigated'. "Na Buff case"

⁷ Political Parties Registration Commission 2010 Annual Report listed hate messages from the print media.

- d) The few incidences where arrests and detention were made were either opposition supporters or anti-establishment activists some within the ruling party
- e) Excessive use of force by the police in most instances
- f) Opposition offices recorded the highest incidences of violent attacks
- g) There are cases where violence erupted when avenues for seeking redress are not trusted.

Table 1: Calendar of major incidences of political violence 2007 – 2016

No	Date	Key Major Violent Activities and Responses
1	23rd July 2007	Tom Nyuma attacked in a hotel in Bo by men who claimed that he wanted to attack Ernest Bai Koroma. There were no arrests, no punishment.
2	30th Aug 2007	Presidential candidates Charles Margai of PMDC and Ernest Bai Koroma of APC were attacked in Kailahun. One SLPP Parliamentary aspirant named as leader of the attacked was not investigated or punished. The man is now a national executive member of the APC.
3	13th Sep 2008	Post-election reprisal attacks in parts of Sierra Leone. SLPP headquarters near the police HQ was vandalized and supporters beaten up after the announcement of results. No one was punished.
	Mar 2009	Multiple incidences of political violence occurred in Gendema (Pujehun District), Freetown(Western Area) and Kenema (Kenema District)
4	13th Mar 2009	Clashes between supporters of Mayor of Freetown city council and SLPP and at the SLPP headquarters. On same date, official vehicle of Resident Minister East set ablaze in Kenema.
5	16th Mar 2009	SLPP national HQ very close to police HQ was attacked in Freetown, women allegedly raped, two vehicles burnt, offices vandalized and over two dozen youth wounded. A presidential bodyguard named in the incident was not arrested. The international community including the USA and UN condemned the violence. UNIPSIL paid for the refurbishment of SLPP office and appeased other parliamentary parties (APC and PMDC) by giving them vehicles and motor bikes. On 2nd April 2009, APC and SLPP leaders, facilitated by the UN, signed a joint communiqué affirming the cessation of all acts of political intolerance and violence. On 4th April, President Koroma visited the damaged SLPP offices as a symbolic gesture of reconciliation. Justice Bankole Thompsom Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate the incident reported allegations of rape unsustainable in law but noted that outrages upon personal dignity and inhuman conduct occurred.
6	Mar 2009	In Pujehun, clashes occurred between rival supporters (SLPP, APC/PMDC) in the lead-up to a local bye election in Gendema, Pujehun District. Some people were arrested.
7	Sept 2009	Two separate incidences of protesters clashing with police in Kailahun and Lungi, leaving two people dead and police posts burnt down. Arrests were made and the matter prosecuted.
8	Multiple dates in 2010	Violence in Tongo Fields, and Bo ahead of local bye elections. A Government enquiry commission recommended the passing of a Political Violence Act, amending the PPRC Act to allow penalties against politicians and parties found to have been engaged in violence and banning of prominent APC politicians including the then Resident Minister South and Mayor of Freetown City Council from holding public office and other known party operatives guilty of violence. Government white Paper acknowledged the recommendations but no action was taken on the individuals named or institutional development to contain violence.
9	13th Nov, 2010	SLPP party office situated on Kainkordu Road, Koidu City was splashed with human excrement in the morning before the arrival of the SLPP Delegates for a meeting in Kono. There was no arrest, no punishment. On 6th December, 2010 the PPRC in collaboration with UNIPSIL hosted the Diplomatic Corp in the Kono District. The opportunity was used to meet with the four candidates contesting the election, civil society groups, the security sector and Paramount Chiefs.
10	18 th Apr 2011	Clashes between supporters of SLPP flag-bearer candidates Mr Usman Boie Kamara (now APC Ministry of Trade) and Rt. Gen. Maada Bio ahead of the party's convention. No arrests by SLP
11	9th Sep 2011	During his thank you tour, convoy of opposition presidential aspirant Julius Maada Bio was

