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Assessing the Integrated Election Security Planning Committee (IESPC) and the State of Election Security in Sierra Leone (2012 - 2018)

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Abstract: Sierra Leone has made significant strides in transitioning from a long period of political instability to a more democratic society. However, the country still faces several challenges in securing its electoral processes. These challenges include the potential for electoral violence, voter intimidation, misinformation campaigns, and the manipulation of election results. Against this backdrop, this study focuses on the role of the Integrated Election Security Planning Committee (IESPC) at Office of National Security in coordinating election security to ensure free, fair, transparent and credible general elections for democratic governance. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis approach were used which thus includes questionnaire and interviews of selected respondents from the IESPC, National Situation Room (NSR) and Election Management bodies (EMBs) to provide comprehensive, timely and relevant information geared towards the research objectives. Data were obtained from 50 respondents out of 60 questionnaires circulated; representing a response rate of 83.3%. The data obtained were analyzed andpresented using frequencies and percentages. The study revealed that by bringing the security sector together under the auspices of the IESPC helped facilitate a transparent and violent-free elections. Providing essential services such as the provision of sufficient security for all Electoral Commission Sierra Leone facilities and key personnel. Forging collaboration and cooperation amongst Election Management Bodies, Civil Society Organizations, relevant Ministries Departments and Agencies, and the media combated misinformation and disinformation. The study concludes that the implementation of effective security measure enhances credibility of the election process and acceptability of elections outcomes that protect the democratic credentials of budding democracies.

Keywords: Integrated Election Security Planning Committee, Election Management Bodies, Elections Security, Democratic Society, Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

Since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in Sub-Saharan Africa in the early 1990s, electoral competition for state power has become the norm and many states have since held more than three successive elections. Since the Arab Spring in 2011, several North African countries have also held multi-party elections. While the frequency of elections and the advancements in the quality of democracy across the continent has generated a sense of optimism for multiparty politics, this development has been closely accompanied by another, much more worrying trend, of election-related violence. This trend not only poses a threat to peace and security on the continent, but also risks undermining the long-term sustainability of these democratization processes.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, decolonization swept across Africa. While freedom was greeted with euphoria in many places, it could not mask the deep political instability that often-accompanied independence. Violence and coercion became a common means of political power. Coups, countercoups, and aborted coups littered the political landscape on the continent. The post-Cold War period witnessed several negative changes with respect to democratization in Africa. Participatory politics grew in the 1990s and 2010s, as the percentage of African countries holding democratic elections increased from 7 to 40 percent and in 2010, 'Freedom House Classified' eighteen countries on the continent as electoral democracies. During the past two decades, the general trend has been toward

greater accountability of political leaders, whose domestic legitimacy is largely linked to the means through which they attain and maintain power. Yet progress has been uneven. Elections have facilitated the emergence of democratic governments in Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa. Following autocratic regimes and protracted civil wars, more stable societies have emerged in Guinea, Liberia, Niger, and Sierra Leone.[1]

The Integrated Election Security Planning Committee (IESPC) – The IESPC is a multi-sectorial arrangement that brings together the relevant elections security management stakeholders and it is composed of state and non-state actors. The committee is coordinated by Office of National Security (ONS) Coordinator, and its secretariat is serviced by the Planning and Inter Agency Relations (PIAR) Directorate within the ONS, with the Director of PIAR chairing its meetings. In the build-up to the general elections held in 2012, the National Security Council (NSC) established an ad-hoc committee designated as the Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee (IESPC). The IESPC concept serves as a framework for an integrated approach in the provision of security for all general and bye-elections in Sierra Leone. The framework was also used for elections security in previous elections and in the recently concluded multi-tier elections of 24th June 2023.

For a country to organize credible, free and fair elections, certain institutional framework should be put in place (Duodo 2010). The institutional architecture provides fair avenue for citizens to freely elect and be elected under rules and regulations that are clear to all contesting parties (IFES 2017). Fundamentally, this requires the establishment of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and the security apparati that are independent of the control and manipulation of the political and governing class, on the one hand, and also have the legal mandate to conduct and preside over free and fair elections, on the other. The responsibilities of EMBs and security institutions are critical to the consolidation of democracies in Africa. These bodies have become the cornerstones of the electoral process (OSIWA, 2011). The core activities of the security apparatus such as the IESPC include but not restricted to ensure the safety of voters, voting materials and other electoral properties pre, during and post election period, manage the entire process by providing maximum security for polling, counting and dissemination of results and guarantee post-election violent free environment after results have been announced. By performing these activities, the the security system ensures that the elections are conducted and managed in a way that is efficient, transparent and acceptable. Failure to do so can trigger electoral violence as was the case in 2007 elections (Jacobs 2011).

