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THE ROLE OF THE POLICE AND SECURITY SERVICES DURING ELECTION VIOLENCE IN SIERRA LEONE



DIGNITY PUBLICATION SERIES ON TORTURE AND ORGANISED VIOLENCE

THE ROLE OF THE POLICE AND SECURITY SERVICES DURING ELECTION VIOLENCE IN SIERRA LEONE

FIELD STUDY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on a study of the role of the police and security services during election violence in Sierra Leone in 2018, this report shows how dynamics of violence were influenced by, on the one hand, overzealousness from security services, mainly police, and on the other hand their passivity in the face of challenges to their authority. More research is called for in other countries on this under-researched field. In the context of Sierra Leone, we identify the need for the police to adopt a more neutral identity and role vis-à-vis the government of the day. The police are called upon to be a 'national force for good' protecting all, rather than an agent of the government. This is especially important during politically charged times such as elections, when the responsibility to keep the peace is paramount.



DIGNITY - Danish Institute Against Torture

DIGNITY is a rights-based, knowledge-driven, development-oriented organisation working through local partnerships for a world without torture. For over 10 years DIGNITY and Prison Watch have worked together to prevent torture, promote human rights and advocate for justice for people in detention in Sierra Leone.

<https://dignity.dk/en/>



Prison Watch – Sierra Leone (PWSL)

Prison Watch is an impartial, non-governmental organisation working to promote human rights and human justice. They have a long history of working 'with but not for' state authorities in the criminal justice sector, speaking truth to power and engaging in constructive advocacy. PWSL have a longstanding commitment to knowledge-based advocacy and longstanding relations with law enforcement and correctional authorities. This study grew out of a concern with police violence combined with an awareness of election-period risks.

<http://www.prisonwatchsl.org/about/>

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FOREWORD

Violence and electoral politics are no strangers to one another on the African continent. This publication reports on a pilot study of the role of the police and military during violent events associated with elections held in March 2018 in Sierra Leone, West Africa. Much has been written about violence and elections in Africa, but this is the first study that focuses specifically on the role of the security services. It is part of a long-term collaboration between Prison Watch – Sierra Leone (PWSL) and DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture around issues pertaining to the prevention of torture in places of detention and the promotion of human rights nationally.

DIGNITY is proud to disseminate this report in its publication series. It speaks to scholars and local human rights defenders, as well as policy makers and officials, and it contains important lessons for the Sierra Leonean police.

Abbreviations

AIG Assistant Inspector General of Police

APC All People's Congress

HRA Human Rights Advocate

ICCPR International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

IMATT International Military Assistance and Training Team

MACP Military Aid to Civil Power programme

OSD Operational Support Division

PWSL Prison Watch – Sierra Leone

RSLAF Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces

SLP Sierra Leone Police

SLPP Sierra Leone Peoples Party

UDHR Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNIPSIL UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone



RATIONALE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

While I take a few days break from work, my daughter and I stay in a small village near Moyamba. A local farm manager shows us the main sites of the village: the clinic, the church, the mosque and the school, and we exchange greetings with some of the village's senior residents. It's hot and humid, and we stroll slowly. Approaching the edge of the village, I ask about who keeps the peace in the village and whether there is any police presence. As I utter the question, I glance up to see a police officer sitting alongside an official motorcycle watching whoever might pass in and out of the village. 'Such criminals, those police' mutters the farm manager...

- Notes: Andrew

This study is a direct extension of PWSL's long-standing work holding front-line state actors accountable to their human rights obligations through observation, documentation, dialogue and advocacy. This is an explorative study of the dynamics around election-related violence involving the police and the military and not an exhaustive study of the prevalence or incidence of violence during elections. The data collected sheds light on the dynamics of violence during electioneering moments and raises the issue of the impartiality and 'proportionate use of force' by security personnel during periods of volatility and democratic transition. The study grew out of Prison Watch's civic engagement in matters related to the prevention of torture and human rights violations and their close and intimate knowledge of policing practice. The need to monitor the role of the security services during election violence was identified based on their experience of interparty violence and violent crackdowns on political demonstrators by the police and the military during election campaigns in Sierra Leone prior to 2018. As elections approached in 2018, PWSL monitors were already documenting police brutality as it occurred around the country. The elections presented an opportunity to conduct a novel, more focused study with the dual aim of being constructive sparring partners and speaking truth to power based on their impartiality and commitment to knowledge-based advocacy.

During and preceding elections, the security services, especially police, have a central role in providing security and ensuring safety during political rallies and events, transportation of election-sensitive materials and keeping peace on the day of the polls. By closely monitoring and analysing the role of the police and the military in election-related violence PWSL sought to contribute to the promotion of peace, stability and democratic values in Sierra Leone and to support better policing practices in the future.

Human rights norms and UN standards require that law enforcement officials be neutral and impartial. For example, the notion of equality before the law requires that law enforcement officials treat all persons without discrimination of any kind, including discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, language, colour, *political opinion*,

national origin, property, birth or other status. (UDHR, article 7; ICCPR, article 26). Similarly, Target 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals, agreed in March 2016, calls for the provision of ‘access to justice for all’ and the building of ‘effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (United Nations 2017).’ Another UN standard explicitly requires police officials to ‘maintain political independence and impartiality at all times’ (UNOHCHR 2014: 5). Historically, the police in Sierra Leone have not lived up to these norms. Among the population they have a poor reputation, and are often seen as criminal, as indicated by our introductory vignette. They also have the reputation of being aligned with the government of the day, in other words, not the long arm of the law but the long arm of the ruling party. This will become a theme in our subsequent analysis and in our recommendations.

The study, as originally conceived, aimed to achieve the following results (some of which proved over-ambitious (8) or beyond the scope of the study (9)):

1. Document the role of security personnel in election-related violence;
2. Collect data on victims and perpetrators;
3. Collate photos and videos;
4. Provide information on the nature of the violence, the damage and injuries suffered;
5. Provide information on the effect of the violence, damage and injuries suffered;
6. Provide information on the financial implication of the violence both on private and public property;
7. Provide information on the role played by the perpetrators;
8. Provide a comprehensive report on all incidents of political violence in the country before, during and after the elections; and
9. Enhance improved skills of security personnel in violence or riot control measures.

This report is structured as follows. First comes an overview of the significance of elections for democratic development in Africa and some details about Sierra Leone’s political history prior to and following the civil conflict of the 1990s. This includes information about the reforms the police and the military underwent after the conflict. As further background, we introduce the legislative framework for elections, the party-political landscape and the results of the 2018 election. Second, we describe the methodology of the study before a third, more substantive section, in which we provide a detailed presentation and discussion of the results. This presentation is organised around two main themes: the overzealousness of the police and military and their passivity. These themes, which became key concepts through which we made sense of the data, emerged inductively through dialogue as we studied in detail the accounts of the violent events. Fourth, we draw a series of implications from the analysis, which leads to a concluding set of recommendations.

Violence, democracy and elections in Africa

In representational democracies elections are the only legitimate route to accountable political leadership. The possibility to cast a vote is a concrete and symbolic expression of the stake that citizens have in the democratic political process. Elections give the electorate an opportunity to determine who their leaders will be and the period around elections serves as an important window on the degree to which democratic principles are embedded in a country's institutional practices and in the political landscape more generally.

Democratic governance as a mode of political organisation is increasingly preferred in sub-Saharan Africa (Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen 2018; Burchard 2015; Bekoe 2012). This process has been supported by the international community in a variety of ways (such as advice, funds, logistics, outreach and technical assistance). However, the spread of democracy may paradoxically lead to increased violence as the stakes are raised in competitions for electoral power (ibid).

Elections taking place in what are sometimes referred to as unconsolidated democracies or fragile/weak states have increasingly been subject to external scrutiny by trained observers affiliated to respected agencies, to evaluate the legitimacy of the process and thus the eventual legitimacy of the winner. An election designated 'free and fair' (or, at least, credible, transparent and democratic) is seen as a victory for democracy. Elections flawed by violence and intimidation of opponents point in the opposite direction and when the security and law enforcement agencies are implicated, this raises concerns about their neutrality and, in turn, their legitimacy. Election monitors observe polling stations, inspect counting methods and generally supervise campaigning, though sometimes with unintended effects (cf Daxecker 2012, 2014). Violence during elections can undermine democracy and threaten long-term peace. Intimidation of voters and candidates discourages participation and delegitimises the police and other security services.

