



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	SIERRA LEONE
Title	Treatment of members of the National Grand Coalition party and of their relatives by the government
Reference period	January 2020 – 23 March 2024
Topic(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Background informationTreatment by the government
Date of completion	26 March 2024
Query Code	Q26-2024
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	N/A

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Sierra Leone

Treatment of members of the National Grand Coalition party and of their relatives by the government

1. Background information

Political life in Sierra Leone has been dominated by two parties, namely the All People's Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)¹. According to Freedom House, the National Grand Coalition (NGC) was created following a departure of 'several high-profile figures' from the SLPP in 2017.² NGC was one of the 17 political parties that registered for the 2018 elections.³ The US Department of State (USDOS) annual report on human rights practices covering 2022 indicated that NGC is a member of the 13-party Coalition of Progressive Political Parties (CoPPP).⁴

During the parliamentary elections in 2018, APC won with 68 seats while the SLPP was the second party with 49 seats⁵, and NGC, having 'only very minor success'⁶, also entered parliament securing 4 seats, while two other opposition parties shared 11 seats.⁷ Opposition presidential candidate Julius Maada Bio from the SLPP won the presidency.^{8,9}

Before the following June 2023 general elections¹⁰, in April 2023, NGC and SLPP announced their political alliance, according to local news outlets¹¹.

The June 2023 general election saw a power change, after the SLPP won, and SLPP's presidential candidate, Julius Maada Bio, also won his second term as the president in the presidential election.¹² The APC, who came second and became the main opposition party, rejected the results because of 'blatant irregularities'¹³ and stated that it will not take part in

¹ EU, Election Observation Mission, Sierra Leone 2023 Final Report, General elections, 24 June 2023, [url](#), p. 9;

Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 - Sierra Leone, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

² Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 - Sierra Leone, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

³ ECSL, Registered Political Parties, n.d., [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 - Sierra Leone, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Sierra Leone, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁵ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021 - Sierra Leone, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report Sierra Leone, 2024, [url](#), p. 13

⁷ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021 - Sierra Leone, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸ Al Jazeera, Sierra Leone opposition leader wins presidential election runoff, 5 April 2018, [url](#); AP News, Sierra

Leone's president wins second term without need for runoff, election commission announces, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹ The previous president from the APC, Ernest Bai Koroma, had already exhausted his two terms as the president and could not run for the presidency again. See: Africanews, RECAP 1: Sierra Leone's 2018 general elections – The twists and turns, last updated 9 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰ EU, Election Observation Mission, Sierra Leone 2023 Final Report, General elections, 24 June 2023, [url](#), p. 9

¹¹ The Calabash Newspaper, That SLPP, NGC Alliance: Marriage of Convenience; or Out of Fear, 26 April 2023, [url](#); Politico SL, Sierra Leone ruling and opposition NGC parties form alliance ahead of June polls, 26 April 2023, [url](#)

¹² Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 17 January 2024, [url](#), p. 1

¹³ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 17 January 2024, [url](#), p. 1



governmental activities, including parliament and municipal councils.¹⁴ According to the APC, at least one person was killed by the police during a violent incident that broke out a few days before the election near their party headquarters.¹⁵

The EU Election Observation Mission has concluded that the election was affected by ‘lack of transparency’ and ‘significant statistical inconsistencies in the results’.¹⁶ While sources have described the election period as ‘calm’, there were also some reports of ‘isolated’ instances of violence.¹⁷ Referring to the period of July to December 2023, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF- Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge) has described the political situation in Sierra Leone as ‘tense’.¹⁸ In August 2023, authorities arrested several individuals for allegedly planning a coup.¹⁹

In October 2023, APC and SLPP signed an ‘agreement to end political crisis’²⁰, that emerged after the APC did not recognize the results of the June 2023 presidential election and boycotted parliamentary and municipal councils’ work.²¹ The two parties agreed to release prisoners ‘arrested during civil and election protests’ and to stop politically motivated court proceedings.²²

In November 2023, some military barracks, prisons, and other locations in the capital Freetown were attacked by armed actors in an ‘attempted coup d’état’.²³ Some 20 people were killed, and 2 200 prisoners escaped from the attacked prisons.²⁴ According to the government, gunmen behind the attack were affiliated with the former president Ernest Bai Koroma²⁵, from the APC²⁶, who was summoned for questioning²⁷. The government charged a dozen people with treason in January 2024²⁸, including Koroma²⁹, and additional 27 soldiers were charged on various offences over the coup attempt.³⁰ Referring to various sources, including media and civil servants, BAMF indicated that there was no evidence of any connection between Koroma and the coup attempt, and the APC has claimed that the government has targeted their members for arrests in a ‘witch-hunt’.³¹

