Sierra Leone's 2007 Elections: Monumental and More of the Same

KEVIN S. FRIDY AND FREDLINE A. O. M'CORMACK-HALE

Abstract: When the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone announced that Ernest Bai Koroma and his party, the All People's Congress, had been elected to replace the incumbent Sierra Leone People's Party government, Sierra Leone joined a growing number of African nations to have experienced a peaceful turnover of power from one popularly elected government to another. Though the electoral tallies were not without their critics, the overwhelming sentiment both within Sierra Leone and without was that the 2007 elections marked a positive turning point in the country's political history. Using newly released census data and election results, we analyze the 2007 elections to see just how paradigm-breaking these elections were. We find that the social cleavages, and most notably ethnic cleavages pitting the Mende versus the Temne, that marked preceding elections were evident in 2007. These most recent elections were not, however, as some SLPP supporters have claimed, more divisive in terms of ethnicity than elections past. What changed between 2002 and 2007 was not an increase in "tribal animosities" or a demographic shift but rather a change in who the heterogeneous and relatively cosmopolitan voters of Freetown felt should lead the country for the next five years.

A Landmark for Sierra Leonean Democracy

Over the course of September and October 2007, Sierra Leoneans cast ballots in landmark elections, ousting the incumbent Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) from power and returning to government the All People's Congress (APC). Only the second elections held since the end of the brutal 1991-2002 civil war, the presidential and parliamentary elections were closely monitored by Sierra Leoneans and the international community as a crucial determinant of the political climate in the country, signaling whether the country had indeed stabilized or if a return to conflict was imminent. The elections were historic for a number of reasons. Contrary to the 2002 elections that were largely managed by the international community, Sierra Leoneans played a significant role in the conduct, management and execution of these elections. A newly reconstituted National Electoral Commission (NEC), with significant funding, training, and institutional support from the international community, spearheaded the process. Despite some allegations of rigging,

Kevin S. Fridy is Assistant Professor of Government and World Affairs at the University of Tampa. **Fredline M'Cormack-Hale** is Assistant Professor at the John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations, Seton Hall University. This research and analysis was made possible in part through University of Tampa Dana and Delo grants and a United States Institute of Peace dissertation fellowship

primarily emanating from within the incumbent party, local civil society groups, the NEC, and international and domestic observers all declared the elections largely free and fair.[1]

Also noteworthy was the competitiveness of the elections. Post-transition elections in Africa have been marked by uncertainty given incumbent tendencies to change the rules to better suit themselves.[2] Additional incumbency advantages, including access to state coffers, early campaigning, and completion of major projects in the months immediately preceding the casting of ballots, make it difficult for opposition candidates to win power, and political turnovers are still a relatively rare occurrence in African elections.[3] In Sierra Leone's 2007 elections, not only did such a change occur, but the party returned to power was one widely associated with the social, economic, and political decline of the country in the previous republic as well as the onset of civil war. Why did the SLPP, the party popularly touted as favorites to win the elections, end up losing not just the presidency but also a significant number of seats in the legislative elections to the opposition APC?

This paper examines the Sierra Leonean presidential and parliamentary elections, situating them within the broader literature on voting trends in African countries. We examine the importance of ethnicity on voter choice in Sierra Leone using as reference point the 2007 parliamentary and presidential elections with an eye for evaluating the extent to which these elections are indeed facile examples of ethnic politics in action, or whether other considerations have risen to the fore. We first present an overview of electoral trends in Sierra Leone, reviewing past elections before turning to a presentation of data on voting patterns during the 2007 elections, using ethnic and socio-economic variables to test the hypothesis that ethnicity conditions partisan preferences. In the final section, we attempt to explain the results with inductively generated hypotheses. While the 2007 elections do indeed illustrate the salience of ethnicity in voting choices as many argue is the case in Sierra Leone, it is not the only factor taken into consideration. The willingness to return to power an opposition party associated with much of the political and economic decline of Sierra Leone in the post-independence years is indicative that other factors are important and that some voters are either located outside of the dominant ethnic split in Sierra Leonean politics or, more likely we argue, willing to set aside old affiliations and call for change in light of salient considerations like party performance and service delivery. Ethnicity matters in Sierra Leonean politics, and politicians need to take ethnic claims seriously. But, ethnicity need not be the kindling that ignites a renewed round of fighting in the country.

The Role of Ethnicity in African Elections

The third wave of democratization sweeping the African continent in the early 1990s led to the installation of democratic regimes that used elections as the primary instrument of political change. Despite some disagreement among scholars about the exact role that elections play in the consolidation of democracy, there is a general consensus that elections are fundamental to the democratic process. Elections are a mechanism through which voter preferences can be aggregated and expressed. They can lead to leadership change with the selection of new individuals and groups to hold legislative and executive power. Much has been made in recent literature of the democratizing power, or lack thereof, of elections.[4] While several scholars have argued that elections are not sufficient for democracy, the general consensus seems to be that they are at least not bad for democracy. Most recently, Lindberg has entered this debate arguing that repeated elections held over time result in increased democratic qualities, with greater levels of freedoms and civil liberties.[5]

Consequently, a central objective of international assistance to post-conflict states is the building of democracy. Within this project the ability to organize and implement free and fair elections is often a first step.[6]

Despite this generally positive perception of democratic institutions, scholars of African politics have a long history of being wary of elections. Ethnicity, they claim, figures prominently as an explanatory variable in the politics of Sub-Saharan Africa, and whether it is perceived as instrumental, constructivist, or primordial, ethnicity has a place in explanations of everything from economic underdevelopment to conflict and state collapse.[7] With Africa's wave of mass democratizations, and many subsequent democratic stops and starts, ethnicity as a variable has been given a new life. Gone are some of the early primordial assumptions, but as instrumentally constructed as it may be, there is no dearth of election observers who believe that ethnicity still matters a great deal.[8] This is true in Sierra Leone where ethno-regional factors are a popular hypothesis used to explain decisions of the electorate, spoils calculations, and alliances of elites.[9] Support for the two main parties is thought to be divided along ethno-regional lines. Though less frequently, other causal factors have also been referenced; including ideology, age and status, and government performance.[10]