Electoral violence has been on the rise in Africa since the end of the Cold-War in 1991, despite the reintroduction of multi-party elections that provide space for different shades of political persuasions to contest elections. This continues to have a debilitating impact on citizens' view of democracy. Working toward the prevention of electoral violence and resolution of the underlying conflicts leading to its recurrence will help to build democratic institutions, broaden the concept of security beyond regime protection (human security), and further development in newly democratizing African states[2].

Electoral conflict can be defined as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced "protection", blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination (Fischer 2002). Electoral conflicts are mostly premeditated acts with the objective to outwit and or overcome a political opponent in all phases of the electioneering period. It portends to disrupt peace, provoke disharmony and foment anxiety with the aim to influence a political process and outcome. Ogundiya 2005 postulates that electoral violence as all sorts of riots, demonstrations, party clashes, political assassinations, looting, arson, thuggery, kidnapping spontaneous or not, which occur before, during and after elections.

Elections form the bedrock of genuine democratic systems (Oluwojolo 2019). As such, periodic elections have become the democratic norm in most developing countries. They are also considered as the most appropriate means that facilitate the transfer of power from one civilian government to another as was the case in Sierra Leone in 2007 and 2018 elections. The demise of socialism and communism in the 1990s ushered in an era that favored representative democracy or neo- liberal democracy throughout the world (Linberg 2003). Every modern vision of representative democracy entails the notion of elections as the primary means of selection of political decision makers (Linberg 2003). It is, therefore, unfathomable to talk about democratic governance without juxtaposing it to

[1] African Union Panel of the Wise, "Election-Related Disputes and Political Violence: Strengthening the Role of the African Union in Preventing, Managing, and Resolving Conflict," The African Union Series, New York: International Peace Institute, July 2010.

[2] The Nordic African Institute: Policy Notes 2013; Electoral Violence in Africa

the processes of elections. Democratic good governance and elections are mutually reinforcing. Popular decisions are severally assumed to be the crucial element of democratic governments, but the significance of elections is so widely assumed that it is rarely examined. Although studies of voting behavior abound, there are relatively few theoretical or empirical investigations of the effects of voting on the total political system [6]. Election has been described as the 'hallmark of democracy' (Pomper 1967) while Chiroro (2005) posits that it is at the 'heart of the democratic order'.

The history of elections in Sierra Leone have been characterized by violence, intimidation and assault, not only against political opponents but the wider populace and, in most cases than not, have been marred by allegations of election rigging and its accompanying vices.

The 2012 general elections constituted a sturdy benchmark for measuring the post-war stability in Sierra Leone. The elections tested not only the resolve of the people of Sierra Leone to put at their back the throes of the decade-long conflict (1991 - 2002), but their ability to conduct credible democratic elections. Remarkably though, Sierra Leone was widely acclaimed for conducting a free, fair and credible elections (Elections Security Strategy, 2023). The security sector played a significant role in providing the enabling environment for the conduct of such accredited general elections.

Recent events have confirmed heightened concerns of increased political tensions in the country. The findings from a security sector-wide threat assessment indicate that security threats are more diverse and challenging leading up to and after the 2023 than during the 2018 General Elections. Hence, there is fundamental need for the Sector to be well capacitated to address/resolved/fix the security challenges and needs of all stakeholders. There are still indications of the inability of the security sector to act in a politically neutral manner. This has raised the urgent need to strengthen institutional capacity to maintain public safety, security and socio-political stability for the electioneering processes (Election Security Strategy, 2023).

Brief Political Context of Sierra Leone - On the eve of independence in 1961, Sierra Leone enjoyed a relatively well-functioning state and a vibrant and promising economy; but the government quickly fell into dysfunction, becoming less and less responsive to the needs of its people (Momoh 2021). Graft, rent-seeking and patronage went unrestrained, and opposition regional and ethnic groups felt that they were becoming increasingly marginalized and excluded from accessing state resources. Years of bad governance, endemic corruption and the denial of basic human rights created deplorable conditions that made conflict inevitable. Momoh (2021) further argues that the governing elite's perceived insensitivity to the growing discontent among the youths and among the most uneducated and impoverished portion of the population resulted in the wanton brutal civil war in 1991, one of the most violent civil conflicts recorded in human history. The country's rich mineral and other resources were exploited to fuel and sustain the civil war (1991-2002).

