



**Presidential Election Results 2018: Lessons Learnt and Implications for the Runoff and Democracy Building<sup>1</sup>**



## **1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

The first round of Sierra Leone's March 2018 presidential elections' results show the opposition SLPP having a slight lead (43.3%) over the incumbent APC (42.7%). Support for the APC dropped by 27.2% from 2012, while Julius Maada Bio of the SLPP increased his vote share by 15.7 percent.<sup>2</sup> Other parties shared the remaining 14% of votes (NGC 6.9% and C4C 3.5%). None of the candidates secured a 55% outright victory as required by law and so the NEC has slated the 27th March for second round or runoff between the two candidates. This paper analyzes the meaning of the first round of presidential results to distill lessons that can inform the conduct of the runoff elections.

While there have been a number of analyses (see for example, papers by Dr. Yusuf Bangura, International Growth Center (IGC), and local newspapers) of the first round of voting, none have focused on the steps that must be taken to promote free, fair and peaceful elections

---

<sup>1</sup> Authors: Andrew T. Lavali, Fredline A. O. M'Cormack-Hale, Aaron Hale and Charlie J. Hughes

<sup>2</sup> That is, APC vote share dropped from 58% in 2012 to 42% while Julius Maada Bio of SLPP increased from 37% in 2012 to 43% in 2018.

in the presidential runoff. This exercise is useful because poor electoral management as well as the manipulation of ethnic identity count among key contributing factors to state fragility across Africa and other countries in the world. In the aftermath of the first round of elections, there has been increased tension and bouts of violence following the results announcement that have stoked fears and concerns over reprisal attacks at the minimum, and at worst, rising tensions and escalating violence due to disputes over the results<sup>3</sup>. Examples of conflict include attacks on candidates who won the elections, such as several MP-elects of Freetown; a civil society activist, Alphonso Manley; as well as reports of attacks of ethnic minorities in strongholds of either one of the two dominant parties including in Bo, Makeni, Freetown and Port Loko. The number of attacks is worrisome: the Women's Situation Room recorded over 500 complaints of individuals being attacked by various parties within a space of one week, in the immediate aftermath of the elections.

Given the fragmentation of the opposition SLPP in the lead up to the March 2018 elections (IGR Cost of Dysfunctional Opposition; Critical Perspectives Vol 5) the defeat of the incumbent APC party at the polls was reported as a surprise to some observers (Umaru Fofana, BBC). The SLPP has been a largely ineffective opposition party: its MPs joined the ruling party to rubber-stamp many proposals by President Koroma; an act which other opposition parties criticized as a contributing factor to the economic challenges that Sierra Leoneans currently face.

In the absence of an effective opposition party, civil society organizations, religious leaders and popular musicians have actively filled the void. Collectively, a Citizens' Manifesto was developed; messages on policy-based elections widely disseminated as well as policy-oriented discussions held on radio and broadcast television at the MP constituency level. Presidential, mayoral, youth and women debates have also been held, and 2018 has been dubbed the year of debate. At least 60% of constituencies' organized debates for MP candidates as a way of promoting issue based politics. These are all positive trends given that some have argued that access to information on candidate positions can influence voter preferences.<sup>4</sup> This paper analyzes the first round of results in light of the investments made in building democratic polity and culture.

## 2. ELECTORAL BEHAVIOURS AND PRESIDENTIAL RUNOFFS

Like many African states, many voters and parties in Sierra Leone have historically viewed voting as a way of supporting kith and kin that they believe can channel public and private resources and prestige to a family, ethnic group or community<sup>5</sup>. This definition suggests that voting has little to do with the assessment of candidates on the basis of their record and ability to govern well or about the policies and programmes of political parties. SLPP's 2007 results in two districts (Kailahun and Bombali) provide a good example of this. Given the deplorable condition of services in Kailahun, (poor roads, schools, health and others) it was hard to understand why 90 percent of Kailahun residents would turn out to vote for the then ruling SLPP. In the same vein, because the SLPP Government constructed a road to Makeni, there was every reason to believe that SLPP should have received more than the 10.1% of votes than they did in Bombali. Over time, entrenched electoral loyalties and patrimonialism have created a com-