		<p>attacked in Bo. The opposition leader was wounded in his head killed and over 15 people injured. SLPP supporters burnt down building belonging to APC. The President set up an investigating panel that revealed that APC supporters started the skirmish by stoning, leading to reprisals by SLPP supporters who committed arson, and police personnel resorted to shooting. Key opposition leaders including a Member of Parliament were arrested and detained. The matter is still in court.</p>
12	18 th to 16 th Apr 2012	<p>African Minerals Ltd workers protested for working conditions (See Human Right Commission report July 2012 for details). The police reacted by killing, subjecting women to inhumane, cruel treatment by beating, kicking and arresting people who were attending to the corpse of relative who died in Bumbuna Health Center. Two named persons, Resident Minister North and the Minister of Mines and Minerals failed to cooperate with the Human Rights Commission investigating the incident. The police was asked to bring some of their officers to book and publicly apologise, especially to the women of Bumbuna for unlawful use of live ammunition</p> <p>For the growing tension ahead of the 2012 elections Police banned all political activities for a while. PPRC made a statement on 18th October 2012 saying the release issued by the SLP was only limited to political rallies and processions.</p>
13	17th Nov. 2012	<p>Dozens of opposition supporters were detained in various police cells following incidences of violence in parts of the country. However, on November 17 2012, Presidential and parliamentary elections held, with incumbent President Koroma emerging victorious with 58 % of votes. The day passed off relatively peacefully.</p>
14	6th Apr 2013	<p>Rival musical fan groups clashed in Freetown. Police investigated and effected arrests.</p>
15	Throughout 2014	<p>2014 Sierra Leone had a shock from an Ebola epidemic. That year went relatively free of incidence of political violence. A State of Emergency (SOE) was passed to contain the epidemic.</p>
16	18th Mar. 2015	<p>Following the sacking of Vice President, Sam Sumana the President citing loss of party membership and willingness to abandon position on 27th April, 15 members of SLPP and a Senior Officer from the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, were arrested in Kenema. Eight days earlier, 10 people were arrested for protesting outside the US Embassy, while in March a meeting of the Bar Association was broken up. In contrast, assemblies and events held by the governing party were allowed. Police investigated and the matters in Kenema and Freetown went to trial.</p>
17	28th Nov. and 1st Dec 2015	<p>Violence in Kailahun between supporters of Minister Mayah Kaikai and Kailahun Local council chairman ahead of a bye election in ward 002. Regional police commander convened a meeting of both sides at the Kailahun court barray and pleaded for calm and peaceful election.</p>
18	Dec 2015	<p>Violence in Kono parliamentary Bye election – houses were burnt down and a vehicle of a minister burnt. A Military Assistance to Civil Power (MAC-P) was instituted.</p>
19	On 27th May 2016	<p>Intra-party violence within the SLPP in Kenema led to stabbing of one person. Arrests have been made and the police is investigating the matte</p>
20	Jul 2016	<p>Violence between rival APC and SLPP supporters in bye elections in Constituency 001 in Kailahun. Police institute MAC-P in Kailahun to calm tensions down. The home of the SLPP candidate was searched for alleged possession of weapons.</p>
21	Jul 2016	<p>Campaigning in the lead up to by-elections in Lunsar, the Alliance Democratic Party (ADP) office in Lunsar was splashed with human excreta. The Leader and parliamentary candidate claim he was attacked by supporters of the ruling party, setting his car ablaze. No one was arrested or investigation conducted.</p>
22	16 th Aug 2016	<p>A protest march by youth of Kabala town, Northern Sierra Leone against a “decision by authorities to relocate the proposed Youth Village from Kabala to Tonkolili District degenerated into violence. The houses of the Local Unit Commander and Police Prosecutor in Kabala were reportedly burnt down. The ruling party’s new office and National Electoral Commission's offices were partly burnt down whilst the District Officer's office was vandalised. Some youth were shot dead and four seriously wounded.</p>
23	20 th Aug 2016	<p>Youth in Lower Banta Chief marched to Largo and burnt houses including the chief’s house, Court Barry and the chief’s brother’s house.</p>

The following conclusions are reached from analysis of the table above.