Sierra Leone presents an appropriate place in which to explore the salience of ethnicity on elections, especially given the circumstances of the 2007 elections. Largely deemed free and fair by international and local observers alike, the decisive defeat of SLPP despite incumbency advantages would appear to signal a change in the political climate in Sierra Leone. As the party that led the country during the final years of the war, and into the post-war transition period, SLPP was widely heralded as the party that brought peace to Sierra Leone, and their victory in 2002 appeared to cement this. How then does one explain SLPP losses at the parliamentary and presidential levels? Does this indicate a change in politics in Sierra Leone where issues are the decisive factor rather than ethno-regional affiliations as has been assumed in the past?

An Ethno-Political History of Sierra Leone

A variety of scholars have argued that ethnicity plays a salient role in politics in Sierra Leone, both as a source for political organization and a basis for support.[11] Some trace these rifts back to the colony-protectorate divide in existence from the early days of British presence in Sierra Leone, when the capital Freetown was established as a haven for freed slaves in the eighteenth century.[12] These Krio, as they came to be known, were considered British subjects subject to British law. With key positions in the civil service, they played an integral role in British rule of Sierra Leone, with (albeit limited) opportunities for political representation. On the other hand, Protectorate Africans were governed by indigenous institutions and subject to indirect, rather than direct rule. Thus, early ethno-political divisions pitted the Krio against other indigenous groups in Sierra Leone.

With the increasing integration of the Colony and the Protectorate toward the end of the nineteenth century, Krio influence with the British declined, giving rise to new divisions within those formerly of the Protectorate. Again, British influence could be detected: the early seeds of ethno-political divisions among Protectorate Africans was sown amidst a British-favored policy of segregated settlements for different groups in the Colony, selective education (with an emphasis on the southern regions and marginalization of the north), as well as infrastructural development that also favored the South.[13] Utilizing divide and rule

tactics effectively, the British quelled nationalist sentiments. "Against the Krios, the government backed the peoples of the Protectorate, whose own divisions were carefully fostered and exacerbated," notes a prominent group of Sierra Leonean historians. "Every effort was made to preserve these invidious distinctions within the population of Sierra Leone and keep its peoples polarized in opposition to one another."[14]

Such divisions were momentarily set aside in the immediate period leading up to independence, with Protectorate Africans presenting a unified front against the Krio and legitimizing their claim of representative rule. By 1967 however, splits in the hinterland alliance began to appear and the Protectorate alliances against the Krio soon fell apart, giving way to today's more politically salient rift between the Mende and the Temne. The SLPP, while positioning itself as a party with integrationist aspirations, was soon seen to represent Southern/Mende interests, especially with the ascension into power of Albert Margai (who many believed actively promoted Mende hegemony) following the death of his half-brother Milton Margai.[15] The relatively greater development of predominantly Mende regions in the Southern and Eastern provinces of the country, along with the Western area around the capital Freetown, as compared to the Northern Province (home to a majority of Temne as well as other groups including the Limba and Kuranko), only served to highlight this perception. Economic patronage in the Southern and Eastern provinces by the SLPP exacerbated the grievances of the North and other marginalized areas and groups, including the Krio and Kono.[16] Such concerns were underscored by the ethnic composition of cabinet posts within the party. In 1962 and 1964, Temne held four and two cabinet posts respectively, compared to seven and six posts held by Mende in the same period.[17]

A change in leadership in 1967, when a new party, the All People's Congress (APC), attained power following what many at the time heralded as competitive elections did not put an end to ethnicity's salience. The APC initially seemed to hold some promise: it posited itself as an alternative to the SLPP and claimed to represent wider interests, counting among its leadership quite a number of Northern politicians who had defected from the SLPP. Additionally, their success in the 1967 elections despite intimidation and fraud seemed to point to general dissatisfaction with the SLPP's gross mismanagement of the country's economy and resources as well as Northern dissatisfaction at their perceived marginalization under the ruling party.

On attaining power in 1968, Siaka Stevens systematically harassed members of the opposition party, eventually imposing one-party-rule (through a questionable referendum). Starting with the 1968 by-elections, opposition members were harassed, imprisoned, and even killed, leading to an SLPP boycott of the 1977 elections and resulting in numerous extra-parliamentary manifestations of opposition by both civilians and army personnel. Although many SLPP members switched to the APC following the ban on multiparty politics, there still appeared to be some northern bias, with the number of northern representation increasing. For example, in 1973, under Steven's rule, Temne cabinet members numbered ten (41.4 percent) as compared to 14.3 percent in 1964. By contrast, Mende made up only 12.5 percent of the cabinet.[18] Ethno-regional cleavages were also visible during the rule of Joseph Momoh, Steven's handpicked successor who came to power in 1985. In 1988, under Momoh, Temne made up 44.4 percent of cabinet membership compared to 18.5 percent Mende.[19] Momoh also appointed Limba (his own ethnic group) to key cabinet posts as well as other prominent positions. While Kandeh argues that that state formation and class formation are the hidden factors that explain ethno politicization, he nevertheless acknowledges that class does have "affective primacy."[20]