---

<sup>3</sup> Cooper Inveen and Ruth Maclean, 2018. Sierra Leone: Violence fears as tense election reaches runoff. The Guardian, March 21. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/sierra-leone-political-violence-tribal-rhetoric-rival-parties-face-runoff>

<sup>4</sup> Casey, Katherine. 2015. Crossing Party Lines: The Effects of Information on Redistributive Politics. American Economic Review. 105(8). 2410-2448

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Charles Silva - FBC

monly-held belief that elections are “winner take all” contests. Voters presume that the SLPP will reward the South and East, while the APC will favour the North and West. The commonly held belief is that defeat at the ballot box will entail socio-political and economic exclusion for the loser for an entire electoral term<sup>6</sup>.

However a more nuanced examination of Sierra Leone’s electoral situation since 1996 indicates that these trends are not permanent. There are a sizable number of voters in parts of the country who vote largely on issues and who seem to determine who wins presidential and parliamentary elections. Leaders of smaller parties also help counter ethnic based voting during presidential runoffs. In 1996, a predominantly northern based party the PDP, threw its weight in the Presidential runoff election behind the SLPP candidate against the UNPP; another party with strong northern support. This trans-regional support was pivotal to the SLPP victory in that election. A similar situation occurred in 2007, when a mainly Southern based party, the PMDC, formed a trans-regional/ethnic alliance with the APC to deliver victory to the latter in the presidential run-off elections. Another counter trend to purely ethnic considerations during elections has been the motivations influencing the urban youth vote. Youth buoyed by a rebellious youth culture and music were more attracted to the APC ahead of the 2007 elections than to the SLPP. Urban youths are relatively less tied to ethnic identities than older voters, and livelihood and economic considerations tend to figure more in their political calculations. This may explain the relative fluidity of voting patterns in large cities like Freetown, Bo, Makeni, Kenema, Port Loko town, and Koidu. Electoral behaviour and voting patterns in urban areas are not largely based on patronage networks alone, but can be shaped by the delivery of services. For this reason Chris Wyrod<sup>7</sup> argued that the 2007 defeat of the SLPP illustrated voter response to policy failures under the 1996 -2002 Tejan Kabba administration. Many urban residents enjoy a comparatively high literacy rate and a vibrant civil society providing civic education which shapes voter behaviors.

Whilst these counter trends point to the slow emergence of more nuanced voting patterns, ethnic considerations are still dominant in the voting calculus. The next section provides an update of the evolution of electoral behaviors and its impact on voting patterns and the presidential runoff.

### **3. LESSONS FROM MARCH 2018 RESULTS**

#### **3.1. An Embrace of Issue-Based Voting: Elections can be won and lost on issues**

Many observers of the recent elections have made the claim that the results illustrate the persistence of ethno-regional divisions in Sierra Leone politics. However, a closer examination of the results, and in particular the decline in support for the APC across the country, including in their ethno-regional strongholds suggest a more complex picture. We argue that human security and livelihood considerations were dominant issues for Sierra Leone voters and these considerations were stronger among voters in swing and competitive districts.<sup>8</sup>

This shift is supported by two KAP studies that IGR conducted in March and December 2018, in which upwards of forty percent of respondents indicated that policy options would inform

---

<sup>6</sup> Ngolo Katta – Public Relations officer for National Election Watch

<sup>7</sup> Journal for Democracy March 2008

<sup>8</sup> Standing Together for Democracy Consortium - KAP survey classified swing districts as those that satisfy two conditions: (1) They changed allegiance between parties in presidential elections in 2002, 2007, 2012 and (2) the margin of defeat in the last election in 2012 is less than 55%. These include Western rural and Western Urban and Kono. Competitive districts satisfy only two conditions: Kabala, Kailahun, Kambia and Moyamba. Party stronghold districts satisfy none of these conditions in the last three elections. These include opposition SLPP districts of Bo, Bonthe, Kenema and Pujehun and ruling party APC areas of Bombali, Port Loko, Tokolili,

their voter choices on election-day. The table below shows that voting patterns are largely consistent with this data. (See table 1 below illustrating the performance of political parties by district).