The two main political parties, the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) (now in governance) and the ruling All Peoples Congress (APC), now in opposition, have each had a fair share in the governance of Sierra Leone. Between 1996 and 2002, the SLPP won and controlled the presidential elections, while the APC were declared winners of the 2007 and 2012 elections. In 2018, the citizens voted the APC out of office. All of these elections were declared free fair and peaceful, albeit they resulted in great social polarization, and divided the country into strongholds, which have gained prominence in recent years. It is generally perceived that the opposition APC's stronghold is in the North-West while the SLPP garner most of its support from the East and South of the country.

Although the country is applauded as one of Africa's most successful post-conflict states, its fragility remains prominent and visible. Support for political parties is polarized along ethnic and regional lines and underwritten by patronage. Youth unemployment and under-employment, a critical threat to sustainable peace and stability, is pervasive and widespread. Sierra Leone is one of poorest countries in the world, ranking 179 out of 188 on the Human Development Index. Two-thirds of the population subsists on less than $1.25 per day, and almost half of the population is malnourished. Maternal and infant mortality rates are among the highest in world, and average life expectancy is 48 years.[3]

The researchers embarked on a nationwide stakeholder consultation exercise with the view to map stakeholders and spoilers who have the influence to foment and or mitigate electoral violence on the one hand, and to map districts and chiefdoms that are prone to electoral violence leading to the 2012 and 2018 elections, on the other. In actualizing this, the researcher visited Kambia and Bombali in the north, Bo and Pujehun in the South and

[3] See Statistics Sierra Leone 2022 Census

Kenema and Kono in the East. Stakeholder consultations and focus group discussions were also held in Freetown. Additionally, literature review formed part of the approaches to data collection.

II. Review of the Literature

Election security presupposes the measures and practices put in place to ensure the integrity, fairness, and safety of electoral processes. It encompasses various aspects, including protecting the voting infrastructure, preventing fraud and manipulation, ensuring the accuracy of voter registration, maintaining transparency throughout the electoral cycle, and addressing and mitigating potential threats or instances of violence. Ensuring election security is crucial for upholding democratic principles and maintaining public trust in the electoral process (Adebayo, 2016). The authors further argue that election violence is often a result of underlying structural factors such as weak institutions, poverty, and inequality. When elections are conducted in a secure and transparent manner, citizens can have confidence that their votes will be counted accurately and that rightful winners will be declared. Effective election security measures also help to prevent, detect, and deter any attempts to manipulate, disrupt, or compromise the electoral process (Adebayo, 2016).

IFES (2019) comments on its experience in Liberia is instructive. IFES argues that the effective coordination of security agencies, the involvement of civil society, and the establishment of a legal framework for addressing election-related offenses were critical to preventing election violence in Liberia. In his contribution, Lynch (2017) postulates that the causes and consequences of electoral violence in Kenya and Zambia were precipitated by political competition, ethnicity, and state capacity in driving violence. The study highlights the need for comprehensive approaches that address the structural factors behind election violence.

In his study on ethnicity, elections, and violence in Africa, Ojo (2007) posits that one of the fundamental problems in African politics is the instrumentalization of ethnicity by the political class. In his investigation on the relationship between ethnicity, elections, and violence in Africa, his study finds that ethnic tensions can escalate during election periods, leading to violence. According to him, this is being perpetrated by the governing class (governing party and or opposition party) to wrest power by all means. Also critical to this study is the winner-takes-all mentality where the party that wins elections deliberately excludes/marginalizes the opposition and monopolize/preserve the spoils of the state for his/her party faithful. This style of playing politics create malcontents of the state who will stop at nothing but to undermine state security to cause mayhem. The study emphasizes the need for inclusive political processes and ethno-regional power-sharing arrangements to mitigate election-related violence.