The question of the role of ethnicity in elections receded in importance in the early 1990s, as civil war ravaged the country. Faced with the winds of democratic change blowing from former communist states in Eastern Europe, domestic civil society pressure for political liberalization as well as international opposition to authoritarian regimes, Momoh had agreed to a multiparty referendum in 1991, dismantling the single party system in favor of a multi-party one.[21] The civil war spilling over from Liberia into Sierra Leone, however, put plans for democratic renewal and multiparty elections on hold. A military coup in 1992 by junior officers frustrated with Momoh's inept handling of the war ushered in a military regime, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), which promised to end the war before handing over to a democratically elected regime. Their failure to deliver on this promise led to consultative conferences, Bintumani I (August 15 – 17, 1995) and Bintumani II (February 12, 1996), where local civil society groups demanded elections before peace. Civil society won out, and the 1996 elections took place within a framework of extreme insecurity. Although there were instances of voter intimidation by the Rebel United Front (RUF) and NPRC, both of whom saw benefits in continuing the war, overall the levels of inter-party violence that characterized previous elections were much lower, perhaps a reflection of the absence of an incumbent and the depersonalization of the contest given the use of the proportional representation (PR) system.[22]

On the other hand, results of the 1996 elections and the 2002 elections that followed again seemed to indicate the return of ethnicity's salience. Though the 1996 elections gave Ahmed Tejan Kabbah a hotly contested second round victory and the 2002 elections gave him a runaway victory, the regional patters that marked elections in the latter first republic demonstrated their endurance. Both elections showed clear ethno-regional patterns with parties performing better in the South and East doing less well in the North and vice versa. The SLPP, however, was also able to garner significant support in the Western area, where voting was more competitive than in all the other regions.[23]

The outcome of the 2007 elections was a subject of hot debate in the period leading up to the elections. In the final analysis, the SLPP's post-civil war honeymoon was short-lived as the 2007 elections were closely contested, reminiscent of those held forty years earlier in 1967. In the first round of the presidential elections held on 11 August 2007, no candidate secured the 55 percent necessary to be declared the outright winner, necessitating a run-off that saw Ernest Bai Koroma, the APC contender, take 54.6 percent of the votes.

Some observers had predicted an early win for the SLPP, citing incumbency advantages outlined above. Others, however, pointed to the growing unpopularity and disappointment with the SLPP in light of their lack of progress on many fronts: poverty remained a central issue, with the country taking last place in the UN Human Development Reports in consecutive years; corruption remained high as the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) established in 2002 through an act of parliament failed to meaningfully address corruption at the highest levels; and the provision of public goods such as light and water remained poor. There was a widespread concern, both domestically and internationally, that although the Kabbah government had received significant amounts of international aid, due in large part to the country's post-conflict status, wide-scale corruption meant that little of this aid actually benefitted ordinary citizens. Still others drew attention to the Margai factor. Added to the historic rivalry of the two main parties, the SLPP and the APC, was the newcomer, the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC). A former stalwart SLPP member, Charles Margai was the son of Albert Margai, Sierra Leone's second prime minister. He had

contended for the position of SLPP standard bearer but lost to Solomon Berewa. He soon broke with the party and in January 2006 officially registered his new PMDC.

Political pundits predicted the launching of this new party would split Mende votes as Margai had significant support among SLPP supporters given his former stature within the party. He also campaigned on a platform of "positive change" urging Sierra Leoneans to vote without respect to region or ethnicity. Hailing from the South, Margai was able to command significant support from this area, especially from Bonthe and Bo. He also needed the support of Kono and Freetown, areas widely perceived as outside of the ethno-regional alliances, with the potential to cast the deciding vote for the elections.[24] Although Margai failed to secure the presidency, he nevertheless performed well for a new party presidential candidate, coming in third behind Ernest Bai Koroma, the APC presidential candidate and Solomon Berewa of the incumbent party. In a surprising move that alienated many party members, Margai endorsed Koroma in the runoff. By so doing, he lent credence to his motto of change and unification, bridging the ethno-regional divide that has long marked Sierra Leone politics.

Examining Ethno-Regional Patterns in the 2007 Elections with Available Data

In 2004, Sierra Leone's decennial population and housing census was collected. The embargo placed on the census findings was lifted in February 2006, and the results were published at the chiefdom-level (N=166).[25] In a show of unprecedented transparency, the NEC reported the first round of presidential election results at the polling station-level (N=6,157). Aggregation allows these polling stations to be collected into units identical to those reported in the census. These two occurrences provide a unique opportunity to test the relationships between parties and social groupings in Sierra Leone with some statistical control but without having to resort to a costly national survey.

Figure 1 (below) displays the NEC reported results for the first round of the presidential election for the three candidates who earned more than two percent of the vote: Ernest Bai Koroma of the APC, Charles Margai of the PMDC, and Solomon Berewa of the SLPP. Clear patterns come to the fore when the electoral data is presented in this format with darker areas indicating a candidate's popularity and lighter areas a lack thereof. The APC candidate dominated in the North, the PMDC candidate was most successful in the Southwest, and the SLPP cleaned up in the Southeast. Without the benefit of detailed electoral maps, observers from both the domestic and international press picked up on the arrangement of votes and sought to give the results meaning.[26]

FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF FIRST ROUND PRESIDENTIAL VOTES IN SIERRA LEONE'S 2007 ELECTION DISPLAYED BY CHIEFDOM

Koroma (APC)