Election battles can be long-running, bitter and acrimonious, and sometimes violent. According to Kewir and Gabriel (2018, cited by Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen), in over 50 African countries surveyed, violence was a feature in 'almost all' elections held between 2011 and 2017. Outbreaks of violence on a large or small scale can depend on a variety of general factors including history, geography and inequality. Conflict can occur around campaigning, balloting and results but also around issues related to who is entitled to vote and who gets to eventually govern, or what Fischer (2002) terms identity and representation conflict, respectively. Contingent alliances between lumpen youth (often including former combatants) and political elites have been identified as playing significant instigating roles.¹

In Sierra Leone three national elections have been held since the end of the war: one in 2007, another in 2012 and the one with which this study is concerned in March 2018. The party-political landscape in Sierra Leone features two main political parties: the All Peoples Congress (APC), which was the ruling party prior to the 2018 election, and the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP), which was the main opposition party. Since independence, these two have dominated the political landscape.²

1 See Christensen and Utas' (2008) analysis of what Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen characterise as the 'mutual dependencies, shifting alliances, unfulfilled promises and unpaid debts' inherent to such relations.

2 Other parties contesting the 2018 elections were the National Grand Coalition, Coalition For Change, Alliance Democratic Party, Citizens Democratic Party, National Democratic Alliance, National Progressive Democrats, National Unity Reconciliation Party, Peace and Liberation Party, People's Democratic Party, Peoples Movement for Democratic Change, Republic National Independent Party, Revolutionary United Front Party, United Democratic Movement, United National Peoples Party and the Unity Party.

Back in 2007 the incumbent party and president were defeated and the SLPP handed over power to the APC, which retained power until 2012.³ When the APC took over from SLPP in 2007 this was one of the first times that an incumbent regime in Africa relinquished power without a fuss. The election of 2018 extended this pattern despite some legal challenges to the result. Before this, elections in Sierra Leone were marred by serious violence between rival political parties as well as factions within the same political party, mostly in the fight for leadership within that party. Apart from the period of the one-party state, led by Siaka Stevens of the APC, Sierra Leonean politics, before and after the so-called rebel war (1991-2002) has been dominated by the geographically and ethnically-determined rivalry between the SLPP and the APC. Other parties have played only very minor roles. At the same time Sierra Leone's politicians have a long history of abusing the criminal justice apparatus for political gain and the development of democracy in Sierra Leone has been undermined by military involvement in politics (Nelson-Williams 2010).

This report is not concerned with causes of violence but with the role played by state actors – specifically the police and the military, in what we might call election security. By this term we simply mean the maintenance of security, safety and public order during a period of electioneering. Our focus on state actors contrasts with the important study by Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen (2018), which is deliberately oriented towards what they term 'big man politics', that is, the political activities of non-state actors. Big man politics refers to the importance in West Africa of networks of patronage and the concentration of power and resources in people (or institutions) whose authority and influence is not by virtue of occupying positions in the state apparatus but lies beyond it or parallel to it. The co-existence of 'big men' mandated by the state and 'big men' not so mandated is a fact of political life in Sierra Leone that undoubtedly plays a significant role during elections. However, while we recognise the importance of non-state actors there are good, pragmatic reasons why this study focuses on the police and the military. Chief among these is the institutional mandate and *raison d'être* of PWSL, which is to hold state institutions and officials accountable.

Despite the difference in focus the current study does bear a family resemblance to Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen's book, in that both are oriented towards everyday practices and informed by first-hand observation and documentation of events on the ground. Such orientations provide important sources of knowledge for policymaking. We also agree with their assertion that a sharp distinction between 'strategic' and 'incidental' electoral violence (2018: 6), such as that made by Burchard (2015) is not justified, at least in the Sierra Leonean context. While some events may appear to be incidental, all types of election-related violence, by the whole range of actors (including police), are part of what Danielle Celermajer (2018) has called ecologies of violence. The violence associated with elections should also be understood as reflecting broader structural and structuring, as well as historical, dynamics.

Hoglund and Piyyarathne write that 'while there is a large literature on elections, and an almost equally large literature on political violence, there are only a few studies addressing the election–violence nexus' (2009: 287). There is even less on the role of the security forces. In fact, to our knowledge there exist no studies that attend specifically to the role of the police and military during election-related violence. This

3 The 2002 elections were overseen by 17,000 UN troops (Jackson and Albrecht 2010).

study thus partially fills a gap in the existing literature. It addresses circumstances that Strauss and Taylor (2012) would call violent harassment or low-intensity violence, characterised by harassment, intimidation and disruption, which they document is actually the most common form of election-related violence in sub-Saharan Africa (in Bekoe 2012: 25-26).

Having introduced the rationale for the current study and situated it in relation to other research on elections and violence we turn now to the specifics of Sierra Leone and the circumstances of the police and the military since the end of the civil war.

Sierra Leone, the police and the military

Sierra Leone is a small country of just under eight million inhabitants (World Bank 2018) sandwiched between Guinea and Liberia within the Mano river region of West Africa. Ranked consistently near the bottom of the UN's development index, Sierra Leone is most famous for its diamonds and its civil war, a protracted affair which caused widespread anguish and disruption between 1991 and 2002. After the war Sierra Leone was often labelled a 'fragile state' to indicate the weakness of the state institutions, the abject poverty, and the ongoing instability and struggle the country faced to move beyond the destruction of the 11-year conflict. In recent years there have been signs of development and strengthening of vital infrastructures in the country including electricity and roads. Freetown, the capital, has seen a huge building boom and expansion.⁴

From 1808 to 1961 Sierra Leone was a British colony. Within ten years of independence in 1961 a multiparty system gave way to a de facto one-party state (in 1969). The war that broke out in 1991 interrupted moves towards multiparty democracy that were under way. While elections were held in 1996 the decade of the 90s was a politically tumultuous period. In the immediate post-conflict context, a large UN contingent was present. UN peacekeepers first handed over responsibility for security to the Sierra Leonean military in 2005 and maintained a relatively strong presence in the country until March 2014, when the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) finally drew down. At this time the international community, through a variety of security and development initiatives led by the British, played a central role in pushing an agenda of rule of law, human rights, poverty reduction and institutional reform, especially of the security and justice sectors, including the military and police.

Even before the war had ended it was clear that both the military and the police were in dire need of a drastic overhaul. There was simply no viable security system. What was called for was full-scale transformation, not simply reform (Jackson and Albrecht 2010: 10). The police force, writes Fakondo, was considered a spent force, with little or no logistical support to enhance its capability. Its methods of policing were very unprofessional and displayed blatant disregard for human rights; corruption was the order of the day. Morale and motivation among police personnel were very low. (Fakondo 2010: 167)

Krogstad offers a similarly bleak picture, referencing early Commonwealth reformers' characterisations of the police as 'on its knees', 'spent' and even 'non-existent' (Krogstad 2017: 41). Kabia notes at this time they were a police force 'in name only' (2012: 53). Following the end of the war in 2002 the rebuilding of the police and the military became a priority and reforms were so sweeping that it makes sense to think of the modern history of the Sierra Leone police and military as relatively short (Jackson and Albrecht 2010: 4). Since the war, one might say, both institutions have been reborn. One of the key problems faced by reformers was the intense politicisation of both organisations. Sierra Leone's armed forces had been politicised since at least the 1960s, and even amid the reforms Nelson-Williams reports that this continued to present a challenge: the International Military Assistance and Training Team (IMATT), a British-led agency, struggled with the fact that they had 'inherited a highly politicised military establishment' (2010: 129) with the additional challenge of incorporating former combatants from different sides of the conflict into a new and downsized force. Further, attention had to be paid to the 'bitter acrimony, misconception and rancour' between the police and the military (ibid) and the fact that historically the lines demarcating responsibilities and jurisdictions had not always been clear. More optimistically, the peaceful elections of 2007 were evidence of a new, improved spirit of co-operation between the police and the military.