Furthermore, elections constitute an important element in liberal democracy. They are a viable means of ensuring the orderly process of leadership succession and change and an instrument of political authority and legitimation. The failure of elections or their absence largely defines the predominance of political dictatorships and personalized rule in Africa. The current wave of democratic enthusiasm has evoked a process of competitive and multiparty elections. This has provided a platform for the civil society to make political claims on the state. However, both the structure and process of elections, the former being the organizational infrastructure for managing elections and the latter, the precepts and procedures of elections, remain largely perverted. Election rigging and brigandage, violence and election annulment are common practices. The trend is towards a reversal to the old order of despotic political rulership under the guise of civil governance. Elections in their current form in most African states appear to be a fading shadow of democracy, endangering the fragile democratic project itself.[4]

Election security is a critical issue in African politics, as many countries in the region have experienced election-related violence, irregularities, and disputed outcomes. Weak institutions, corruption, poverty, and ethnic tensions are some of the underlying factors that contribute to election insecurity in Africa. Election security challenges include ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, violence, and fraud. Addressing these challenges requires the involvement of all stakeholders, including electoral management bodies, security agencies, civil society organizations, political parties, and international partners. Strengthening democratic institutions and processes, promoting transparency and accountability, and fostering inclusive political cultures are essential for ensuring election security in Africa. Efforts to increase voter education, enhance access to information, and adopt new technologies can also improve election security (IDEA 2006).

Overall, these studies suggest that election violence in Africa is often a result of underlying political, social, and economic factors. To ensure election security, there is a need for strong institutions, effective coordination among security agencies, and the involvement of civil society and international partners.

[4] See International Political Science Review, pp. 59 - 73 (15 pages) Published by: Sage Publications, Ltd. for details

Political violence remains a pervasive feature of electoral dynamics in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, even where multiparty elections have become the dominant mode of regulating access to political power. With cross-national data on electoral violence in Sub-Saharan African elections between 1990 and 2010, this research develops and tests a theory that links the use of violent electoral tactics to the high stakes put in place by majoritarian electoral institutions. It is found that electoral violence is more likely in countries that employ majoritarian voting rules and elect fewer legislators from each district. Majoritarian institutions are, as predicted by theory, particularly likely to provoke violence where large ethno-political groups are excluded from power and significant economic inequalities exist.

Elections instigated coups and violence in Sierra Leone - Pre civil war years witnessed the militarization of national politics where violent attempts to overthrow democratically elected governments were not uncommon in Sierra Leone. The following notable dates are those where a military takeover of government has occurred:

- **1967:** a controversial elections (widely perceived to have been won by the opposition) birthed the first coup (by Brigadier David Lansana) who stopped Siaka P. Stevens of the opposition All People's Congress (APC) from assuming power;
- **1967 – 1968:** a raft of coups and counter coups by junior and senior military officers that visited uncertainty to the politics of the country. These coups and counter coups were as a result of the polemic 1967 elections that left the country in a state of political uncertainty;
- **1973:** first elections held under the republican state and was marred by unprecedent violence, intimidation, bloodshed and mayhem culminating in the withdrawal of the opposition-SLPP party from participation;
- **1973:** a *de facto* one party prevailed (1973 - 1977) after the withdrawal from the polls by the opposition-SLPP;
- **1977:** Nation-wide students' demonstrations that nearly brought the Siaka Stevens government to its knees. This witnessed widespread human rights abuses including raping killing and incarceration of students at Fourah Bay College, other universities and schools. The students' uproar clearly forced the government to conduct the 1978 elections that was characterized by uninhibited violence paving the way for the declaration of the one-party state;
- **1982:** a first one-party state elections held and was marred by insane violence and cataclysm. The Sanda Massacre (killing, destruction to properties and cattle) in the Bombali District in the Northern region;
- **1982:** The Ndogboyosoi War, also known as the Bush Devil War and believed to have been the dress rehearsal of the civil conflict, was an episode of macabre political violence that occurred in 1982 between supporters of the APC and the SLPP in Sierra Leone. The violence was centered in Pujehun District especially in the Soro-Gbema Chiefdom. It was triggered by the ruling APC party's alleged electoral manipulation and the intervention of a special squad of customs police against supporters of the SLPP candidate. There was no process of reconciliation following the violence. Children of those killed in the fighting or of those who died in detention were among the first to join the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a rebel group which began a civil conflict in eastern and southern Sierra Leone nine years later;
- **1985:** Siaka Stevens retired from active politics after seventeen years at the helm and hand-picked Brig. Gen. Joseph Saidu Momoh to succeed him. Ministers who opposed this incongruous move were instantly sacked from cabinet;
- **1985:** Students' riots at the University of Sierra Leone resulted in the rustication of several students and lecturers from the university that would have future implication of the security of the country. The expelled students and lecturers have been widely alleged to have contributed to the formation of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel outfit that visited mayhem and catastrophe on the nation;
- **March 1991:** The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel outfit started the decade-long civil conflict that engulfed the entire country massifying society, pillaging the economy, ransacking the political system, decimating the population, arson and banditry, raping women and girls, and committing all sort of human right abuses;
- **April 1992:** Young, lower ranking and disgruntled soldiers from the war front attacked and overthrew the government of president Momoh and set up the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) military government;
- **May 1997:** Major Paul Koroma of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) overthrew the legitimate government of President Kabbah in a coup; and