Margai (PMDC)
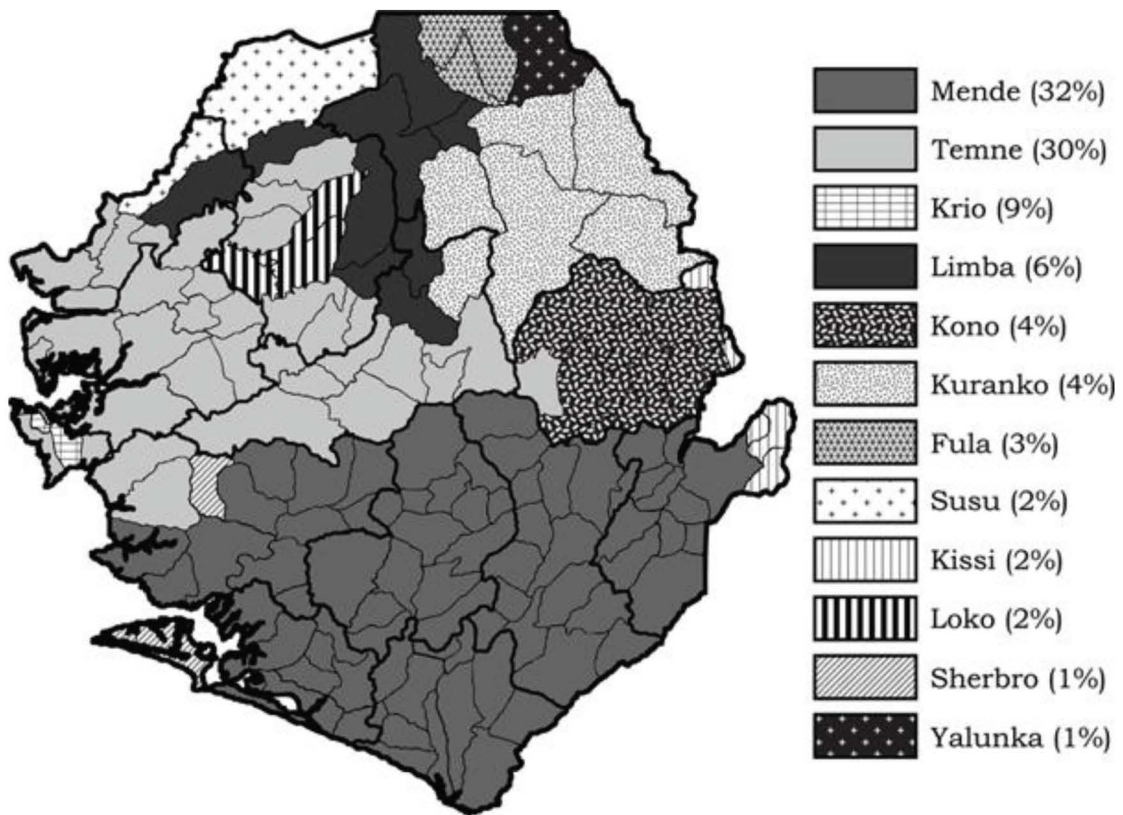
Berewa (SLPP)

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%
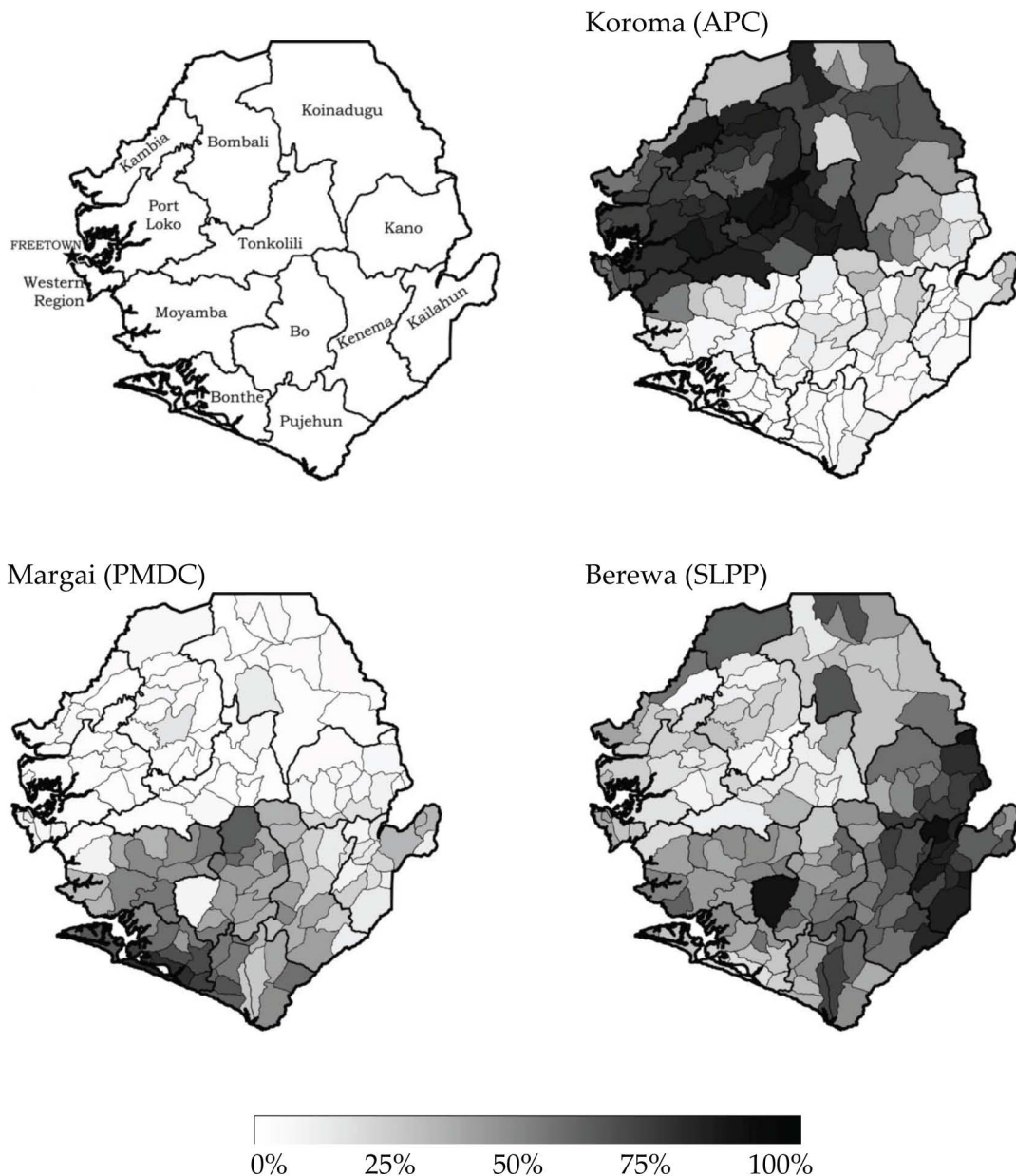
Note: Freetown's eight electoral wards are represented on the above maps as a single chiefdom. Also, the towns of Kenema, Koidu, Makeni, Bo, and Bonthe are represented as part of the chiefdoms in which they are contained. Election results are taken from NEC published reports.