**Table 1: Presidential Results 2007, 2012, Round 1 - 2018**

District	2007		2012		2018		APC % Change 2012 to 2018	SLPP % Change 2012 to 2018
	APC	SLPP	APC	SLPP	APC	SLPP		
Kailahun	9.4%	90.6%	22.6%	73.3%	10.5%	81.9%	-53.5	11.7
Kenema	16.9%	83.1%	18.7%	77.9%	11.0%	83.8%	-41.1	7.4
Kono	41.5%	58.6%	58.2%	37.1%	20.1%	21.5%	-65.4	42.0
Bombali	89.9%	10.1%	93.2%	4.4%	86.2%	8.5%	-7.5	93.1
Koinadugu	64.6%	35.4%	86.4%	9.1%	56.3%	27.2%	-34.8	198.1
Tonkolili	88.7%	11.3%	92.6%	4.4%	76.7%	9.8%	-17.1	122.2
Kambia	80.9%	19.1%	82.2%	13.0%	39.3%	10.2%	-48.9	21.5
Port Loko	88.2%	11.9%	90.2%	5.6%	71.3%	9.3%	-20.9	66.7
Bo	26.0%	74.0%	16.7%	77.1%	10.3%	83.7%	-38.3	8.5
Bonthe	41.4%	58.6%	11.7%	80.6%	4.6%	89.8%	-60.6	11.4
Moyamba	34.7%	65.3%	26.2%	65.3%	17.9%	73.5%	-31.6	12.5
Pujehun	7.0%	93.0%	15.5%	74.7%	7.9%	86.1%	-49.0	15.2
Western Rural	68.3%	31.7%	74.3%	23.4%	55.8%	34.7%	-24.8	48.2
Western Urban	70.8%	29.2%	71.4%	27.3%	57.8%	33.1%	-19	21.2
National	<b>54.6%</b>	<b>45.4%</b>	<b>58.7%</b>	<b>37.4%</b>	<b>42.7%</b>	<b>43.3%</b>	<b>-27.2</b>	<b>15.8</b>

The argument can be made that APC lost votes in a number of areas due to voters' calculations on various issues. Put another way, voters rejected the APC because the APC failed to address issues they deemed important. Consider the following examples: In the swing district of Kono, MP candidates campaigned on two issues: unfair dismissals: The sacking of former VP Samuel Sam Sumana and Emerson Lamina, the former Mayor of Kono; and the pledge to hold mining companies to account. Emmerson Lamina, the current MP Candidate for C4C was dismissed as mayor of Kono under the APC party, and it was reported in several newspaper articles that he was dismissed because of his stance against Koidu Holdings having taken them to court over non-payment of appropriate mining royalties to Koidu city. While the perception that APC had wronged a "son of the soil" undoubtedly entered the calculus of voters, it

is likely that the issue of mismanagement of mining revenue was a contributing factor as well. C4C won almost all parliamentary seats in the district in this current election. The ruling APC lost over 65 percent of its votes in Kono district forcing the party to a distant third. Given the issues that dominated the campaign, it is unlikely that these voters will change their views to support the ruling APC in the next one week to the runoff.

Voters across the six opposition controlled districts in the south and east, namely, Bo, Moyamba, Bonthe, Pujehun, Kenema and Kailahun, have all complained about perceived marginalization and exclusion under the ruling party in the last 10 years. Overall, APC performance dropped by an average 53 percent in the opposition stronghold of Southern and Eastern Sierra Leone (over 60 percent in Bonthe, 53 percent in Kailahun, by 41 percent in Kenema etc.). There have been media reports of high-ranking party officials, including the current vice president stating in bye-election campaigns in Kono and Kenema, that government can only provide development assistance in areas where they get votes.