- **Jan 6, 1999:** a *Combined* rebel forces (AFRC and RUF) entered Freetown and launched a campaign of terror and mayhem.[5]

2.1 Research Methodology

The researchers embarked on a nationwide stakeholder consultation exercise with the view to map stakeholders and spoilers who have the influence to foment and/or mitigate electoral violence on the one hand, and to map districts and chiefdoms that are prone to electoral violence leading to the 2012 and 2018 elections, on the other. In actualizing this, the researchers visited Kambia and Bombali Districts in the north, Bo and Pujehun Districts in the South and Kenema and Kono Districts in the East. Stakeholder consultations and focus group discussions were also held in Freetown. Additionally, literature review formed part of the approaches to data collection.

Two methodologies were used for this study – pre-survey interviews with personnel from the Integrated Election Security Planning Committee (IESPC), the National Situation Room (NSR) and the Election Management bodies (EMBs). A field survey, which entailed the administration of questionnaire after all recommendations on errors during the pre-survey were taken into consideration in order to increase the credibility of the questionnaire. The pre-survey interviews lasted for 1 week while the field survey was conducted over a 2-week period in October 2024.

This study employed a mixed approach, so that the limitations of qualitative and quantitative are complemented. The mixed method is believed to provide more perspectives on the phenomena being studied. The qualitative approach generates verbal information rather than numerical values (Polgar & Thomas, 2009). Instead of using statistical analysis, the qualitative approach utilizes content or holistic analysis to explain and comprehend the research findings. With this, inductive and not deductive reasoning is used. The main point of the quantitative research method is that measurement is valid, reliable and can be generalized with its clear anticipation of cause and effect (Cassell & Symon, 1994).

By employing a mixed-methods research design with a focus on questionnaires and interviews, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive evaluation on the role of the security sector in creating the enabling environment for peaceful elections. It further explored the level of public confidence bestowed on the security sector in managing elections in Sierra Leone. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data offered a holistic understanding of the Integrated Election Security Planning Committee of the security sector in creating a conducive environment for peaceful and credible elections that will foster democratic governance.

Purposive sampling was used to get the target population. This type of sampling, involved the researcher using his/her expertise to select a sample that is most useful to the purposes of the research. It is often used in qualitative research, where the researcher wants to gain detailed knowledge about a specific phenomenon rather than make statistical inferences, or where the population is very small and specific and also to avoid research or observer bias.

The sampled respondents were personnel from the Integrated Election Security Planning Committee (IESPC), the National Situation Room (NSR) and Election Management bodies (EMBs). These individuals have insights into the operations and challenges of the security sector in managing elections. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, aiming to include personnel from IESPS, NSR and EMBs which include but not limited Office of National Security Personnel, Sierra Leone Police, Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, Sierra Leone Correctional Centre, Peace Commission, Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone and Political Parties Registration Commission all based in the Western Area of Freetown of Sierra Leone.

Primary data was mainly collected from the interview and questionnaire from the personnel, who are currently working at the Integrated Election Security Planning Committee at Office of National Security and the National Situation Room. In contrast, the secondary data collection was used to support and compare with the primary outcome. It was collected from books, journals, academic published papers, case studies and reliable online based data.

The primary data were collected using the structured questionnaire, which comprised of two parts – A and B. The general information about respondents was given in part A of the questionnaire, while part B comprised 5 sections consisting of open-ended questions relating to the 5 research questions.

[5] See Momoh. H. B. 2023. The 2023 Elections in Sierra Leone: Identifying Potential Conflict Flashpoints and Spoilers, GSC Advance Research and Review

A final sample size of 50 questionnaires were completed and useful for analysis out of 60 questionnaires that were issued out. This represented a response rate of 83.3% and a non-response rate of 16.7%. After the collected data were coded, edited, compiled and computerised, it was analysed using SPSS version 25. The results were used to obtain frequencies and percentages for the close-ended responses and the open-ended responses were analyzed in a qualitative manner. The qualitative data formed bulk of the analysis with the aim of achieving the research objectives and research questions.