Koroma captured Temne and Limba areas in the country's North, the common understanding of the first round's results goes, while Margai and Berewa split the South's Mende-speakers.[27] Comparing the electoral maps with a rough map of the country's ethnic groups (Figure 2 below), it is easy to see why this popular hypothesis that Sierra Leonean elections are largely contested along ethnic lines seems self-evident to so many casual

observers and scholars alike.[28] Though short order analysis of this sort is an excellent resource for hypothesis-generation, it runs a real risk of ignoring a potential spurious relationship that can be hidden by overlapping cleavages. While acknowledging the developing political animosities between Mende-speakers from the South and Temne-speakers from the North that led to the founding of the APC as an oppositional force to the SLPP, for example, Cartwright notes that the APC owes its genesis not only to a facile "tribal clash" but also to generational, status, and ideological conflicts that had simmered for some time within the ranks of the ruling SLPP.[29]

FIGURE 2: ETHNIC MAP OF SIERRA LEONE

Mende (32%)
Temne (30%)
Krio (9%)
Limba (6%)
Kono (4%)
Kuranko (4%)
Fula (3%)
Susu (2%)
Kissi (2%)
Loko (2%)
Sherbro (1%)
Yalunka (1%)

Note: Author created map depicting the ethno-linguistic group with the largest population in each chiefdom area according to the 2004 national census. Groups which were measured in the census but did not make up a plurality of a single chiefdom include Mandingo (2%), none (2%), Krim (0%), Vai (0%), English (0%), French (0%), Arabic (0%), and Others (0%).

With census data and election results available at the chiefdom-level, several of these potentially competing variables can be statistically controlled allowing us to test the veracity of the widely held assumptions about how ethnic variables work in Sierra Leonean politics not in isolation, but with alternative hypotheses taken into consideration. These tests attempt to more accurately predict Koroma, Margai, and Berewa's electoral tallies from the first round of 2007's presidential contest. Ethnicity proxies used as independent variables in these predictions are constructed using the percentage of the population of a given chiefdom who identify a particular language as their native tongue.[30] Independent variables touching

on socio-economic cleavages that could compete with ethnicity as a form of partisan binding available for testing include literacy and population density, as independent variables.[31]

TABLE 1: MULTIPLE REGRESSIONS USING VARIOUS SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND SECTIONAL INDICATORS AS PREDICTORS OF ELECTORAL SUCCESS

	APC	PMDC	SLPP
Constant	.466***	-.001	.473***
	(.029)	(.026)	(.038)
Mende (%)	-.566***	.406***	.169***
	(.028)	(.025)	(.036)
Temne (%)	.402***	.006	-.409***
	(.033)	(.030)	(.043)
Literacy (%)	.098**	.032	-.067
	(.048)	(.043)	(.063)
	N = 166	N = 166	N = 166
	R^2 = .911	R^2 = .749	R^2 = .655
	Adj. R^2 = .909	Adj. R^2 = .744	Adj. R^2 = .650
	SEE = 26.38	SEE = 23.59	SEE = 34.32

Note: The dependent variable is Koroma (APC), Margai (PMDC), and Berewa's (SLPP) percentage of the vote in a given chiefdom for the first round of presidential balloting in Sierra Leone's 2007 election. Due to the huge variance in chieftaincy population totals, the reported regressions were weighted by the total population of a chieftaincy. Data is taken from NEC published reports. Results of the regressions are reported as Coefficient / (Standard Error). Significance designations are *$p<0.1$; **$p<0.05$; and ***$p<0.01$.

Table 1 (above) reports the results from one of these regression models for the APC, PMDC, and SLPP candidates respectively. A first cut analysis of these results suggests the ethnic hypotheses are confirmed. Based on these findings, one can say with a great deal of confidence that a chiefdom's percentage of Temne-speakers was significantly positively correlated with Koroma's success. These results are well within the widely held assumptions about APC's ethno-linguistic foundations.[32] The relationship between a chiefdom's percentage of Mende-speakers and the SLPP is less pronounced, likely due in no small part to the presence of the PMDC, but no less clear. While it is impossible to know for certain because the NEC failed to release comprehensive polling station-level data for the second round, the APC hypothesis that the PMDC would cut into the traditional SLPP base of support in the Southeast seems plausible.[33] A chiefdom's percentage of Mende-speakers appears to be positively correlated with Margai's percentage of the vote largely because the party was rarely the first choice of voters in areas predominately populated by non-Mende-speakers. Berewa cast a far wider net than the PMDC candidate, and though he was undeniably unpopular in Temne and Limba-speaking areas, his Mende support was mitigated statistically by relatively strong showings in predominately Fula, Kuranko, Kono, and Susu-speaking areas.

Though literacy rates are controlled for in Table 1, other available socio-economic variables yield similar results. A region's status as urban and its percentage of Krio-speakers, generally regarded as Sierra Leone's most educated and affluent population because of their historical privileges and location almost exclusively in greater Freetown,

impact the depicted model insignificantly.[34] Since these three variables (literacy, urbanness, and Krio-speakers) are correlated, only one is included in the presented model. The relationship between the Mende/SLPP and Temne/APC is so robust that it stands up to a number of regression variations in addition to altering the socio-economic control. There is very little change in the significance or intensity of these relationships when the socio-economic controls are dropped, when the ethnic variables are used to predict partisan preferences in a bivariate regression, and when weights are removed so that each chieftaincy, regardless of size, is considered equally.