In Pujehun, where SLPP increased its presidential votes from 74.7 percent in 2012 to 86.1 percent in 2018, land issues have been a source of concern. One independent candidate, Honorable Siaka Sama combined forces with four other land rights campaigners to run as independent candidates for one MP and four local council seats in Malen chiefdom where large scale land acquisition by SOCFIN, a Belgian agricultural company, has given rise to grievances. Hon Siaka along with his four colleagues accused a local Paramount Chief of colluding with the central government and SOCFIN to provide peasant farmers with unfair deals. The region has high rates of poverty, despite agricultural wealth and there have been several reports of human rights abuses, with confrontations noted between landowners in Malen and the local police in Pujehun. Although Pujehun is seen as a stronghold for the SLPP, Sama and three others were able to win as independent candidates, arguably as a result of the role they played in advocating for land rights. There is a lot of expectation on Sama and his colleagues to promote land reforms in the next parliament.

The salience of policy issues can also be seen in the Northern region where new districts and chiefdoms were created with just a few months to the polls. APC lost nearly 30 percent of its votes in the northern region with Kambia (48 percent fall), Koinadugu (34.8 percent fall), and Port Loko (18.9 percent fall) all accounting for the highest losses. Three issues dominated the campaign in the northern region: (a) livelihood security, (b) the fallout following Koroma's hand-picking of a candidate in the last party primaries in Makeni, which some northern figures view as the over-personalization of power; and (c) the emergence of Kandeh Yumkella with a strong message of change. While again, the argument can be made that ethnicity played a role (for example, Yumkella is from Kambia and some areas in the North were upset that candidates from their area were not picked), voters switched over to SLPP in communities such as Bum-buna in Tonkolili where residents were concerned over their lack of benefit from iron ore wealth; in Lungi in Port Loko where there were protest votes against government's decision to relocate the Airport to Mamamah; and Falaba - a multi-ethnic district affected by chiefdom boundary de-amalgamation issues. SLPP made the biggest gains in Falaba, Koinadugu, and Tonkolili where they won parliamentary and local council seats (see table 1 above).

In the Western Area (Freetown and environs) where government made visible improvements in road construction, the ruling party lost just over 20 percent of its 75 percent of votes earned in 2012, and the opposition made significant inroads into their electoral majority, by 36 percent on average. Many political analysts blame the poor showing of the ruling party in Freetown on the failure of reform: - lawlessness, corruption scandals and the failure of services particularly education and water were cited as serious concern for Freetown in the March 2017 KAP study. The opposition campaigned on education and the promotion of law and order in Freetown, which appears to have paid off. At the time of writing the opposition had taken four of the 28 seats in the Western Area that was unanimously controlled by the ruling party. Considering the ruling

party's financial investment in the campaign, perhaps the heaviest in the history of Sierra Leone's democracy, the APC's decline in vote share can be seen as a major shift toward issue-based voting in Sierra Leone. It is safe to conclude that it would not have been possible for SLPP to win four seats in Freetown by relying only on voters with southeastern origin. All SLPP candidates who won in Freetown are homegrown Freetonians or of northern descent.

### 3.2. Competition Breeds Violence And Impunity Breeds Extremism

The recent spate of violence and political intimidation that have marred these elections show that competitive party politics in Sierra Leone needs further nurturing. According to the second KAP report in December 2017, approximately 25 percent of voters noted that they were willing to vote for new parties, while 23 percent of the surveyed population stated that they might not vote for the political parties they voted for in 2012. These shifts were bound to generate competition and tensions at the community level in an emerging democracy like Sierra Leone. This report shows an interesting relationship between competition and political violence. To illustrate this relationship we compared data on violence reported on radio, newspapers, and social media forums with the official election results of polling centers. IGR agreed on a definition of competition to mean: polling centers where one candidate of a particular party cannot secure more than 60% of the votes.