III. Presentation of Results, Analysis and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics - Data were obtained from 50 respondents out of 60 questionnaires circulated; representing a response rate of 83.3%. The 16.7% non-response rate was attributed to refusal to respond by respondents because of their busy schedules. The demographical factors revealed that the majority of the responsive respondents were male (80%) while the rest were female (20%). This disproportion in the gender of respondents could be as a result of the gender gap in the workforce of the security sector or that more males were contacted as compared to females.

The analyses revealed that 10% of the respondents were in the age bracket of 18 – 30 years, 60% were in 31 – 43 years, 16% were in 44 – 56 years and 14% were in 57 years and above. This indicates that majority of the respondents contacted were within the age bracket of 31 – 43 years. 20% of the respondents completed senior secondary education and 60% were tertiary graduates. This indicates that majority of the respondents contacted had tertiary education. The analysis also revealed that 10% of the respondents had work experience between 6 to 10 years, 20% between 11 to 20 years, 20% between 31 to 30 years and only 5% between 31 to 50 years. This shows that majority of the respondents had work experience of above 20 years in elections related matters.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the researchers administered a structured questionnaire as the main data collection method. The questionnaire provided rich information derived from descriptions and explanations on the role of the security sector is creating the enabling environment for peaceful conduct of elections that will foster democratic governance. The researchers examined the interview data against the approaches and strategies referred to in the research questions and the outcomes are discussed in this section.

Generally speaking, a well secured environment is critical for the conduct of free, fair, credible and transparent elections as well as central to the realization of democratic credentials. To achieve this, the IESPC was established in 2011 as a specialized sub-committee of the National Security Council (NSC) for election security. It was reactivated in 2022 to coordinate security sector planning, develop strategies and mobilize resources for the security sector ahead of the 2023 elections.

RQ1: Please explain in detail how was a well-resourced and capacitated Integrated Election Security Planning Committee been able to coordinate election security for a free, fair, transparent and credible elections?

It was quite evident from the research findings that elections in Sierra Leone have not only been controversial and polemic but also laden with violence, intimidation and harassment against political opponents and the wider civil populace. In many proven instances, elections have been marred by complaints of outright rigging (such as ballot stuffing and manipulation of polling figures), brazen violence culminating in the aggrieved-party's withdrawal from the contest and/or rejection of outcomes.

To curb this debilitating trend, 90% of respondents disclosed that through the Integrated Election Security Planning Committee (IESPC), the security sector carried out a number of programs and activities to support the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL) for the smooth conduct of the 2023 elections. The programs and activities included the conduct of election security assessments, security sector needs assessment, development of strategic documents, trainings, operational deployments, among others before, during and after the 2023 elections. This, according to majority of the respondents, created the enabling environment for peaceful elections. However, 10% of respondents observed that the credibility of the election results remains contestable.

RQ2: What are the proactive measures been used by Integrated Election Security Planning Committee in building trust and public confidence in the security sector?

Prior to the 2023 elections, the security sector through the IESPC conducted two key assessments to enable it to provide the appropriate support required for the smooth and successful conduct of those elections the research reveals. These includes National Elections Threat Assessment/District Risks Mapping (NETA/DRM) and Needs Assessment of the Security Sector's Preparedness. According to the respondents, these assessments were done to identify and classify the kinds of threats and risks that the elections were prone to and to measure the degree of

preparedness of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and stakeholders to ensure a safer, peaceful, free, fair and credible elections. The research reveals that the involvement of critical stakeholders in the regions, districts and communities in the identification and classification of possible threats and risks, the 2023 elections did not only have the credibility of a secured environment but also built confidence in the EMBs.

Dovetailing with the above, an Elections Security Communication Strategy (ESCS) was developed with the aim to create a positive image of the security sector to the public. The ESCS also engendered and helped build trust and confidence in the professionalism and impartiality of the security forces in the electoral processes based on professional messaging of timely, accurate and credible information to the public. The research demonstrated that the strategy was developed in consultation with media practitioners and civil society organizations to enhance a secured and safe environment for the June 2023 elections the research.

RQ3: In what ways has the training opportunities provided for the security sector through the Integrated Election Security Planning Committee enhanced free, fair, transparent and credible elections?

According to the respondents, a number of training programs were identified and conducted throughout the electioneering processes to strengthen the institutional capacity of the security sector. The trainings focused on the core issues in providing election security and helping security personnel to know their responsibilities and work together during the entire electoral process. The objective of the trainings was to establish standards on the rules of engagements for public order management, enhancing prevention of electoral violence and creating incentives to pursue justice for victims through legal processes.