Facts about the Sierra Leone Police

- There are 12,679 police officers in the SLP.
- The SLP was founded in 1894.
- The organisation is led by an Inspector General and Deputy Inspector General, who are appointed by the President of Sierra Leone. At the national command level, there are 16 Assistant Inspector Generals (AIGs) with responsibility for operations, human resources; training; medical services; crime services; support services; professional standards; corporate affairs; peacekeeping; gender affairs; community affairs; traffic management; intelligence; presidential guard; infrastructure and the operational support division (OSD - the armed wing of the SLP).
- Regional commanders known as Regpols (who are also AIGs) carry regional responsibilities for the Freetown West Area, Freetown East Area, North East Area, North West Area, Southern Province and Eastern Province. All of these AIGs assist the IGP and the DIG in the running of the day-to-day affairs of the SLP.
- Their slogan is 'A Force for Good'.
- The mission of the SLP is to provide a professional and effective service which protects life and property, achieves a peaceful society and takes primacy in the maintenance of law and order (Charley, Ibiduni and Cormack, 2011).
- To a large extent the SLP is not trusted by the people. A corruption perception survey carried out in Sierra Leone within the last four years by the Anti-Corruption Commission and other surveys rated the SLP as the most corrupt institution in the country.⁵

5 A slightly different view was expressed by one senior police officer at the SLP headquarters in conversation with a PWSL monitor. This was his opinion: 'If you ask the criminals, drivers and okada riders, they will say they don't trust the SLP because they are lawless, but if you asked prominent business people or diplomats and other important people they will tell you something different.'

Facts about the Armed Forces

- According to the Ministry of Defence website (2020), there are 13,000 men and women in the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). The primary role and mission of the RSLAF is to defend Sierra Leone's territorial integrity against external aggressors.
- Current challenges include low morale, lack of adequate accommodation for personnel and limited training opportunities.
- The people seem increasingly appreciative of them. To some extent they are more trusted by the citizenry than the police. The RSLAF is responsible for external security but also has some domestic security responsibilities through a government programme known as Military Aid to Civil Power, which authorises assistance to police in extraordinary circumstances upon request.

Electoral landscape and results 2018

Presidential and parliamentary elections are held every five years. The legislative framework for elections includes the constitution, the Public Elections Act of 2012 and the National Civil Registration Act 2016. Section 87(1) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone provides that general election of members of parliament should be held between 30 and 90 days after any dissolution of parliament. Elections are organised and supervised by an independent electoral commission comprising a chair (for the 2018 elections Mohamed N'fah-Alie Conteh⁶) and four commissioners. This is the agency responsible for registering parties and voters and facilitating the process of voting across the country.

The first round of elections in 2018 was held on 13 March. This resulted in no one candidate acquiring a sufficient proportion of the votes to be declared the winner. A run-off poll was held on 31 March. Final results were published on 4 April and Julius Maada Bio was sworn in as president that same evening. The election result gave the presidency to the SLPP but without a parliamentary majority in the first instance. However, a number of results were challenged in the courts and the final outcome left the SLPP with 59 seats, a slim majority of one (World Bank 2014). As usual results were spread along geographical lines, with the country split more or less into an SLPP-supporting south and an APC-supporting north.⁷

6 When the Global Times, a local media outlet, announced the NEC chair would be their 2017 'man of the year' they referred to the 'arduous responsibility' of occupying such a role (Daramy 2018). This is a reference to the sensitivity and importance of the role in a polarised political landscape.

7 Voter turnout was relatively high. According to the NEC's presidential runoff election report (2018), in 2012 it was 87%. In the run-off poll for presidential elections in 2018 it was 81%.

METHODOLOGY: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This report describes and analyses violent events before, during and after elections in Sierra Leone that involved Sierra Leone police officers and/or soldiers. It is based on nationwide monitoring implemented by PWSL's human rights advocates (HRAs) in their respective duty stations across the country. The HRAs were charged with monitoring political events in their locations. Where violence erupted, they were required to document the event and the incidents comprising it, specifically looking at the role of the police and military but also including the perspectives of victims, onlookers and stakeholders. A template was designed to help the HRAs capture the anticipated complexity of events. A WhatsApp group functioned to share information on events as they developed, not as a data storage method but simply to keep fellow HRAs updated. The template covered information about four main areas: the monitor and the monitoring (identity, time, place etc.), the victim or victims, the perpetrator(s), and the event itself. More specifically the template called for the HRA to provide information, where possible, about the nature of the violence, the effect of the violence, the monetary cost of the violence and the current state of the victims. This strategy can be referred to as an extended case study methodology through which various perspectives and experiences were collected from bystanders, victims and perpetrators, so as to explore and identify the drivers and consequences of violence in such settings. Through this methodology cases were created that could subsequently be analysed.

Two caveats are worth mentioning at this point: First, the data set is not large enough to compare types of violence during different phases of the election process. It may well be that the violence of the police changed as the election process progressed but we do not have the data to reliably illuminate this question. Second, it would have been desirable to be able to identify some cases where the police or other security services acted appropriately and succeeded in defusing charged situations or conflicts, or maintained peace through appropriate expression of authority. However, our study design deliberately sought out bad practice and is thus blind to any good practices there may have been. Studies of good practice would be a valuable addition to the literature.

The data collection took place before, during and after the elections of March 2018. The first recorded event was on 26 January and the last on 14 April. In all, 41 events were recorded, with 27 featuring security services. The raw data was transposed to an Excel spreadsheet and then analysed qualitatively.

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

As mentioned, the data set consists of 27 accounts of violent events involving the police or the military. In the analysis that follows we refer to the events as cases. The military are involved in only four of the 27 cases. One case involves both police and military; three cases involve the military and not the police. We consider these at the end. Ultimately our analysis of the violent events leads us to conclude that the security services are implicated in violent incidents in three types of circumstances:

1. During direct confrontations with demonstrators;
2. When they intervene in a conflict between other actors; and
3. When they are passive in the face of a conflict between others.

Appendix A provides a chart summarising the 27 cases featuring the police and/or military. Below we present the basic details of each case along with a brief analytical commentary. By doing so we hope to convey to the reader a sense of the circumstances under which violence takes place and some insight into the dynamics, patterns and forms of violence.⁸

Early analysis

The first step in the analysis undertaken by the team was to identify attributes of the cases that could form the basis for further analysis. Fifteen attributes were identified that appeared worthy of further consideration. As this analysis will show later, these attributes were useful points of departure in the analysis of the events and they are therefore listed in Table 1 below with an associated question.

Subsequent analysis involved creating separate Excel sheets for different parts of the data and examining each in turn with specific focus on the most qualitative and substantive sections, that is the descriptions of the violent incidents.

⁸ While we have tried to paint as full a picture as possible there are certain limits to the data that may leave the reader puzzled, curious or wishing for more. In most cases if we had more detail, we would have included it. We beg indulgence in this regard. Despite the limitations of the data we are confident the analysis carries enough weight to be illuminating.

Table 1

ACTORS	WHO WAS INVOLVED?
WEAPONS	WHAT WEAPONS WERE USED?
LOCATION	WHERE DID THE VIOLENCE TAKE PLACE?
PROVOCATION/ MOTIVE/ RETALIATION	WHAT APPEARED TO BE A CAUSE?
SPONTANEOUS CLASH/ PLANNED ATTACK	WAS THE INCIDENT PLANNED OR SPONTANEOUS?
SINGLE OR MULTIPLE INCIDENT	WAS ONE VIOLENT INCIDENT DESCRIBED OR MULTIPLE INCIDENTS?
GENDER	WHAT WERE THE IDENTITIES OF THE VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS?
VICTIMS	WHO WERE THE VICTIMS?
SINGLE OR MULTIPLE VICTIMS	WAS THERE A SINGLE VICTIM OR WERE THERE MULTIPLE VICTIMS?
PERPETRATORS	WHO WERE THE PERPETRATORS?
SINGLE OR MULTIPLE PERPETRATORS	WAS THERE A SINGLE PERPETRATOR OR MULTIPLE PERPETRATORS?
INTER- OR INTRAPARTY INCIDENT	DID THE INCIDENT FEATURE VIOLENCE BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES OR WITHIN POLITICAL PARTIES?
EMOTIONS	WHAT EMOTIONS WERE ON DISPLAY?
TIME	WHEN DID THE INCIDENT TAKE PLACE?
VEHICLES	WHAT VEHICLES WERE INVOLVED?