**Table 2: Centres with one party scoring 60% and above in presidential elections in round 1**

DISTRICT	Total Number of centres	Centres with one party scoring 60% and above	Percentage
Bonthe	129	122	94.6%
Bo	300	270	90.0%
Bombali	219	193	88.1%
Kenema	337	294	87.2%
Pujehun	174	149	85.6%
Tonkolili	233	183	78.5%
Moyamba	218	171	78.4%
Kailahun	222	172	77.5%
Karena	155	113	72.9%
P/Loko	271	189	69.7%
Kambia	171	75	43.9%
Kono	228	97	42.5%
Koinadugu	131	53	40.5%
Falaba	127	51	40.2%
W/Rural	129	51	39.5%
W/Urban	256	94	36.7%

<b>National</b>	<b>3300</b>	<b>2277</b>	<b>69.0%</b>
-----------------	-------------	-------------	--------------

We discovered that that candidates/parties secured more than 60% of the vote in 69 percent of the 3,300 polling centers, whereas in 31 percent of polling centers no one candidates/party secured above 60%. These latter categories of polling centers are classified as competitive areas. A majority of these centres were located in the Western Area, Kambia, Koinadugu, Falaba, and Kono in the east where opposition SLPP, NGC and C4C made significant inroads, winning MP constituencies and entire local council seats in some districts. Violence was reported in a majority of communities where individuals had shifted party affiliation. These communities will require close supervision in the runoff polls. Table 3 highlights a competitive centre where at least one of the non-winning parties received at least 15% of the total valid votes, which further reinforces a similar view of the communities identified above.

**Table 3: A competitive centre is one where at least one of the non-winning parties gets at least 15% of the total valid votes.**

<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>SLPP</b>	<b>APC</b>	<b>NGC</b>	<b>C4C</b>
Bo	270	0	0	0
Bombali	2	191	0	0
Bonthe	122	0	0	0
Falaba	17	31	3	0
Kailahun	172	0	0	0
Kambia	9	29	37	0
Karene	2	106	5	0
Kenema	293	1	0	0
Koinadugu	4	47	2	0
Kono	7	8	0	82
Moyamba	146	24	0	0
P/Loko	0	189	0	0
Pujehun	149	0	0	0
Tonkolili	5	178	0	0
W/Rural	0	51	0	0
W/Urban	0	94	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1198</b>	<b>949</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>82</b>
%	36.3%	28.8%	1.4%	2.5%

A more detailed look at the existing data on violence reveals that violence has thrived in a context of impunity where law enforcement agencies have turned a blind eye to violent acts committed by certain political actors. The December KAP study showed that 51 percent of respondents trust NEC to handle election security fairly. At least half of the country also states that they do not trust the SLP. Opposition supporters interviewed in Port Loko and Kambia complained that in some situations they were made out to be culprits when they went to the police to report intimidation by the ruling party. While the SLP have made efforts to show neutrality in the elections, failure to impartially respond to complaints of violence by a few of their colleagues is contributing to the perception and atmosphere of impunity.

### **3.3. Politicization of Ethnicity is Counterproductive**

Nearly half of the voters in the 2018 elections were either too young or first-time voters who did not have first-hand experience of the sharp ethno-regional divisions that contributed to the Sierra Leone war. After 20 years of multiparty democracy, 2018 was a test of how far political institutions have reformed to the point of managing a democratic transition including the acceptance of defeat. Sierra Leone managed a successful transition in 2007 leading to the emergence of Ernest Bai Koroma and ushering the APC to power. At the same time, the KAP in December 2017 indicates that nearly 80 percent of voters believe that democratic elections can make a difference in the way the country is governed.

Despite these positive strides, the results of the first round of elections revealed that the politicization of ethnicity is a cause for concern. The immediate reaction to the results by certain quarters was to reject the outcome, accuse the electoral commission of ineptitude, inflame ethnic sentiment and make calls for the police to take on some of NEC's powers, including the oversight of ballot boxes. Quite a number of politicians developed a strategy of mobilizing voters in the runoff by whipping up ethnic sentiment and blaming poor electoral performance on ethnically rooted divisions, and encouraging voting on ethnic lines. This strategy is reminiscent of the southeast/northwest divide that was manifested during a hotly-contested election in 1967 that led to ethnic extremism in many parts of the country, coups and counter coups, and ultimately the re-installation of democracy a year later in 1968.