A total of 600 personnel from the security sector institutions were trained under the Training of Trainers (ToT) programme nationwide. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and Republic of Sierra Leone Arm Forces (RSLAF) accounted for 70% and 10% beneficiaries of the ToT respectively. The others including Office of National Security (ONS), National Fire Force (NFF), Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS), Sierra Leone Chiefdom Police (SLCP) benefited 5% respectively. The trainers in turn cascaded the training acquired to personnel in their respective institutions across the country. In addition to the ToT, security sector institutions benefited from a number of other training programmes including security sector oversight and accountability that was facilitated by the ONS in collaboration with the Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL).

According to the research findings, to ensure interoperability among security sector players during the 2023 general elections, the IESPC developed an Elections Security Strategy (ESS) which established the overall strategic priority and direction for the security sector and informed operational plans in the provision of election security. It also guided the coordination of international support and provided strategic guidance to national authorities and institutions. The strategy further provided a vision for strengthening and sustaining the security sector capacity and a coordination mechanism with other national entities involved in the election process.

Respondents revealed that each personnel deployed on election duties was issued a pocket guide on elections security. The pocket guide provided rules and guidance for security personnel and contained useful information to help them discharge their duties professionally in order to ensure a peaceful and credible elections security process. The guide reflected national, regional and global standards and obligation on election security. The respondents revealed that all these training opportunities provided to the security sector through the IESPC created the enabling environment that ushered in a violent-free and fair elections.

RQ4: Do you believe that there is working relationship with Electoral Management Bodies' and other stakeholders in the discharge of their duties with professionalism, neutrality, impartiality – all which leads to the creation of the enabling environment?

The research revealed that the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), being the primary agency responsible for internal security, worked in collaboration with sister agencies and deployed adequately for the security of the 2023 elections. A total of 19,631 personnel from the SLP (68.7%), RSLAF (22.2%), SLCS (7.3%), NFF (1.1%) and SLCP (0.7%) were deployed nationwide. The security sector took into consideration identified hotspots, the ECSL's security requirements, demographics among others in the deployment of personnel.

In addition to the deployment of personnel, the security sector was involved in facilitating the transportation of ECSL's logistics across the country. The IESPC was part of the Political Parties Liaison Committee (PPLC) meetings that was coordinated and presided over by the Political Parties Registration Commission. This platform brought the Security Sector, EMBS and Political Parties to interface and discuss issues that could enhance to smooth conduct of the elections under review. Furthermore, the IESPC coordinated all Situation Rooms nationwide with a view to centralize information generated from the field and disseminated to the public the research reveals.

RQ5: Do you believe in the security service delivery of security operations during election period?

The Security Service delivered during election period - accordingly, the research findings proved that through the provision of the following services, the security sector created the enabling environment for free, fair, transparent and credible elections in Sierra Leone in 2023. These services included but not limited to the:

(i) Provision of adequate security for all ECSL facilities, key personnel and sensitive materials;
(ii) Cooperation and collaboration among EMBs, CSOs, relevant MDAs and the media;
(iii) Prompt response to emerging public order issues;
(iv) Provision of a secure environment for the elections;
(v) Effective communication and coordination between the IESPC and Situation Rooms run by other institutions; and
(vi) Robust response to social media abuse to counter misinformation and disinformation.

Additionally, the IESPC needed a clear picture of the security sector's capabilities in anticipation of the ECSL's request to support the successful conduct of the multi-tier elections. As such, a Nationwide Needs Assessment of the Security Sector's Preparedness (NNASSP) was conducted ahead of the 2023 elections. The NNASSP undertook a thorough scanning of the security sector landscape to identify existing and emerging gaps. The findings informed the security sector's planning and deployment of its resources in support of the election security process the research reveals.

Finally, the research findings demonstrated that the security sector facilitated free, fair, transparent, and credible elections by providing the following services. These services comprise, but are not restricted to, (i) providing sufficient security for all ECSL facilities, key personnel, and sensitive materials. (ii) Collaboration and cooperation among Election Management Bodies, Civil Society Organizations, relevant Ministries Departments and Agencies, and the media. (iii) Promptly reacting to emerging public order concerns. (v) Efficient collaboration and communication between IESPC and other institutions' Situation Rooms; and (VI) Responding strongly to social media abuse to combat misinformation and disinformation.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that improving election security is crucial for ensuring fair, transparent, and credible democratic processes. Overall, election security is essential to uphold the democratic values of free and fair elections, ensuring that the voice of the people is accurately represented and protected. Effective security measures contribute to building public trust in the electoral process and safeguarding the democratic foundations of a nation.