Case Descriptions and Analysis

Forms of violence

One key fact that the data reveals is that the police/military can either act overzealously with an excess of force or they can adopt positions of relative passivity or acquiescence when confronted by the violence of others. This is the overarching pattern: either too much force or too little. Neither strategy is optimal.

We begin by focusing on the excessive use of force, focusing on shootings, assaults and sexual violence, before moving on to the theme of acquiescence. Of the 27 cases, 11 are instances of shootings and 10 are assaults (encompassing beatings, attacks and disorderly arrests). Tear gas was used five times, four of which were accompanied by shooting. We identified seven cases of passivity or acquiescence.

Overzealousness

Shootings

In the 11 cases where weapons were fired the events can be divided into four types: intervention in a conflict (3); response to attack under chaotic circumstances (4); shooting at individuals (featuring arbitrary selection criteria) (3); and shooting at a vehicle when the driver refused to submit to stop and search (1), as listed below.

INTERVENTION IN CONFLICT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• POLICE INTERVENE IN A CONFLICT BETWEEN APC CAMPAIGN TEAM AND VILLAGERS. ONE FATALITY, SHOT BY POLICE.• POLICE INTERVENE WITH TEAR GAS AND BULLETS IN TWO SEPARATE CLASHES BETWEEN RIVAL PARTY SUPPORTERS.
RESPONSE TO ATTACK UNDER CHAOTIC CIRCUMSTANCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• POLICE WARN PARTY SUPPORTERS TO VACATE THE AREA. THEY REFUSE AND PELT THE POLICE WITH STONES. TEAR GAS AND BULLETS ARE FIRED.• SOLDIER ARRESTS PARTY SUPPORTER AND IS THEN CONFRONTED BY A GROUP OF SUPPORTERS WHO ATTEMPT TO DISARM HIM. HE FIRES WARNING SHOTS AND THEN SHOOTS A MAN. ALTHOUGH THE BULLET HITS A LEG, THE WOUND IS FATAL.• A MAN ALLEGEDLY DISARMS A POLICE OFFICER; IS THEN ATTACKED BY ARMED POLICE AT SLPP OFFICE. A SECOND MAN ENQUIRING INTO THIS EVENT IS SUMMONED TO A NEARBY SENIOR POLICE OFFICER, WHO SHOOTS HIM.• SAME EVENT AS ABOVE FROM A BYSTANDER PERSPECTIVE WITH BULLETS FLYING, ONE HITTING A MAN IN THE HEAD.

PROHIBITED ARTICLES



*No Person Shall be subject to any
form of torture or any punishment
or other treatment which
is inhuman or degrading.*

Chapter III ■ 20 (1)
Act No.6 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone

INDIVIDUALS SHOT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SENIOR POLICE OFFICER SHOOTS AND WOUNDS IMAGINED PARTY SUPPORTER IN THE BUTTOCK AT CLOSE RANGE.• POLICE SHOOT AND WOUND A WOMAN BYSTANDER WHILE PARTY SUPPORTERS CELEBRATE IN THE DISTANCE.• POLICE FIRE TEAR GAS. MARKET TRADERS FLEE. ONE IS SHOT IN THE FOOT BY A AN OSD OFFICER WITH A RIFLE AS THEY RUN.
REFUSAL TO SUBMIT TO STOP AND SEARCH RESULTING IN VEHICLE BEING SHOT AT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AT A POLICE CHECKPOINT, SENIOR APC OFFICIALS REFUSE TO SUBMIT TO A SEARCH AND DRIVE OFF. THEIR VEHICLE IS SHOT AT AND STOPPED.

Who is shot?

Another way to categorise these cases is to consider who gets shot. Is there a typical victim? The data suggests not. The table below comprises two individuals who were shot and killed and five who were shot and wounded. Shots were fired into three crowds of party supporters and at one vehicle.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FARMER, PART OF A WEDDING PARTY IN THE VILLAGE (DECEASED)• BIKER/STUDENT, PROBABLY A PARTY SUPPORTER (DECEASED)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ELECTRICIAN, ENQUIRING INTO THE ABUSE OF A MARSHAL OUTSIDE PARTY OFFICE• TAILOR AT SAME PARTY OFFICE• SUSPECTED PARTY SUPPORTER• BYSTANDER• FLEEING MARKET TRADER
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CROWD OF UNRULY RIVAL SUPPORTERS X2• CROWD OF PARTY SUPPORTERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• VEHICLE CONTAINING SENIOR OFFICIALS

The range of people who end up getting shot suggests no distinct pattern. There is no evidence to suggest the police are systematically targeting a specific group or type of person. Rather, in many cases who gets shot seems rather accidental, even if the shooting was deliberate. This suggests a certain unpredictability to the violence. As we shall see, being in the wrong place at the wrong time can have fatal consequences due to the overzealousness of the police. We turn now to consider these cases in more detail. Each case is presented and an interpretive commentary provided.

Fatalities

It is early afternoon in early April in a town in the northern province when a bike-rider/student is shot in the leg and later dies (case 30). The shot is fired by a soldier as political party supporters (APC) seek to disarm him after he tried to arrest and take to the police station a member of their group. Supporters of rival parties (APC and SLPP) are present. SLPP supporters are celebrating their victory in the runoff presidential election. The APC supporters surround the soldier, who fires two warning shots before shooting the victim in the leg. He dies the following day.

Here we have a soldier attempting crowd control, apparently a lone soldier with little perceived authority. When surrounded and subject to attack he resorts to his weapon.⁹ The victim could likely have been any of the surrounding people and one could easily imagine the shot not having been fatal. At one level a tragic accident - the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time. At another level, the event is structured according to a pattern that is not uncommon in the data set: rival parties, one group celebrating, another group disgruntled. A scene of disorder and a state official out of his depth and under threat. Under these circumstances a tragic outcome seems all too predictable.

The other fatality, a month earlier, is a 43-year-old farmer who dies after being shot in the stomach, also in the northern province (case 14). It is mid-afternoon when an APC campaign team of senior party and government officials descends on a village that is not a scheduled part of their campaign trail. They interrupt a wedding ceremony and an altercation ensues. The victim is shot by an OSD officer at inspector level, who is accompanying the youth affairs minister as a bodyguard. Apart from the farmer who dies, five people suffer serious injuries, three vehicles are damaged and one is torched.

Here we have an unscheduled stop on the campaign trail resulting in a confrontation, and the forceful disruption of an intimate community event – a marriage ceremony. Of note is the seniority of the APC participants: the chief of staff and the youth affairs minister. Clearly, they were unable to control the situation or had no interest in doing so.

Apart from the two people who died in separate incidents as a result of being shot, as mentioned five other specific individuals feature in the data as victims of gunfire. We consider these cases below.

9 There are two cases where police or soldiers are subject to being disarmed by members of a crowd. Weapons, it seems, can become a focus of conflict, the centerpiece of an altercation that can end badly. One reason weapons are usually not permitted inside prisons is that an individual prison officer faced with a group of unruly inmates can easily lose control of his/her weapon. Similarly, in these two cases members of a crowd, aware of the potential danger of a gun, try to wrestle the weapon away.