4.2.1. Impunity: The 'Buff Case' Syndrome A Driver of Violence

The incidences presented in the table above shows mixture of impunity (*buff case*) for perpetrators of violence and resistance to claims from citizens as conditions that makes youth violence to thrive. Two categories of people enjoy impunity: a) groups associated with ruling parties engaged in elections related violence and b) law enforcement agencies responding to protest actions. Government reaction to the three most recent state-commissioned enquiries into violence (Human Rights Commission on Bumbuna 2012; Kelvin Lewis 2011; Sheers Moses 2009) shows the lack of will to end violence. None of the state officials mentioned in the three reports were brought to book. Below is an excerpt from Government White Paper on Sheers Moses Commission of Enquiry.

“Government notes the recommendation that steps be taken against persons allegedly responsible for acts of violence in Freetown and Gendema to be relieved of their responsibilities and banned from holding public office for a period of at least five years.

Government however regrets its inability to legally effect that recommendation as the banning of citizens from holding public office (other than by law) recommended by the Commission is not provided for in the laws of Sierra Leone accordingly;

- a) In the case of the Mayor of Freetown, Herbert George Williams, he was duly elected by popular vote for a term of four years. This mandate cannot therefore be overturned by the government through administrative action;*
- b) Government notes the findings and recommendations of the Commission relating to the erstwhile Resident Minister, South, Musa Tarawallie, and assures the public that appropriate action will be taken in due course in that regard.*
- c) Government further notes the recommendation of the Commission in respect of Mr. Mohamed Turay (alias Yete Yete) and Idrissa Kamara (alias -Leatherboot) and considering their respective ranks in the police force, will refer the matter to the Police Council in respect of the former and to the Inspector-General of Police in the case of the latter.*

Government is of the view that the violence under reference was perpetrated not only by members or sympathizers of political parties but also ordinary persons who may not have belonged to any political party. To combat or forestall this, Government is actively considering the enactment of the Political Violence Act which will provide for punishment and the banning of convicted individuals from holding public office for a number of years.”

While government state its inability to ban elected leaders from office in 2010, in 2015 a sitting Vice President and Mayor of Kono were dismissed and suspended from office. One of the officers named in this report remains a senior member of the SLP working in the same community that reported the violent incident.

4.2.2. Lack of Neutrality: The SLP Drives Violence

Another driver of violence cited in all enquiries of violence is the lack of neutrality of the SLP as a player in politics. Lack of neutrality of the SLP is reflected in the lack of will to investigate and punish selected case. Table 1 shows a significant number of attacks on opposition offices and personnel where no punitive action was taken by the SLP. The attacks on opposition offices in Freetown mostly took place in an area close to the Police Headquarters. A leader of one of the smaller parties interviewed in this research gives another take on his experience with SLP:

“I was never allowed to observe my election in Lunsar town because the SLP never wanted me to do so. Lunsar is the most populous community in the constituency I contested. Youth supporting the ruling party candidate were loaded in a vehicle with a Guinean registration number. They attacked me and said, I cannot go round to observe election in Lunsar. When I reported the incidence to a senior police officer covering Lunsar area, he did not help. Later on I overheard him on phone bragging to his colleagues that he prevented me from going round in Lunsar. In the end, I lost the election. I did well in most of the areas I was allowed to observe but spectacularly failed in Lunsar.”

Even if this opposition candidate might have genuinely lost the bye election in Lunsar being the home town of his opponent, the ruling party candidate, creating room for perceptions does not bode well for citizen trust of the SLP as a neutral player.