Conclusions: Putting the 2007 Elections into Historical Perspective

As constitutions were rewritten across Africa to accommodate the arrival of the "Third Wave" of democracy on the continent, several constitution-makers were of a similar mind with regard to ethnicity's proper role in the electoral process.[35] In this vein, Sierra Leone's 1991 Constitution expressly forbids parties from restricting their leadership to a single ethnic group; adopting a name, symbol, color, or motto with "particular significance or connotation to members of any particular tribal or ethnic group;" or advancing only the interests and welfare of a particular ethnic group (Article 35, Section 5). In societies as ethnically diverse as many of those found in Africa, prohibitions of this sort are intended to avoid the centrifugal tendencies predicted by scholars who view elections in competitive ethno-party conflicts as a recipe for violence.[36]

Given these sentiments, it is not surprising at all that pundits and politicians alike saw the specter of "tribalism" written all over Sierra Leone's 2007 elections. Those with a clear partisan preference most often blamed their opponents for unnecessarily dividing the populace by pandering to sectional identities. Those whose alliances are not as fixed saw the campaigns as potentially fanning the flames that could lead to a return to violence in a country still struggling to move past the decade-long conflict that cost tens of thousands of lives.[37] These concerns are far from novel. Observers of Sierra Leonean politics have a history of expressing distress over the politicization of ethnic conflicts and the potentially damaging effects of multi-party elections on national unity.[38]

Comparing the electoral outcomes of bygone elections with those of 2007 gives us some idea of whether the contemporary fears of "tribal" politics are a response to something fundamentally new or just old wine in new bottles. Unfortunately for this endeavor, most election results at the polling station or chiefdom-level have been lost to history. Without this specificity, it is impossible to replicate the above analysis across the years. We were, however, able to find district-level results for seven national elections in addition to 2007's first round of presidential balloting.[39] Given the small N (there are 14 districts in Sierra Leone as opposed to 166 chiefdoms), a series of regression analyses similar to Table 1 but across time is impossible. So to test the hypothesis that ethnic cleavages likely matter in Sierra Leonean politics and have mattered for some time as many have argued, we set about constructing an alternative measurement unburdened by the onerous requirements of multiple regression.

Our solution to this problem was to divide Sierra Leone's districts into four mutually exclusive categories and compare these categories' electoral results across elections (see Table 2 below). Three of these categories are based purely on ethnic composition with one category capturing districts where Mende-speakers are the largest group, another capturing districts where Temne-speakers are the largest group, and a third capturing districts where

the largest ethno-linguistic group is non-Mende and non-Temne. A fourth category is really a break away from the third category and has been labeled "Freetown."[40] The category "Freetown" is not without its ethnic component. The Western Area which we label "Freetown" contains the two most ethnically heterogeneous districts in Sierra Leone with Krio providing the area's modal ethno-linguistic category at 41 percent of the population, but Temne (29 percent), Mende (9 percent), and Limba-speakers (7 percent) each comprising significant population components. In addition to being more ethnically heterogeneous than the rest of Sierra Leone, "Freetown" is more educated. Nearly a third of the residents of Freetown and its immediate environs are currently attending school. In the remainder of the country, no district has a percentage exceeding Bo District's 26 percent and the mean percentage across districts is around 20 percent.

When parsed out in this manner, the historical election results yield interesting patterns. Taken as a group, the elections show that the SLPP has always done on average better than the APC in Mende-dominant districts and the arrangement is reversed in Temne-dominant districts. This consistent North/South, Temne/Mende, APC/SLPP patterning of elections is worth taking note of as potential support to the thesis that elections are an opportunity to express ethnic identities in the form of an ethnic census. Stopping the analysis here, however, would do an injustice to the more nuanced ethno-political relationships in Sierra Leone. The SLPP, for instance, did much better in Mende-speaking areas in elections they won as did the APC in Temne-speaking areas in their victorious elections suggesting that perhaps these blocs are more or less cohesive depending on some still ill-defined political zeitgeist.

Looking at the far east of the country to Kono and Koinadugu Districts and the far west to Freetown, a new arrangement appears. These non-Mende and non-Temne dominant areas of Sierra Leone do not appear to be locked into a permanent agreement with one party or another. Instead, they demonstrate a willingness to sway between parties from election to election. In relatively cosmopolitan Freetown this free-agent status is particularly important. For each of the elections on which we were able to collect district-level data, the modal category in Freetown is the winning party. With Mende-speakers and Temne-speakers each making up just under a third of the Sierra Leonean population, it appears from our analysis that it is amongst the remaining voters that electoral success lies. Making up just shy of a fifth of Sierra Leone's total population, Freetonians are a key component in this admixture

TABLE 2:
COMPARISON OF MEANS USING A DISTRICT'S PREDOMINANT ETHNIC GROUP TO PREDICT PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE

		SLLP				
		Mende	Temne	Freetown (WR	Other	Total
Legislative	1962	38%	28%	36%	34%	37%
	1967	53%	21%	25%	44%	40%
Presidential	1996 2nd Round	93%	23%	54%	47%	61%
	2002	95%	31%	54%	77%	69%
Legislative	2002	94%	30%	46%	74%	68%
Presidential	2007 1st Round	52%	16%	31%	45%	38%
	2007 2nd Round	77%	13%	30%	47%	49%
Legislative	2007	54%	18%	29%	47%	40%
N		6	4	1	2	13
		APC				
		Mende	Temne	Freetown (WR	Other	Total
Legislative	1962	3%	47%	34%	0%	18%
	1967	17%	77%	72%	54%	45%
Presidential	1996 2nd Round	*	*	*	*	*
	2002	2%	55%	30%	18%	23%
Legislative	2002	3%	55%	27%	18%	23%
Presidential	2007 1st Round	9%	78%	61%	47%	40%
	2007 2nd Round	23%	87%	69%	54%	51%
Legislative	2007	8%	72%	55%	45%	37%
N		6	4	1	2	13

Note: Districts with a Mende majority include Bo (79%), Bonthe (83%), Kailahun (70%), Kenema (77%), Moyamba (56%), and Pujehun (95%); Districts with a Temne plurality include Bombali (48%), Kambia (58%), Port Loko (86%), and Tonkolili (81%); Freetown (the combined Western Region urban and rural areas) has a Krio plurality (41%); and the remaining districts, Kono and Koinadugu respectively, have Kono (54%) and Kuranko-speaking (48%) pluralities.