Individuals shot arbitrarily

Case 34 features a regional police chief, notorious for his strong-arm tactics and political trouble-making, and responsible for two other shootings (see below). The victim, who ends up with a bullet in his chest, is enquiring of the said police chief about why an election marshal is being harshly treated and whether he could not take custody of him. A marshal is a crowd controller at political events who wears special regalia. They are there to prevent the crowd 'straying into enemy territory' as a research team member put it. In some ways they can be seen to be doing the work of the police - keeping order and maintaining peace. It is thus ironic that they should become targets of police violence in this instance. The event takes place at the SLPP office and is preceded by a group of heavily armed OSD officers patrolling in a van brandishing their weapons at the community. An allegation that a police officer was disarmed by a member of the crowd features in this account (see also footnote 10). It is an allegation made by police to justify their harsh treatment of the detained man. To disarm a law enforcer is to radically question their authority, a clear provocation. In this instance, it justifies (in the eyes of the assailants and shooter) a beating and the subsequent unleashing of live fire on the crowd.

In case 35 an 18-year-old tailor is present at the SLPP office where the regional police chief shot the person in the chest (see above). He too witnesses the beating of the marshal as well as the intimidation of the public by weapon-toting police patrolling the streets in the back of a truck. When the police open fire a bullet hits him in the head. The injury is debilitating, leaving him unable to work and with pain in the head. The local mayor covers his medical expenses.

There is clearly an issue here of public-police relations. The style and reputation of the regional police chief does not enhance perceptions of the police as a neutral, impartial force for good. Rather the impression is one of threatening behaviour and political interference.

In case 37, on the same day as the former event, a 30-year-old woman stands at the side of the road as SLPP supporters dance and celebrate in Kenema. She can see police with weapons in the distance. The next thing she knows she wakes up in hospital after having been shot in the forehead above her left eye. The local mayor takes care of the medical expenses, but she is left with pain in her head and neck.

Case 38 appears to be a case of mistaken identity. He is wearing the colours of the SLPP (green) on 5 April (the day after the party's victory is announced) but claims not to have been involved in the celebrations. As SLPP supporters celebrate he is confronted by a pistol-wielding senior officer (same as above). As he turns to flee he is shot in the backside, with the bullet passing close to his stomach. He crawls, wounded, along the road until he is picked up and taken to a hospital with blood oozing from his back. The injury is so serious that he cannot eat, and has to be fed intravenously. He has also lost the power of speech. He is held in isolation for fear that the police chief's allies might try to finish him off. Here we learn about fear of the police, the fact that they seem to be above the law and the implications of becoming caught up in violence. Getting shot is not necessarily the end of it.

A second woman, a 27-year-old trader, also apparently in the wrong place at the wrong time, is also shot deliberately by police as she flees the market area where she does business after tear gas is fired into the market (case 39). She is running away and there seems no obvious reason why the police officer would aim his rifle at her and shoot her. She is simply trying to get home. On being shot she crawls into an adjacent compound until tensions subside and she is able to make her way home, from where she is taken to hospital. Again, it is the mayor who covers the medical expenses. This is likely not an example of generosity as much as patron-client relations at work, a political figure fulfilling and creating obligations.

The above cases all happened on the same day in Kenema and are part of the same extended event. It is interesting to note the quite different victim narratives. Violence by the police on the crowd (and bystanders) is experienced differently. Each victim has their own story. Nevertheless, the pattern of events is quite similar.

All the above cases feature the shooting of individuals, though clearly they took place in the context of crowded spaces. The following cases are slightly less individualised in the sense that no individual victims of shooting are identified. They can be understood as cases of problematic crowd control.

Crowd control

In two separate events (cases 31 and 32) police intervene in a clash between rival supporters with tear gas and live fire. The two events take place one month apart. One is in Freetown, the other in Kailahun, about as far distant as you can get from Freetown. In Kailahun (31) the clash plays out over an extended part of the day, beginning around lunch time and reigniting in the evening. Abuse is hurled and missiles are thrown. Police intervene and make some arrests (of SLPP supporters) but no-one is hurt. In Freetown (32) a similar series of events plays out. First, a building associated with a political aspirant is attacked and stoned and occupants flee for their lives. Later they retaliate by targeting the APC HQ. At this point the police intervene, firing tear gas and live rounds, causing people to flee. Some fall, some are wounded. Noteworthy here is that the police intervention came in defence of the incumbent party. No police action is recorded during the earlier event.

In case 41 tensions are high on a busy market day on the final day of campaigning as police are provoked by a group of party supporters who refuse to leave an area and pelt them with stones. In this instance, the supporters targeting the police are APC, suggesting again that while the police may see themselves as the government's police this sentiment is not always reciprocated, at least not when the police challenge them or ask them to disperse and move on. In this case the police react with tear gas and bullets. Both APC supporters and police are implicated in looting activities in the busy market. Two traders in their 60s lose almost all their supplies and the 12-year-old child of one of them is injured in the head by a stone.

Here we have the police, ostensibly tasked with maintaining law and order, attempting to do so, but ultimately undermining their own position and professionalism by engaging in looting alongside those instigating the chaos.

Checkpoint (in)security

Case 15 is unique in the data set. There are no rival factions, just the ten occupants of a vehicle refusing to obey police instructions. At a police checkpoint at 10am on 7 March, senior named APC officials and their entourage refuse to submit to a search and drive off. Their vehicle is shot at, damaged and stopped. Senior officials are injured in the process. Electoral materials are found in the vehicle, apparently against regulations, and other parties get involved; five more people are subsequently injured. The initial incident and subsequent violence occur close to the voting hall and voting is interrupted for up to three hours. The record notes that as the injured people are taken to hospital, election officials move around with megaphones encouraging people to come out and vote. This is the only event in the data set that takes place at a voting station, though there are other events that take place at the homes of political figures or the offices of political parties.

Sexual violence

Excessive violence can include a sexual dimension. We will consider later an incident of sexual violence where the police are acquiescent (case 12). The data set features two other blatant examples and a number of other examples where women were the victims of violence (in total five in the database of 41, all five of which occurred in our subset of 27; the group of 56 arrestees also included one woman). In one instance, case 4, an unemployed young woman is arrested in the middle of the day for defacing a poster promoting the ruling party candidate, and then is physically manhandled and sexually assaulted on the way to the police station in the police vehicle. We learn few details but what is striking is the triviality of the offence and the banality of the violence.¹⁰ There is something about the minimalist nature of the account of this event that makes it sound all too common: vulnerable woman picked up for trivial offence subject to sexual assault by representatives of patriarchy and state power.

In case 29, the 37-year-old SLPP district chairman is attacked by APC ‘thugs’ wearing party colours and masks. He and his wife are beaten and he is slapped by the police in front of his children. Subsequently the whole family spend a week at the police station. This may have been a form of protective custody rather than punishment. We learn little about the beating of the woman but it is plausible that there is a connection between the targeting of her together with him and the slap in front of the children as part of an extended debasement and humiliation with a gendered dimension.

Other events featuring excessive force

There are four further cases involving overzealous policing. In case 23 APC supporters barricade a road to hinder the movement of SLPP supporters in one of the provincial capitals, resulting in riotous conduct and police intervention. A 20-year-old motorcycle rider is severely beaten and extorted by police following the arrest of many rival party supporters in the context of a late afternoon altercation between them. The beating features a group of police and takes place at the police station. He loses 50,000 Leones in the process.

10 Thanks to Victoria Canning for help developing this formulation.

The police station was the location of another event that stands out from the rest because of the significance of chain of command in the account. Case 11 features the beating of a political aspirant at 10pm. A notorious senior police officer instructed his subordinates to beat the person. (This was a week before this officer was implicated in a series of shootings and community intimidation – see above.) The victim could find no reason for the beating, especially since his previous experience engaging with the police was in a mediating role, ‘fostering peace’ between them and members of his party. He suspects that the regional police chief is out to create ‘mayhem’ for the main opposition party. The account implies that the violence was orchestrated to escalate the conflict.

Case 2 can be another instance of excessive use of force. It features a late afternoon raid on the top floor of a building in the capital, where APC supporters are holding an election rally. Police force 56 of them out of the building and beat them with guns and other weapons as they are transferred to police vehicles. All except one are men. First, they hear shouting, ordering them to come down from the top floor, which they use as their base, or be shot on sight. Then the building is stormed by a large group of police, allegedly over 100. It is worth noting that this is the only case in the data that features the arrest of people en masse by such a large contingent of police. Rather than random it appears preplanned, though the motive is unclear from the record. It is likely the group were deliberately targeted. By whom exactly is unknown.