While one opposition candidate was complaining about failure to get access to communities in another election in that period the premises of a female opposition candidate in Kailahun was cordoned and searched by police officers for alleged possession of weapons. Violence between the opposition and supporters of the government ministers representing that area led to the institution of a MACP. “Clearly, when security agencies are not seen as neutral they exacerbate violence, when they are professional elections are peaceful”. (interview with Lecturer Political Science Dept, FBC) One opposition leader remarked “the day the SLP becomes neutral, fair and enjoy our confidence as political leaders in our own right, we will stop hiring personal bodyguards who have been named in many incidences of violence”.

4.2.3. Overreaction: Killing Mosquitoes with Bazooka

Police brutality and overreaction to peaceful protests has been cited in all reports (Human Rights Commission on Bumbuna 2012; Kelvin Lewis 2011; Sheers Moses 2009). We noted a disproportionate use or display of force by the SLP on ordinary people who are neither influential in anyway nor enemies to their police officers who are meant to protect their lives. Disproportionate use or display of force is manifested in three ways:

- A) **Frequent display of weapons:** The study noted that even on a normal day where there is no incidence of violence, the SLP displays weapons such as water tanks among peaceful population which is most times perceived as intimidating and traumatising for a population trying to consign memories of war to history.
- B) **Police Highhandedness:** Heavy handedness by the SLP in handling peaceful protests has been recorded in most incidences (Kenema, Kabala, Lungi, Kailahun, Kono, Bo and Freetown) where they had cause to intervain. The Human Rights Commission’s report on Bunbuna gave a graphic account of beatings, torture and destruction of property. It appears citizens right to peaceful protest is no longer recognised.
- C) **Frequent use of Military Aid to the SLP:** The study saw a good number of instances in Bo, Freetown, Kailahun, Kenema and Kono where the SLP

requested military aid in quelling violence⁸. Such requests officially dubbed by the GOSL 2004 Defence White Paper as Military Aid to Civil Power - MACP can only be raised when “crisis situations go beyond the capacity of SLP to resolve in any other way”. None of the incidences reviewed in the table above were outside the capacity of the SLP to handle. For example SLP invited the military to secure an opposition party convention in Bo in 2013. These three actions cannot stop violence but leaves the issues unresolved and drives dissent underground.

Low capacity of the SLP to respond to community tensions was spotted as a concern. The SLP cannot effectively discharge its constitutional duty to maintain order if it continues to overstretch its available armed man power by renting its armed personnel to all commercial banks, supermarkets and private businesses and individuals. By giving its personnel out on fundraising activities, the SLP competes with private security companies living the institution in a weak capacity to do its core function. It is not surprising therefore to see the little manpower of the SLP using excessive force on innocent civilians or making frequent MACP requests over the last eight years

4.3. Sustaining Thuggery: Access to Finance as a Driver of Violence

In election related violence cases such as Lunsar 2016, Kono 2009 and 2010, multiple cases in Kailahun and Freetown, communities reported that youth are financially supported by stakeholders residing outside the communities. Where there is assurance of impunity and sustained resources, known perpetrators can engage in violent actions in their communities of residence for long periods. Understanding and cutting the financial support to thugs is key to stopping violence.

Understanding political financing in Sierra Leone can be difficult. Compared to western democracies where there is large middle class and rich people making membership contribution, some politicians in Sierra Leone enjoy covert support of large businesses, banks, state owned enterprises, mining companies, sometimes from official budget of ministries, departments and agencies and contribution of friends and family members⁹. Giving this reality of political financial having huge revenue sources such as National Telecommunication Commission, Petroleum Unit, Road User Fund, Environmental Protection Agency and Maritime Administration outside the consolidated revenue expose these agencies to grave financial risks.