The conclusion that non-Mende and non-Temne districts are the deciding factor in Sierra Leonean elections cannot be interpreted as a statement assigning essentialist ethnic understandings to Sierra Leone's Mende and Temne communities. To begin with, available data only lets us say something confidently about district and chiefdom units. Anecdotally, we can point to several cases of individual Mende-speakers supporting the APC and individual Temne-speakers supporting the SLPP. Within each district we cannot get at how

individuals or particular groups of voters behaved at the polling stations with the available data. At the district-level it bears mentioning that the data collected indicates a certain ebb and flow to Mende and Temne districts not dissimilar from that witnessed in the non-Mende and non-Temne districts. In elections won by the APC, Temne districts gave the party on average more than three-quarters of their vote. This figure is just over half for elections lost by the APC.[41] Comparing the 1996 and 2002 elections, which were won by the SLPP, to the 2007 elections, which were lost by the SLPP, Mende districts go from a support level greater than 90 percent to one around 50 percent in the elections with a PMDC presence and just over 75 percent in the second round presidential election without a PMDC candidate. Though ethnicity matters, something else is at work.

More individual-level polling data that gets at individual reasons for voter preferences would help illuminate what this something is. Without this data, one can only surmise. For example, Kandeh has noted that failure to translate political positions into tangible benefits for constituencies could effectively undermine support among constituencies.[42] While Kandeh has attributed this to the contracting ability of the state to provide patronage in the face of excessive exploitation by politicians, one could extend this observation to a general ineffectiveness of government that arises following a situation of conflict where government resources are stretched and performance capacity is generally limited. Given this situation, widespread discontent exists with state performance, possibly transcending ethnic considerations. Research carried out in 2006 in several communities of Kailahun district in the East, a traditionally SLPP stronghold, suggests that citizens disappointed with SLPP performance were amenable to altering their partisan status quo but that their ability to vote for another party was constrained by, among other factors, chiefs who wield significant influence.[43]

This latter point is an important one given traditional authorities' proximity to the local populace and their control over the determination of citizenship and accompanying rights enable chiefs to wield considerable power within their communities.[44] As a result, political parties of all dispensations have curried favor with chiefs and become involved in local rivalries in the hope that traditional authorities will deliver the votes. As Fanthorpe notes, in rural areas ethnicity (however defined) remains a salient structure for marshaling political support, with chiefs serving as the most visible figurehead of respective communities.[45] This is to say that the anecdotal findings discussed above suggesting that discontent with government performance could perhaps transcend ethnic considerations was not without countervailing pressures

On the other hand, in ethnically heterogeneous regions such as the Western Area, where chiefs hold much less sway, dissatisfaction with current policies could point to a possible explanation for the APC's strong showing as the opposition party in 2007. Whereas the SLPP won two thirds of the seats in the Western Area in 2002, they lost all of them in the 2007 elections. Although some pundits point to the large numbers of Temne residing in Freetown and a historically-rooted alliance between the Krio and the Temne under the banner of the APC as reason for their positive showing in the Western Area, this cannot be the only reason given that prior elections reveal that the Western Area does not always vote APC. In a recent survey conducted by BBC World Service and Search for Common Ground, urban residents in Freetown reported high levels of knowledge and involvement in the electoral process. A total of 86 percent of respondents knew when the elections were taking place, and were more likely overall to name parties contesting the elections outside of the three main ones. In addition, along with Kailahun and Bombali, western urban residents were more likely to

distinguish policy differences between the parties, especially social policy. Urban-dwelling Freetonians also reported the lowest percentage of trust in local politicians.[46]

Some maintain that the colonial legacy of bifurcated governance that saw Freetown administered independently from the interior continues today, with Freetown remaining somewhat autonomous from the rest of the country, a separation that is reflected in social and political attitudes less tolerant of ineffective government.[47] Thus, familiarity of and disappointment with SLPP policies could point to a possible reason for the transference of support from the SLPP to the APC in this region, especially since the APC campaign focused on the SLPP's economic mismanagement, general bad governance, and poor development record. For example, the International Crisis Group has argued that patronage and ethnicity seem to be less salient for the more politically informed urban areas for a number of reasons, including the rise in membership in voluntary associations that transcend ethnic affiliations.[48] Both Jalloh and Kandeh have argued that despite the clear evidence of the influence of ethnic identity on voter choice, the elections also reflected broad dissatisfaction with SLPP's poor economic performance and perceived levels of corruption.[49]

While the apparent "northernization" of the cabinet under Ernest Bai Koroma has again brought cries of ethnicity to the fore, it remains to be seen whether electoral choices for the upcoming elections in 2012 will be reflective of ethnic blocs hardening or will widen the perception that certain swing voters are able to transcend ethnicity as the historical data appears to show. Politicians would be wise to note that although their ethnic bases can make them viable candidates, playing the ethnic card too strongly will likely alienate the very voters they need to transform from viable candidates into elected officials.