Most victims of police or military violence are targeted not for who they are but for who they represent (a political party), what they happen to be doing (rioting) or where they happen to be at the time (in the vicinity of or trying to get away from a conflict between political parties). In more than one case, the victim appears to be a victim of chance rather than a deliberate selection. Who ends up getting shot or beaten is therefore unpredictable. Case 40 is particularly striking in this regard. The victim is a 39-year-old school security guard who is arrested and brutally beaten by police one morning after the SLPP supporters they had been chasing evade them by cutting through the school where the guard works and escaping through a back gate. It is plausible that the police beat him in order to extract information about the whereabouts of the SLPP supporters who fled through the school. It is equally plausible that they beat him out of frustration that the supporters had evaded their grasp, in other words that he was a proxy for the aggression that would otherwise have been meted out to the SLPP supporters should the police have captured them. The SLPP supporters had allegedly been beating up APC supporters who had just lost the election. The school gate was destroyed by the police and the victim had 100,000 Leones and his phone taken from him at the police station.

We move now from cases featuring what we have termed overzealousness or excessive use of force to cases that feature passivity or acquiescence. The police are mandated by law to use force, but it is a delicate balance between using too much or too little. As has been documented by prisons scholars, the appropriate performance of authority by state officials is a tricky business. (See, for example, Liebling and Arnold 2004).

Passivity or acquiescence

Among the 27 cases are seven documented cases where police officers or soldiers are mostly passive or acquiescent when action would have been appropriate. We consider each below.

In late February a 29-year-old married businesswoman confronts a group of people destroying posters and banners promoting SLPP candidates (Case 12). They are led by two named people aligned with the ruling party at the time, the APC, one a former councillor. The event takes place in a chiefdom in the northern province after dark (at 8.30pm). Police are present but they do not intervene as the woman is stripped naked and 'maliciously beaten' by the former councillor. Apart from the humiliation of being stripped naked and beaten she sustains wounds all over her body and her left hand is broken. She is hospitalised as a result. It is quite shocking, in some respects, that this blatantly illegal act takes place in the presence of the police. It is likely that this inaction is evidence that the police explicitly side with the incumbent regime. In Sierra Leone, the police are seen by many as the ruling party's police, rather than the state's police. In an area dominated by the APC, destruction of rival posters is likely seen as a legitimate activity, and by extension so is sexual violence meted out to a woman protesting such action. Here the police fail to restore order, fail to prevent a crime and fail to hold lawbreakers to account. In short, they are complicit. There are at least two possible explanations for police acquiescence in this case. It may be that the police are sympathetic to the action of the councillor and believe the woman deserves it and therefore do not act to stop the violence. Or the police may be afraid to identify with the woman, who holds a position in the opposition, so they choose not to intervene. Either way they are not neutral and not maintaining law and order.

In case 13 a few days later, also in the north (Mile 91), two men in their 30s are 'mercilessly beaten' by APC supporters at 11am. The background is a conflict between supporters of one of the minor opposition parties, the National Grand Coalition (NGC), and the APC. In the leadup to the beating, NGC supporters had destroyed loudspeakers belonging to the APC and taken three APC supporters captive. These three were rescued by police, who dispersed the crowd using tear gas. Within half an hour, however, apparently in retaliation, two NGC supporters are taken captive by the APC supporters and beaten. There is no record of the police intervening this time, again implying an allegiance to the incumbent regime. Indeed, the data reveals that named individuals who were instigating violence, intimidating people and torching property in the aftermath of this event told the monitor collecting data 'as long as we are in governance we can do anything with impunity.' This altercation led to further unrest, with three *palava* huts torched. Eventually a three-day curfew was declared by the police. With some acuity the monitor records how the beating resulted in the disenfranchisement of the two victims; they were hospitalised while voting was taking place and therefore unable to cast their votes. Striking, in this example, is how the police acted in one instance (rescuing the APC supporters) but failed to act in the second. Their party-political bias seems evident.

On 11 March, after SLPP won the first round of elections, a young farmer is attacked and injured on the street in the south-east of the country by APC supporters (case 20). APC supporters challenge SLPP supporters saying they will win the second round and when that happens they will come and kill them. These threats are uttered in front of the police, but no action is taken, though the record states arrests were later made. Provocation and stone-throwing by APC supporters feature. In the end the stand-off is resolved not by the police but by community elders.

Case 3 occurs in the southeast at 6am in late January. It features a confrontation over something as trivial as a police barricade that is blocking the view from the APC office. An SLPP 'cross country' rally had been permitted (by the police) two weeks earlier and the barriers were to ensure safety as the rally passed the APC headquarters. APC supporters remove the barrier, sparking a confrontation between APC supporters and SLPP supporters, who are angered by the removal of something meant for their safety. A riot ensues, featuring the exchange of threatening remarks, stone-throwing, assaults and injuries on both sides. Senior party representatives are involved. In this case the police are not, in fact, perpetrators of violence but they are implicated in two ways: first, they are the authority that granted permission for the SLPP to campaign and second, they are the authority that set up the barrier that became the flashpoint for the confrontation. This reminds us of the role of police as the bureaucrats granting or refusing permits and as providers of materials for protection. Ironically, in this case the best efforts of the police to ensure safety were subverted by a conflict over the means by which they sought to do this.

An explicit failure to act by the police seems to contribute to another violent event. On the evening of 19 March in one of Freetown's outer districts the house of the mammy queen¹¹ is attacked (case 24) in retaliation for an attack two days before on a parliamentary candidate (presumably SLPP). Citing the police's failure to act (i.e. passivity) as grounds for taking the matter into their own hands a group of men (SLPP supporters) armed with cutlasses, knives and sticks destroy the house, torch a vehicle and stab the daughter of the mammy queen. In the perceived absence of maintainers of law and order the SLPP supporters step in and take retaliatory action, perpetuating rather than resolving the conflict.

In case 25 the exact role of the police is again unclear, but they are present ('in the midst') as APC supporters attack a village armed with machetes, other 'offensive implements' and petrol. They storm the village, torching five houses. Witnesses allege they were sponsored by a former member of parliament. After the event, the villagers fear police harassment and victimisation; the effects of the attack spill over in the form of ongoing trauma and fear of arrest. Some flee the village; some are arrested. Once again the police seem not to occupy the role of neutral peacekeeper or order-maker, but rather of passive bystander and threatening presence.

In a further example of passivity (case 16), the context is an altercation between rival political parties' supporters (APC and SLPP). First, some ruling party supporters are wounded by the main opposition party's supporters. Then the opposition supporters and 'some police' are subject to intimidation by ruling party supporters.

11 Mammy queen is the term given to a respected female community head who handles issues and challenges faced by women and girls in their communities.

Here we have the police and the opposition apparently targeted together. This example does not support the hypothesis that the police are the APC's police, or at least not always. One explanation for this is that when police do attempt to act neutrally, they are subjected to hostile actions by people they otherwise sympathise with and may fear.

All but one of the above cases concern the overzealousness or acquiescence of the police. We turn now to consider the few cases of the involvement of soldiers in election violence.

The violence of soldiers

We have already discussed the case of the soldier who shot and killed a man. The military were involved in three other events, twice alone and once together with the police. In case 17, early one evening a fight between APC and SLPP supporters leads to injuries and the torching of several houses in the village. The police and military intervene together, arresting some and beating and mistreating them in the process, another example of excessive use of force.

In case 18, a Coalition for Change political aspirant, caught in possession of electoral materials, is arrested by a soldier and taken in disorderly fashion to the police station. He is not physically abused but reports feeling disrespected.

Case 33 features tensions in a village due to a military presence¹² after a soldier beats up a party supporter who refuses to obey an order to stop celebrating. During collective analysis of the data Andrew asked the PWSL team why the military would try to stop people celebrating. 'Andrew, you don't understand. Our country is divided down political lines', they shared, reminding us all of the way politics in Sierra Leone infuses institutions that under democratic ideals should be impartial.