To understand covert party financing we looked at the performance of state owned financial institutions. We divided the financial institutions into two – a) those legally established to raise revenue through collection of mandatory fees and taxes (e.g. National Revenue Authority and National Mineral’s Agency, Road Safety Authority); and

⁸ GoSL Defense White Paper 2004 recognizes Military Aid to Civil Power (MACP) a task for the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. This means that MACP can be employed “at the request of GOSL, and within the provisions of the Constitution, the direct maintenance and restoration of law and order, in situations beyond the capacity of civil power to resolve in any other way. To include the provision of critical services during crisis or conflict, including those required for the functioning of Government itself.”

⁹ A few senior public servants interviewed said one strategy to keep their jobs is to show loyalty to both sides of the political divide... that is, secretly carrying the ruling APC and the main opposition SLPP cards at the same time

(b) those businesses such as banks, insurance and state lottery operating in open market with private business competitors. In an environment where capital accumulation processes and financial transfers anchor around banking institutions we decided to put the performance of two state owned banks under the microscope for their last 5 years. We compared state owned bank with their competitors. Table 2 below shows a distribution of profitability of the only state owned banks to two randomly selected private banks. The report found that both state owned banks reported unprecedented financial loss in the election year in 2012 which was reflected in their statements in 2013. The table also shows that even when banking operations were heavily affected by Ebola the two banks recorded higher profit in 2015 than the election year.

Table 2: Profit and Loss Banks in Sierra Leone

PROFIT/LOSS FOR THE YEAR AFTER TAX PUBLISHED BY BANKS IN SIERRA LEONE				
YEAR	SL Com Bank Le '000	Rokel Bank Le '000	ECO BANK Le '000	GT BANK Le '000
2010	8,812,068	15,010,434		
2011	13,040,869	9,970,704	4,000,000	10,793,058
2012	14,674,184	7,049,224	6,300,000	11,092,689
2013	(58,494,317)	(99,079,830)	7,600,000	14,849,765
2014	3,354,746	(22,270,119)	9,900,000	23,833,448
2015			11,100,000	32,732,416

Experts interviewed suggests two possible reasons for the financial loss: a) the two banks could be the preferred choices from lax loans and bank guarantees to politicians, their business allies and surrogates and putting the businesses under immense pressure during the election year which was reflected in the two lists of loans from banks; one under the former SLPP regime where the state facilitated SL Commercial Bank loans to MPs to buy cars and another recently in 2016 under the APC where list of debtors published by the two state owned banks involving predominantly politicians, their allies and prominent political families. b) Huge overheads of the two banks undermined their efficiency further deepening the loss. State owned banks add to the long list of state owned enterprises that hardly declare dividend to the state. A detailed study on the performance of SOEs is required to understand political risks and mitigating measures.

4.4. A Hungry Man is an Angry Man: High Inequality and Grievances in Resource Distribution

Fifteen out of the 22 incidences of violence occurred in communities in the south and eastern region where there are strong feeling of perceived discrimination in resource distribution leading to persistent conflicts between the entitled and the aggrieved. Perception of discrimination in resource distribution increased the stakes in politics in places such as Kono, Kenema, Bo, Tongo Fields, Pujehun making local bye elections a platform for vendetta. Recently, youth poverty and high unemployment combined with perception of discrimination and voicelessness to generate resentment in Largo – Moyamba and Kabala. Evidently, 19 of the 22 cases of violence are either elections related, resentment with local leadership or protest over unfair resource distribution. Skewed resource distribution including jobs, roads and infrastructure, contracts,

allocation of development projects are growing source of concern for many citizens and is increasing the stakes of politics. A number of interlocutors believe that state resources are more aligned with political party and electoral objectives. We note from the table above that in 65% of the incidence of political violence occurred when key actors who are either in control of resources (ministers and other public servants) or could potentially have resources to share (opposition aspirants).