Notes

1 Öhman 2008.
2 Bratton 1998.
3 Lindberg 2003.
4 See for instance Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Carothers 2002; Schedler 2002.
5 Lindberg 2006, p. 140.
6 Carothers 1995.
7 For foundational works of this variety see Apter 1965; Coleman 1964; Hodgkin 1961; Morgenthau 1964; Wallerstein 1967; and Zolberg 1966.
8 Some recent works of this variety include Cheeseman 2007; Fridy 2007; McLaughlin 2007; Posner 2005; Miguel 2004; and Mozaffar 2003.
9 Kandeh 2004.
10 On ideology see Zolberg 1966, p. 35. On age and status see Cartwright 1970. On government performance see Kandeh 1992.
11 For a particularly comprehensive review of the interplay between ethnicity, class, and state formation, see Kandeh 1992.
12 In 1808, the Freetown-based settlement for freed slaves became a crown colony and as such was under the direct administration of the crown. British influence was extended to the hinterland in 1896 when it became a Protectorate, governed primarily through a system of indirect rule, with more political autonomy than the Colony.
13 Kilson 1966.
14 Last et al. 1987, p. 417.

15 Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999.
16 Bebler 1973, p. 64.
17 Kandeh 1992, p. 91.
18 Kandeh 1992.
19 Kandeh 1992 p. 93.
20 Kandeh 1992 p. 98.
21 Reno 1995.
22 Riley 1996; Abdullah 1997.
23 Kandeh 2003.
24 Kabba 2005; Marrah 2007.
25 Chiefdoms are a geographic unit inherited by independent Sierra Leone from the British. Included in this 166 total for the purposes of this paper are the wards of Freetown as well as municipal areas of Bo Town, Kenema Town, Koidu Town, and Makeni Town. Though not referred to as chiefdoms, these urban wards serve an identical purpose as chiefdoms as census categories and parliamentary districts. For more on the origins and functions of "chiefdoms" see Fanthorpe 1998.
26 The popular sentiment is captured by Manson 2007.
27 The South's split along East/West lines is attributed largely to differing interpretations of the Special Court's treatment of Kamajor leader Hinga Norman. In Bo District, where Kamajor forces did most of their recruiting, it is possible that Norman's endorsement of the PMDC helped to loosen the SLPP's historical stranglehold on the region. Perhaps more importantly in explaining PMDC success in Moyamba, Bonthe, and Pujehun, however, is the Margai family name. Though once indelibly linked to the SLPP, when Charles Margai broke away from the party of his father and uncle he took with him many of the family connections emanating from their home chiefdom of Gbangbatoke. For more on the Hinga Norman factor see Thyness 2007. On Margai's political heritage see Cartwright 1978.
28 One cannot create an ethnic map without doing some violence to social realities on the ground. In Sierra Leone there are no completely ethnically heterogeneous chiefdoms. Additionally, if anyone doubts that ethnicity can just as easily be interpreted as a dependent variable and an independent variable they need look no further than the Krio of Freetown for a dramatic example of ethnic construction. Describing some of Freetown's eminent 'Krio' families, Kandeh notes that "[t]he Mende origin of the Bowen, Mason, Moore and Marke families, the Temne origin of the Gurney-Nicol family, the Limba origin of the Meheux and Leopold families and the Susu origin of the Sarif-Easmon family are well known and have been documented" (A.J.G. Wyse cited in Kandeh 1992, pp. 98-99).
29 Cartwright 1970, pp. 125-37.
30 Variables included in various models include Krio, Limba, Mende, and Temne. These four ethno-linguistic identities represent Sierra Leone's most prominent. No other ethno-linguistic identity claims at least 5 percent of the population. The national percentages of these, and several other ethno-linguistic identities, are detailed in the key for Figure 2.
31 Literacy is measured by the percentage of residents who report being literate in a given chiefdom. The average literacy rate in Sierra Leone is 39 percent with Freetown's

Central Ward 2 being the most literate sample unit (78 percent) and Bonthe District's Sittia being the least (7 percent).

32   As ethnicity can be constructed multiple ways with individuals' complex set of social identities we ran preliminary regressions for Table 1 with religion (the other oft discussed sectional cleavage available in the census) included as a potential predictor of election results. In these multivariate regressions ethnicity remained the dominant factor while religion was an insignificant predictor.

33   "SLPP Gone!" 2006. *We Yone* newspaper 18 December.

34   Population density is represented by an Urban Dummy which assigns a one to Bo Town, Kenema Town, Koidu Town, Makeni Town, and Freetown's eight wards and a zero to all other chiefdoms. Just under a quarter of Sierra Leonean voters live in the designated urban areas.

35   Osaghae 1998.

36   Horowitz 1985, pp. 342-49.

37   The *Times* of London reported that approximately one in ten Sierra Leoneans were murdered, maimed, and/or raped during the civil war (Clayton 2007).

38   Simpson 1972.

39   Reported results for the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2007 are taken from Sierra Leone's NEC whose internet site (www.necsierraleone.org) is now defunct. Results from 1962 and 1967 are from Cartwright 1970; results from 1996 are from Interim National Electoral Commission. 1996. *Executive Summary of the Report of the Work of the Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC): 1994-1996*. Freetown, Sierra Leone: INEC; and 2002 results are from Adam Carr's election database (http://psephos.adam-carr.net/countries/s/sierraleone/).

40   We use "Freetown" as opposed to simply Freetown here to distinguish the greater Freetown area from Freetown the city.

41   We should note here that similar to the Margai factor, the presence of competing parties with strong northern support like the United National People's Party (UNPP) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) helped split the northern vote in the 1996 elections.

42   Kandeh 1998.

43   M'Cormack-Hale 2008.

44   We should note that the authority of chiefs is not without contestation—a number of scholars have pointed to the abuse of power and the marginalization of the youth in traditional structures as an instrumental contributory cause of the decade-long civil war. See for example, Jackson 2005; Richards 2003; and Fanthorpe 2001.

45   Fanthorpe 2001.

46   Nineteen percent of respondents said they had a high level of trust in local politicians; and 13 percent said the same of national leaders, the second lowest level. The lowest percentage 11 percent was recorded in Kailahun district (BBC World Service 2007).

47   Jackson 2005.

48   International Crisis Group 2008.

49   Jalloh 2008; Kandeh 2008.

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