This case, like others, has contestations about authority at its heart as well as the reasonableness of a command. The party supporter, who is a bike rider, refuses to obey and ends up unconscious.

The following section outlines a series of points raised by the data about the violence associated with electioneering in general, and the violence of the police and military in particular.

12 Cf Söderberg Kovacs' (2012) finding that police and military presence can increase people's sense of insecurity rather than relieve it.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The idea that violence begets violence (*lex talionis*) is quite strong in the data (see Hoglund and Piyaathne (2009) in Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen 2018: 8). This takes the form of what we might call tit for tat, or recriminatory or mimetic violence. The data seldom describes a single incident; rather, a series of incidents makes up an event that is linked by actors and framed by circumstances. Additionally, the data set is unfortunately not large enough to compare types of violence during different phases of the election process. It may well be that the violence of the police changed as the election process progressed, but we do not have the data to reliably illuminate this question. Cases 34, 35, 37, 38 and 39 attest to this vividly. Multiple incidents of violence occur within the same brief accounts committed by different actors. This reminds us that each single act of violence exists in a broader context or ecology of violence. The events documented have both history and consequences.

Rivalries between political parties feature as preconditions for violence, including violence by the police and other security services. Competition over territory and the ability to exert leverage over communities plays a role, as does a long history of political polarisation and a winner-takes-all mentality. An enquiry that was initiated into the actions of the previous government as soon as the new government was installed points to this.¹³ The costs of losing an election can be high, which may lower the threshold for engaging in violent behaviour in order to retain power, which in turn has implications for election security.

Often the cases feature a group of actors targeting (indiscriminately or purposefully) a single victim. In 19 out of 27 cases violence was committed by multiple perpetrators. In only six instances was the perpetrator a single individual. Weighted in the opposite direction we see that in 15 of the 27 cases victims were individuals while seven involved multiple victims. One involved property.

Many cases feature descriptions of rather chaotic events. Use of force is often disorderly and ill-disciplined. Not all victims are deliberately targeted; some are simply caught in the crossfire. In a number of cases the victims seemed to be incidental to the events going on. They were no more or less deserving than anyone else; they were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. They were simply bystanders: for example, a woman fleeing the market; a security guard at a school; the family member of a political figure. This might be thought of as an alternative type of excessive force, where the violence spreads beyond those who are more legitimate targets. It implies not simply too much violence but violence that is too widely distributed and too diffuse. Use of force should be both proportionate and appropriately targeted.

Violence has consequences for people, property and possessions. It also has consequences for atmosphere in a community or neighbourhood. The consequences of violence vary. As Fischer (2002: 8) points out, both material and symbolic items can be targets of violence. Attempts to undermine the political process itself can lead to violence, for example, instructing people not to vote.

13

See, for example, <https://www.exclusivenewspaper.com/tense-battle-over-commissions-of-inquiry-apc-vs-sllp/> and <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/26906/is-sierra-leone-s-bio-going-after-corruption-or-his-adversaries>

In election violence perpetrated by civilians the weapons used are often quite banal. Beating is a common technique or weapons employed are often whatever comes to hand. Police, however, seem predisposed to use tear gas and bullets. Intimidatory tactics also feature where the threat of violence is performed (such as gun-toting cops in trucks or a military presence in a village).

Rules designed to manage disorder or limit violence can sometimes contribute to violence (for example, when they are broken or not enforced, such as roadblocks and protective barriers).

Violence can involve senior figures with long histories and positions of authority in political movements as well as foot-soldiers who may be more temporarily and contingently aligned. (See Christensen and Utas 2008).

A cross-cutting issue when it comes to the role of the police and the military during election violence is the legitimacy of violence. In fact, police are permitted to use force where necessary but are prohibited from using excessive force. The cases described clearly indicate some of the difficulties the police and military have had in using appropriate force. All too often their actions have gone beyond the bounds of what is appropriate or legitimate. In this they have been party to undermining the democratic process rather than enabling peace and security.

How come, in these cases, the police seem to make chaotic situations worse rather than better? How come a police presence exacerbates already tense situations? They are there to maintain order but they provoke disorder (and community tension). They are perceived as predatory and as serving the government of the day. It is often likely that the police may not know the background to incidents they attend to. It is an acute situation for them and the inclination will be for them to protect the senior incumbent figure present, that is, to protect their own. That might be a government figure, a senior party figure or their supporters. If arrests are made, incumbent party supporters are likely to be favoured and released rapidly compared with those perceived as opponents of the regime. This undermines any sense of public trust that may exist and threatens perceived authority and legitimacy. It implies a lack of skills in diffusing tense scenarios.

Clearly the police and soldiers, as representatives of public authority, should be beyond provocation and it is absurd that celebrating an election victory can lead to someone being shot. Such examples point to the fact that despite reforms since the rebel war there is some way to go in establishing good public relations between government security services and citizens. Indeed, we might also note that such relations will always be contingent on the police's ability to adapt and perform legitimately in response to changing societal dynamics. Good community relations will never be achieved all at once but must always be worked on and consolidated. The role the police and military have in ensuring law and order and security means tensions and flashpoints are inevitable. But this should not be an invitation to use violence or excessive force.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the past we have not been particularly good at protecting our assets. The reasons for this are complex, but lie in many years of injustice, bad governance, corruption and mismanagement. If we are to ensure that history does not repeat itself, we need to have loyal, strong, reformed, capable, well-motivated and equipped forces that answer to a democratically elected civilian government.

- Nelson-Williams 2010: 152

Nelson-Williams, a former senior military official, is referring above mostly to territorial and material assets but he could just as well be referring to value or actor-oriented assets, in other words to people and values. If Sierra Leone is to protect her people and consolidate democratic values then 'loyal, strong, reformed, capable, well-motivated and equipped forces' are certainly desirable.

Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen (2018) make a series of policy recommendations that are worth reiterating here. They call for a lowering of the stakes, so that it is not a 'winner takes all' situation with no role for losers in an election.¹⁴ This might involve strengthening the role of parliaments. They call also for increased support to democratisation processes beyond the period of elections. This is about embedding democratic principles at all levels of decision-making and conflict resolution across countries. They call for an expansion of election monitoring to the times between elections, when low-level, non-spectacular but nevertheless destructive violence often takes place. This does not have to involve international observers but could be about equipping domestic observing bodies with the tools to monitor effectively. Not allowing local conflicts to fester (over land, exclusion or the outcomes of civil conflict) is another recommendation of Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen. But most significant in relation to our topic is their recommendation to 'rethink electoral security'. Neither military nor police should be politicised at election times (or any other times); they should not be fighting on behalf of the government or using excessive force in the name of security. In the same way that clear distinctions ought to be drawn between state and ruling party, there should be clear acknowledgement that police are not the police of the ruling party but the police of the people.

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In a Reuters news report of the swearing in of the new president, Julius Maada Bio, the SLPP's campaign manager Ali Kabba, apparently in the same spirit, is quoted as saying: 'Celebrate responsibly. Do not disturb your neighbor. Victory for all men, not victory for some. Everyone in, no one out.'

Finally, we propose nine advocacy points:

1. We call for an impartial police force that works in the interest of Sierra Leoneans and not political party interests.
2. We encourage stakeholders within the security sector to demonstrate honesty, neutrality and the creation of a level playing field for all parties and actors.
3. We call on the wider populace and members of the security sector to uphold the constitution of the land as a sacred document which should be respected by all and sundry.
4. The position of the Inspector General of Police and the Chief of Defence Staff of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces should not be political appointments but rather based on the merit, competences and non-political position of such individuals.
5. Recruitment into the police and other armed forces should be on merit and not political party connections. Due consideration should be given to geographical representation in recruitment to mitigate against region-based politicisation of the armed forces.
6. We call on the Sierra Leone Police to review their policies and practices around appropriate use of force, specifically with reference to the use of weapons.
7. We call on the press to report dispassionately and without prejudice on election-related issues and to pay specific attention to the role of the police and security services around election times.
8. Young people in the country should not be misused as political thugs during political events. Instead, they should be enabled to become ambassadors of peace in their communities.
9. Elections should not be seen as winner-takes-all battles but as a means for citizens to demonstrate their franchise in determining who represents and governs them at a given time.