5. Conclusions and Entry Points for Reform

It is clear from the responses to ongoing drivers and incidences of hate and violence that the political class seems reluctant to embrace many opportunities for sustainable solution to violence and extremism. This study shows that over the last 8 years GOSL has not implemented most of the recommendations of the very commissions of enquiry it established to look into violent conducts in the country. Impunity, inequality, skewed resource distribution and the lack of trust in law enforcement agencies remain the biggest features of the politics of Sierra Leone, something reminiscent of the pre-war situation described in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report. It is therefore simplistic and misleading to describe ordinary Sierra Leoneans reacting to perceived unfairness as violent people. Addressing impunity in all its forms ranging from unprofessionalism of security agencies and politicians involved in violence, media houses promoting hate to bureaucrats engaged in unfair distribution of resources will help reorient youth who have embraced violence rather than peaceful means of seeking redress.

The data also shows that violence is institutionalised in the politics of Sierra Leone. As Maya and Utas (2008) indicated, Sierra Leone has shown a tendency for electoral moments to legitimise violence. Violence increases the cost of politics and makes it impossible for Sierra Leonean citizens to agree on development policy and collectively fight vested interests. One opportunity presented to address institutional violence is to embrace political reforms as part of the post-Ebola Recovery programme. Political reforms leading to inclusiveness and accountability of institutions is extremely necessary in a context of massive resources for recovery activities ahead of the upcoming 2018 elections. Implementation of the seven pillars of the recovery programme needs to integrate conflict sensitivity programming in its designs and activities. More importantly actions should be taken to reorient politicians towards policy based contestations; and disarm them of the tools for violent mobilisation as we count to the 2018 elections.

This report proposes the following immediate and long term actions to government, development partners, private sector and citizens to help respond to current threats of violence and develop a new generation of forward thinking people willing to build and live an inclusive society.

Immediate:

- A) GOSL through the Independent Police Complaints Board should investigate recent incidences of violence in Kono, Lunsar, Kabala and Gbangbatoke; review

reports of commissions of enquiry on violence and advice on appropriate actions to end impunity among security agencies and non-security actors.

- B) GOSL should ensure that security forces are not recruited on a basis party affiliation. Government should also demonstrate zero tolerance for police indiscipline.
- C) Ahead of the 2018 elections government, SLAJ and IMC should create a reward system for good behaviour among media practitioners. Newspapers publishing hate messages and blackmail should be denied advertorials from GoSL, donor projects and private sector entities for financing of their activities. The IMC should work with SLAJ and other stakeholder including PPRC to formulate responses that mitigates the use of hate as a weapon of the media.
- D) National Council of Paramount Chiefs could work with the PPRC and the Office of National Security to establish a Chieftom Peace League table with clear indicators for conflict sensitivity to be monitored by chiefs and local CSOs.
- E) The SLP should do all in its power to limit the use of MAC-P and display of weapons in communities living in peace. Frequent use of MAC-P gives an impression that the police is not effective.
- F) The SLP armed personnel serving various private sector agencies should be recalled to rededicate to their constitutional role of maintaining civil order.
- G) The PPRC to ensure that political parties to enforce the political parties rules and regulations and private businesses declare their financial support to political parties. This recommendation is important to avoid the possibility of political parties being captured by business entities.
- H) A further analysis on political financing by private sector agencies is recommended to understand party financing in Sierra Leone.
- I) The GOSL agencies should demonstrate that a fair resource distribution formula exists and is working especially for infrastructure and development projects, jobs, scholarships and contracts where inequity in allocation of have been cited as areas unduly influenced by political interest.
- J) GOSL can also consider introducing tolerance and peace education in schools and colleges. Such programmes can be rolled out in communities by civil society organisations and religious leaders. This point has been recommended in earlier reports.
- K) Because political leaders great influence on the actions of their followers they should take responsibility for the behaviors of their supporters. Leaders in public will contribute to building a tolerant society if they refrain from using symbols, languages and action that can be perceived as discriminatory e.g. holding exclusive meetings with their tribes men.
- L) GOSL and development should take conscious step to promote decentralised service delivery and ensure that a winner-takes-all electoral practice does not undermine national cohesion