¹⁴ IPS, Cloud Lingers over Sierra Leone’s Election, 7 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵ Reuters, Violence flares in Sierra Leone ahead of presidential vote, 21 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶ EU, Election Observation Mission, Sierra Leone 2023 Final Report, General elections, 24 June 2023, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁷ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 17 January 2024, [url](#), p. 1; EU, Election Observation Mission, Sierra Leone 2023 Final Report, General elections, 24 June 2023, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁸ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 17 January 2024, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁹ Al Jazeera, Renewed violence in Sierra Leone is a sign of fragility, polarisation, 1 December 2023, [url](#)

²⁰ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 17 January 2024, [url](#), p. 3

²¹ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 17 January 2024, [url](#), p. 4

²² Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 17 January 2024, [url](#), p. 4

²³ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 17 January 2024, [url](#), pp. 3-4

²⁴ Al Jazeera, Sierra Leone attacks were a failed coup attempt, officials say, 28 November 2023,

[url](#); Reuters, Sierra Leone information minister says weekend attack was a failed coup, 28 November 2023, [url](#)

²⁵ Reuters, Sierra Leone information minister says weekend attack was a failed coup, 28 November 2023, [url](#)

²⁶ Brenthurst Foundation (The), Fears of Violence in Sierra Leone as Former President Koroma Faces Treason Charge, 10 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁷ Reuters, Sierra Leone ex-president Koroma summoned for questioning over failed coup, 7 December 2023, [url](#)

²⁸ Reuters, Sierra Leone charges ex-president’s guard, 11 others over failed coup, 2 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁹ Reuters, Sierra Leone charges ex-president’s guard, 11 others over failed coup, 2 January 2024, [url](#)

³⁰ BBC News, Sierra Leone charges 27 soldiers over foiled coup attempt, 9 January 2024, [url](#)

³¹ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 17 January 2024, [url](#), p. 4



2. Treatment by the government

Information on treatment of members of the National Grand Coalition party and of their relatives by the government was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information on the situation of the opposition may be relevant.

The UN Human Rights Council noted in a report from July 2021 that ‘the criminal libel law that had given political leaders the power to silence their critics or opponents had been repealed in 2020. As a direct result of this repeal, all criminal libel cases in court had been dismissed’.³²

According to CIVICUS, a non-profit organisation aiming at strengthening civil society around the world, the August 2022 cost-of-living-crisis protests in Sierra Leone were seen by the government as initiated by the opposition.³³ According to the testimonies collected by Amnesty International (AI), security forces used ‘excessive use of force’ during the protests in Freetown, Makeni, and Kamakwie.³⁴ More than 20 protesters were killed during the protests and no investigation had taken place as of October 2023.³⁵

In July 2022, NGC chair Dennis Bright was arrested for allegedly inciting a previously banned protest, and he was released after a few days without any charges.³⁶ In October 2022, an opposition politician was imprisoned for speaking about a right to protest on TV.³⁷

According to an article by Al Jazeera, politics in Sierra Leone has been defined by ‘ethno-regional divisions’ and these divisions represent ‘risks to jobs and livelihood, diminished access to opportunities, and marginalisation of one’s ethnic group in public life’.³⁸ Similarly, an Afrobarometer report, published in March 2023, has found that following the change of government in 2018, perceived opposition supporters have lost ‘formal-sector jobs’, and in 2022, the APC presidential candidate stated that ‘only ruling-party supporters are able to access jobs’.³⁹

³² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review; Sierra Leone, 22 July 2021, [url](#), para .78

³³ CIVICUS, Sierra Leone: Will The Lessons Be Learned From Protest Violence?, 30 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁴ AI, Sierra Leone: Seven months after August’s protests which turned violent in some locations, no justice yet for those injured or the families of those killed , 20 March 2023, [url](#)

³⁵ AI, Sierra Leone: Still no justice for victims of August 2022 violent protests more than one year on, 17 October 2023, [url](#)

³⁶ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Sierra Leone, 20 March 2023, [url](#) , p. 8; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Sierra Leone, 2023, [url](#)

³⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report Sierra Leone, 2024, [url](#), p. 9; Sierra Leone Telegraph (The), More political arrests in Sierra Leone as human rights lawyer Ady Macauley is locked up for interpreting the law on national TV, 7 October 2022, [url](#)

³⁸ Al Jazeera, Renewed violence in Sierra Leone is a sign of fragility, polarisation, 1 December 2023, [url](#)

³⁹ Afrobarometer, Ahead of election, should Sierra Leoneans be worried about social cohesion?, 23 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2



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