However, Sierra Leone of 2018 is different from the Sierra Leone of 1968. As a result of intermarriages, urbanization, social media, and education, among other factors, Sierra Leone is less susceptible to mass mobilization along identity lines. A considerable number of voters across Sierra Leone and abroad swiftly condemned the resurgence of ethnically-motivated attacks, as manifested through the media or ethnically-motivated acts targeting certain individuals and groups. Although the situation is gradually normalizing, the ongoing incidences of violence and social media attacks demonstrate the need for the incoming administration to make strong investments in programs encouraging national cohesion and reconciliation, as well as the democratic management of national diversity. A starting point for state security and justice agencies is that they need to be seen as fair and impartial in their response to complaints from all parties, both within the ruling party and the opposition.

### **3.4. NEC and institutional integrity**

Based on two rounds of survey data, IGR concluded that citizens had a largely positive view of NEC, seeing it as a credible institution that could properly conduct a free and fair election. The March 2017 survey revealed that 69% of prospective voters believed that NEC would count their votes fairly, and by December the percentage had increased to 77.3% of the voting population.

In spite of these pre-election findings, NEC's credibility has lately come under question over voting irregularities, voided ballots, and persistent rumors about co-optation across social media and the local press. NEC has received criticism from all sides, including high-ranking party officials and the opposition over its competency and neutrality. A citizen affiliated with the ruling party has recently applied for an injunction to restrain NEC from conducting the runoff election until a forensic audit is conducted on NEC's data tabulation system.

In writing this paper, we were unable to verify claims made by NEC critics or ascertain that any irregularity in the electoral process is a deliberate calculation of leadership that has come under significant attack. Moreover, independent data collected from the Parallel Voter Tabulation (PVT) system of the civil society National Election Watch (NEW) yielded results that were very close to NEC's final election results.

While we could not independently verify the accusations made against NEC, it is important to note that NEC had to employ over 15,000 staff for the polling centers. At the same time, these staff are drawn from a population that in many respects is quite partisan. Yet, in a country with limited capacity, it is difficult for any public institution, even with the best of intent, to guarantee absolute control over staffing, and the neutrality of its agents. Thus, it is not inconceivable that some staff may be compromised. Nevertheless NEC is demonstrating an awareness of these concerns and is providing greater engagement with political parties to reinforce the belief of citizens in the institution to ensure that the electoral process is free, fair and transparent, and that all sides of society can trust the outcome of the runoff results.

A potential larger lesson that can be drawn from the concerns around electoral malpractices is that in countries where corruption appears to be socially accepted, and there is weak enforcement of laws, rules and regulations, it should not be surprising that an event as important as national elections can easily be affected.

### **3.5. The outgoing president taking a partisan position affects Democracy**

The president stands in a somewhat conflictual position: he is the leader of his party and in this capacity, would like to make sure his party wins the election, while at the same time he has to play his constitutionally-mandated role as the Chief Executive, responsible for safeguarding the rights and safety of all citizens, including those campaigning against his party. Balancing these two roles has been a challenge. Concerns have been expressed around the (mis)use and abuse of state resources for the service of the ruling party, which has created an uneven playing field in the election. While such actions are not peculiar to Sierra Leone, the country's unique need to build peace, and consolidate post-war democracy can be jeopardized if the Commander-in-Chief and is not seen to be a neutral player in political party contests.

The president has been uncharacteristically quiet over recent violence that has targeted some political party supporters and candidates, especially in the ruling party controlled districts of Kambia, Port Loko, Tonkolili, Bombali and Koinadugu where new parties and the main opposition were competing for votes. The absence of presidential authority and voice condemning extremism has the potential for increased violence during the runoff and in the post-election period that could result in reprisals.