In Tandem with the above, the study clearly concludes bringing the security sector together under the auspices of the IESPC helped facilitate a transparent and violent-free elections on the one hand. By providing essential services such as the provision of sufficient security for all ECSL facilities, key personnel, and sensitive materials; forging collaboration and cooperation among Election Management Bodies, Civil Society Organizations, relevant Ministries Departments and Agencies, and the media; and ensured that the IESPC reacted to emerging public order concerns and equally appropriately responded to social media abuse that helped combat misinformation and disinformation. These strategies paved way for the conduct of a credible elections in 2023.

This research has also shown that initiatives like the National Elections Threat Assessment/District Risk Mapping (NETA/DRM), Needs Assessment of the Security Sector's Preparedness, Elections Security Strategy (ESS), Elections Security Training Manual (ESTM), and the Elections Security Training Manual (ESTM) and the Elections Security Communication Strategy (ESCS) provided a bedrock in building public confidence and trust in the sector. For instance, the NETA/DRM report identified political intolerance/intimidation, hate speech, media misuse, mis/disinformation, use of thugs among others, as threats generic to all districts across the country. In addition, some threats were identified as specific to particular districts. These findings informed regular or periodic update of the Election Threat Register and guide operational planning and deployment. Furthermore, it identified communication, training, partnership and coordination as key priorities to be addressed.

In summation, the study concludes that the implementation of effective security measure enhances credibility of the election process and acceptability of elections outcomes that protect the democratic credentials of budding democracies.

4.2 Recommendations

Since 1996, Sierra Leone has successfully conducted five multi-party elections two of which (2007 and 2018) witnessed the incumbent handing power over to the opposition. Both local and international elections observers have lauded the effort not only of the EMBs, but the people and the security sector for facilitating the

electoral processes. The transitions have been smooth, violent free and peaceful albeit initial tensions not uncommon with elections in Africa where the winner-takes-all provokes such situations. But in a large part, these successful elections have put Sierra Leone in the limelight and among countries that have recorded democratic credentials.
However, the research found that there are still areas that require improvement going forward. These include:

- **Voter education and awareness:** Invest in voter education and electoral awareness (public campaigns, workshops, radio etc.) by ensuring that citizens know their rights and responsibilities; about the electoral process and how this can be monitored and enhanced; and how to detect and report electoral irregularities without provoking violence. This can help empower citizens to contribute to election security;
- **Transparent result management**: Establish a transparent and accountable system for collating, tallying, and announcing election results is crucial. This can include implementing robust mechanisms for results transmission and publishing the results in a timely manner, and allowing for independent verification;
- **Transparent and inclusive electoral laws:** Develop clear and inclusive electoral laws and procedures that are accessible to all stakeholders. This has the tendency to promote and foster trust and reduce the likelihood of security related tensions and upheavals;
- **Utilize technology:** Explore the use of technology, such as biometric voter registration, electronic voting systems, and result transmission platforms, can help reduce electoral fraud and enhance the overall security of elections;
- **Build trust and inclusivity:** Promote dialogue and inclusivity among political parties and civil society can foster trust, reduce tensions, and enhance the overall security situation;
- **Strengthen legal frameworks:** Review and update the election laws to enhance security measures, particularly by criminalizing electoral fraud, voter intimidation, and violence during elections. This would act as a deterrent and help ensure accountability;
- **Effective conflict resolution mechanisms:** Develop efficient and impartial conflict resolution mechanisms can help address election-related grievances and prevent them from escalating into violence;
- **Strengthen and promote security sector neutrality:** Security personnel should be trained to remain neutral pre, during and after elections and act in accordance with the rule of law. It is essential to create mechanisms to hold accountable any security personnel involved in election-related violence or intimidation;
- **Public-private partnerships:** Collaborate with private sector stakeholders, such as technology companies and cyber security experts, can provide valuable expertise and resources to strengthen election security;
- **Long-term capacity building:** Continuously invest in capacity building programs for electoral management bodies, security sector and civil society would enhance professionalism and foster accountability and transparency in service delivery;
- **International election observation and assistance:** Strengthen bilateral relationship with international organizations, such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN), to provide technical assistance, monitor elections, and offer recommendations can help enhance election security. International observation missions can contribute to ensuring transparency, fairness and accountability; and
- **Collaborate with fact-checking organizations:** the security sector should partner with reputable fact-checking organizations to identify and debunk false or misleading information. By sharing their findings with the citizens, this will help combat social media disinformation/misinformation before, during and after elections.

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