The data featured in this study was collected with a view to increasing the understanding of PWSL, DIGNITY and other partner institutions and organisations about the context and circumstances of election-related violence in Sierra Leone in order to inform preventive and mitigating measures in the future. We expect the knowledge generated to be of value to academic and civil society organisations interested in the study of policing, security, elections, violence and democratic transfers of power more generally in Africa. Therefore, we hope this report will generate debate and discussion on the effects of police heavy-handedness during electioneering. We hope it may serve as a platform for promoting debate on democracy, human rights and good governance in Sierra Leone.

With this in mind, two final points are worth emphasising. Firstly, each act of violence we have documented exists in a broader context or ecology of violence.

This directs the attention of those designing interventions to these broader dynamics. They must not be ignored. Secondly, it is important to remember that elections exist in a broader ecology of transition and changing power dynamics in the country. As we considered at the start of this report elections and democracy are a means to effectuate rule. In this light it is not surprising that the stakes are high. It is our hope that democracy will continue to be consolidated in Sierra Leone and that policing and military practices will continue to adapt and come into closer alignment with democratic values. The sooner the better.



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Appendix A. 27 accounts of violent events featuring police and/or military

The following chart summarises the role of the police or military in each case for easy reference.

CASE NR	ROLE OF POLICE OFFICER/S
2	POLICE, MAINLY OSD, STORM A BUILDING, EVICT 56 PEOPLE ATTENDING AN ELECTION RALLY FROM A BUILDING, TRANSFERRING THEM TO A POLICE VEHICLE AND BEAT THEM IN THE PROCESS.
3	PERMIT GRANTED BY POLICE FOR AN SLPP EVENT EARLIER THAN SCHEDULED. APC MOVE A BARRIER ERECTED BY POLICE. SPARKS A CONFRONTATION.
4	A WOMAN WHO IS ARRESTED FOR VANDALISING A POLITICAL POSTER IS SEXUALLY ASSAULTED DURING JOURNEY TO POLICE STATION.
11	SENIOR OFFICER AT POLICE STATION INSTRUCTS SUBORDINATES TO BEAT A POLITICAL ASPIRANT.
12	POLICE ARE PRESENT AS A FORMER COUNCILLOR ASSAULTS AND STRIPS NAKED A WOMAN WHO CONFRONTED A GROUP OF PEOPLE DESTROYING POSTERS AND BANNERS.
13	POLICE INTERVENE TO RESCUE TWO APC SUPPORTERS CAPTURED BY A RIVAL PARTY (NGC). THEY DISPERSE CROWD USING TEAR GAS. LATER THEY FAIL TO INTERVENE WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES ARE REVERSED AND 2 NGC SUPPORTERS ARE 'MERCILESSLY BEATEN' BY APC SUPPORTERS.
14	POLICE INTERVENE IN A CONFLICT BETWEEN APC CAMPAIGN TEAM AND VILLAGERS. ONE FATALITY, SHOT BY POLICE.
15	AT A POLICE CHECKPOINT SENIOR APC OFFICIALS REFUSE TO SUBMIT TO SEARCH AND DRIVE OFF. THEIR VEHICLE IS SHOT AT AND STOPPED. A CONFLICT BETWEEN PARTIES ENSUES AS BALLOT BOXES ARE DISCOVERED (ON POLLING DAY).
16	POLICE ROLE UNCLEAR BUT IT APPEARS AS THOUGH THEY ARE SUBJECT TO SOME INTIMIDATION AS RIVAL SUPPORTERS CONFRONT ONE ANOTHER.

20	POLICE PRESENT BUT PASSIVE WITNESSES TO A SERIOUS ALTERCATION BETWEEN A GROUP OF APC SUPPORTERS AND AN SLPP SUPPORTER.
23	POLICE RESPOND TO BARRICADING OF A ROAD BY APC SUPPORTERS BLOCKING AN SLPP GROUP'S MOVEMENT. MANY ARRESTS ARE MADE. ONE MAN IS SEVERELY BEATEN AND HIS MONEY IS STOLEN.
24	POLICE FAIL TO ACT QUICKLY ON REPORT OF A PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE BEING ATTACKED AND HIS SUPPORTERS TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS AND WREAK HAVOC AT THE HOUSE OF THE MAMMY QUEEN. HER DAUGHTER IS STABBED IN THE LEG.
25	POLICE PRESENCE AT SERIOUS ATTACK ON VILLAGE BY APC SUPPORTERS LEAVES VILLAGERS IN FEAR OF ONGOING HARASSMENT AND ARRESTS BY POLICE. SOME ARRESTS ARE MADE.
29	POLICE HUMILIATE AND ASSAULT SLPP DISTRICT CHAIRMAN, WHO HAS JUST BEEN ATTACKED BY APC SUPPORTERS, IN FRONT OF HIS FAMILY. HIS WIFE IS ALSO BEATEN.
31	POLICE INTERVENE WITH TEAR GAS AND BULLETS IN CLASH BETWEEN RIVAL PARTY SUPPORTERS.
32	POLICE INTERVENE WITH TEAR GAS AND BULLETS IN CLASH BETWEEN RIVAL PARTY SUPPORTERS (DIFFERENT INCIDENT).
34	A MAN WHO ALLEGEDLY DISARMS A POLICE OFFICER IS SUBSEQUENTLY ATTACKED BY ARMED POLICE AT SLPP OFFICE. A SECOND MAN ENQUIRING INTO THIS INCIDENT IS SUMMONED TO A NEARBY SENIOR POLICE OFFICER WHO THEN SHOOTS HIM, THE BULLET STRIKING HIS CHEST.
35	SAME INCIDENT AS ABOVE FROM A BYSTANDER PERSPECTIVE WITH BULLETS FLYING, ONE STRIKING A MAN'S FOREHEAD.
37	POLICE SHOOT WOMAN BYSTANDER WHILE PARTY SUPPORTERS CELEBRATE IN THE DISTANCE.
38	SENIOR POLICE OFFICER SHOOTS IMAGINED PARTY SUPPORTER IN THE BUTTOCK AT CLOSE RANGE.

39	POLICE FIRE TEAR GAS. MARKET TRADERS FLEE. ONE IS SHOT IN THE FOOT BY A POLICE OFFICER WITH A RIFLE.
40	POLICE CHASE SLPP SUPPORTERS WHO WERE ALLEGEDLY BEATING RIVALS. A SECURITY GUARD ACCUSED OF HARBOURING OR ABETTING THE ESCAPE OF THE SLPP SUPPORTERS IS BRUTALLY BEATEN BY POLICE.
41	POLICE WARN PARTY SUPPORTERS TO VACATE THE AREA. THEY REFUSE AND PELT THE POLICE WITH STONES. TEAR GAS AND BULLETS ARE FIRED.

Cases involving military

CASE NR	ROLE OF MILITARY
17	POLICE AND MILITARY INTERVENE IN INTERPARTY 'RIOT'. THEY MAKE ARRESTS, BEAT AND MANHANDLE PEOPLE.
18	A PARTY MEMBER IN POSSESSION OF ELECTORAL MATERIALS IS ARRESTED AND TAKEN TO POLICE STATION IN DISORDERLY FASHION BY MILITARY OFFICERS.
30	SOLDIER ARRESTS PARTY SUPPORTER AND IS THEN CONFRONTED BY A GROUP OF SUPPORTERS WHO ATTEMPT TO DISARM HIM. HE FIRES WARNING SHOTS AND THEN SHOOTS A MAN FATALLY IN THE LEG.
33	SOLDIERS BEAT PARTY SUPPORTER WHO DISOBEYS ORDER TO STOP CELEBRATING. MILITARY PRESENCE IN VILLAGE FUELS TENSION.





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By Andrew M Jefferson, Ahmed S Jalloh, Berthan L Bangura & John L Coker

Field study prepared in collaboration with PWSL

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