Outside of politics, members of Sierra Leone's political class are close friends: political party boundaries are fluid and there are many examples of party stalwarts that have crossed to the other side. For instance, before he became opposition leader, Maada Bio and the late Tom Nyuma (District Chairman in the opposition-ruled Kailahun district) were among Koroma's first entourage on an international trip to Burkina Faso immediately after his inauguration 10 years ago. The former Chairman and Leader of the main opposition party, the SLPP, recently de-

clared for the ruling party weeks before the first presidential ballot in March 2018. However, critics of the president have argued that he is more effective at coopting opposition leaders rather than engaging them on policy. Over the weekend, it was reported that he made an unannounced visit to the mother of Dr. Kandeh Yumkella, one of the Kingmakers in the runoff.

It is therefore advisable for the president to place greater emphasis on leaving a lasting legacy of a peaceful and inclusive society than on the short-term concern of ensuring that his party succeeds him.

#### **4. IMPLICATIONS**

These results show a new phase of democracy in Sierra Leone. The country's resilience has been tested in many ways over the last two years but citizens remain resolved to have free, fair and peaceful elections as a mechanism for acquiring the mandate to address the myriad of challenges they face. Attacks on the integrity of NEC and increasing securitization of the electoral process has been met with the willingness on the part of voters and political parties to find workable solutions.

However, one of the biggest risks of the election is the potential refusal of the losing side to accept the results and the possibility of post-election reprisals. At the moment, national focus is on the runoff scheduled for Tuesday 27th, which translates into very little planning going into what happens after the announcement of results and any attendant implications. In the context where campaign slogans such as PAOPA (at all cost), and Tolongbo (follow blindly), are readily touted, this rhetoric has served to exacerbate perceptions of difference and sowed seeds of division in an electorate that has otherwise enjoyed international acclaim for being one of the most tolerant and peaceful countries in the world. It is important to note however, that these are often the pronouncements of leaders of the parties. Beneath the sharp rhetoric, the high rates of inter-marriage show that tolerance is a strength and a deep-rooted trait, in Sierra Leone, as evidenced by the widespread repudiation of ethno-regional divisions by civil society and citizens alike. Rather, as happens across countries in Africa and elsewhere, it is politicians that manipulate ethnicity for their own ends. However, if this is not checked, it has implications for the levels of trust in the new administration, societal cohesion and acceptance of the new regime, by at least half of the country. It is important that the next regime is seen as an administration for all, and not just some, Sierra Leoneans.

Given continued institutional weakness, austerity and debt crisis, prioritizing efforts to build an inclusive society should be one of the first tasks for the new administration.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

For Sierra Leone to have a peaceful runoff, there is a need to ensure that stakeholders embrace peace and tolerance. We strongly recommend that:

1. President Koroma breaks the silence on the surging levels of violence. He needs to show commitment to shepherding a peaceful democratic transition and provide leadership in restoring peace, and law and order. The president commands significant power that he can leverage as a symbol of tolerance and national unity that political parties can in turn coalesce around
2. NEC must commit to the highest levels of openness, transparency and integrity in the management of the run-off elections. In light of the growing tensions NEC must ensure that all parties must feel that they can trust that NEC will conduct its work freely and fairly.
3. Kingmakers KKY and Sam Sumana should be peacemakers and lead the way in communicating to their supporters the need for peace, as well as ensure that they monitor the process in ways that ensure their voters are protected during the second round.

4. Bio and Samura should demonstrate leadership in peacebuilding and national reconciliation by addressing their supporters and encouraging them to vote peacefully.
5. Development partners and civil society must take strong steps in calling out any and all acts of ethnic provocation, ethno-regional based threats etc. They need to be willing to name and shame political actors, irrespective of their party or position. Civil society in particular should produce data on the key drivers of violence within districts.
6. Civil society and religious leaders should reconvene and demand certain standards from political leaders like adherence to the Political Party Code of Ethics, linking these standards to their voting preferences. Voters in competitive areas such as Freetown, Kono and Kambia can be particularly useful in this regard.
7. The PPRC, media and civil society, as well as election observers should demonstrate a policy of zero tolerance towards the politics of violence, extremism and electoral malpractice to ensure that parties are compliant with their code of conduct and take steps to punish those who do not conform to these standards.