



In Sierra Leone, perceived corruption rises, public trust and leaders' job approval drop

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 106 | Lena Thompson

Summary

Fourteen years after the end of its civil war, Sierra Leone continues to struggle with weak governance, widespread poverty, and systemic corruption that undermine efforts toward sustainable development.

These challenges are reflected in citizens' perceptions expressed in the latest Afrobarometer survey. A large majority of Sierra Leoneans say the level of corruption in the country has increased over the past year. Compared to the previous survey in 2012, citizens express lower levels of trust in the president, Parliament, local government councillors, the National Electoral Commission, the National Revenue Authority, courts of law, and the army. Moreover, seven of 10 Sierra Leoneans disapprove of the performance of their members of Parliament (MPs) and local government councillors. With two years remaining until the next general election, these findings indicate potential roadblocks ahead for the country's political leaders and the sustainability of democratic governance.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. After five rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2013, results of Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being published. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Sierra Leone, led by ITASCAP, Campaign for Good Governance, and Lena Thompson, interviewed 1,200 adult Sierra Leoneans in May-June 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. One previous Afrobarometer survey was conducted in Sierra Leone in 2012.

Key findings

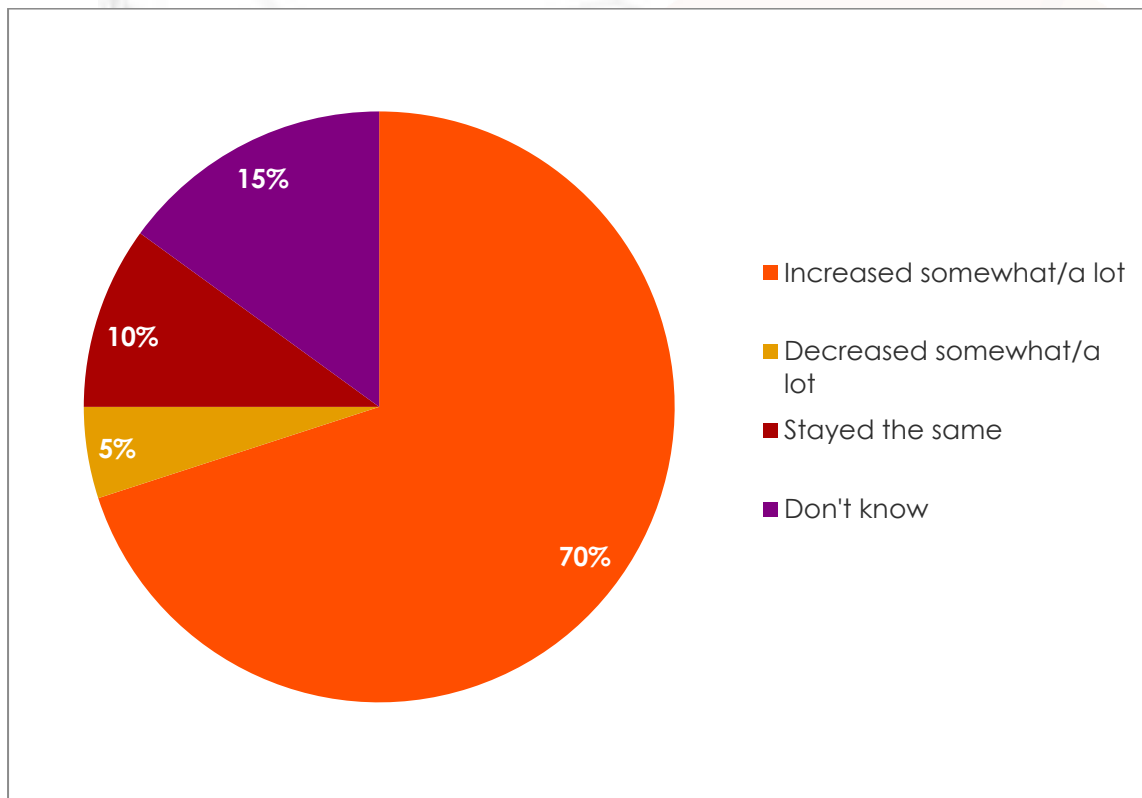
- Seven of 10 Sierra Leoneans (70%) say the level of corruption in the country increased during the year preceding the survey.
- While public perceptions of corruption among the police decreased from 2012, a majority (59%) of respondents still say "most" or "all" police officials are corrupt – the highest level of perceived corruption among public institutions.
- Sierra Leoneans express lower levels of trust in the president, local government councillors, the National Revenue Authority, the ruling party, and the army than they did in 2012. The proportion who say they trust the president "somewhat" or "a lot" declined from 70% to 52%.

- Barely half of Sierra Leoneans (51%) approve of the president's performance, and seven of 10 (71%) disapprove of the performance of their MP.
- A huge majority (82%) of Sierra Leoneans "agree" or "strongly agree" that political party leaders are more interested in advancing their own ambitions than in serving the interests of the people.

Increasing corruption

Despite the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2000, corruption continues to be a major problem, widely seen as a significant factor in the country's inadequate level of socioeconomic development. Seven of 10 Sierra Leoneans (70%) say the level of corruption increased "somewhat" or "a lot" during the previous year (Figure 1).

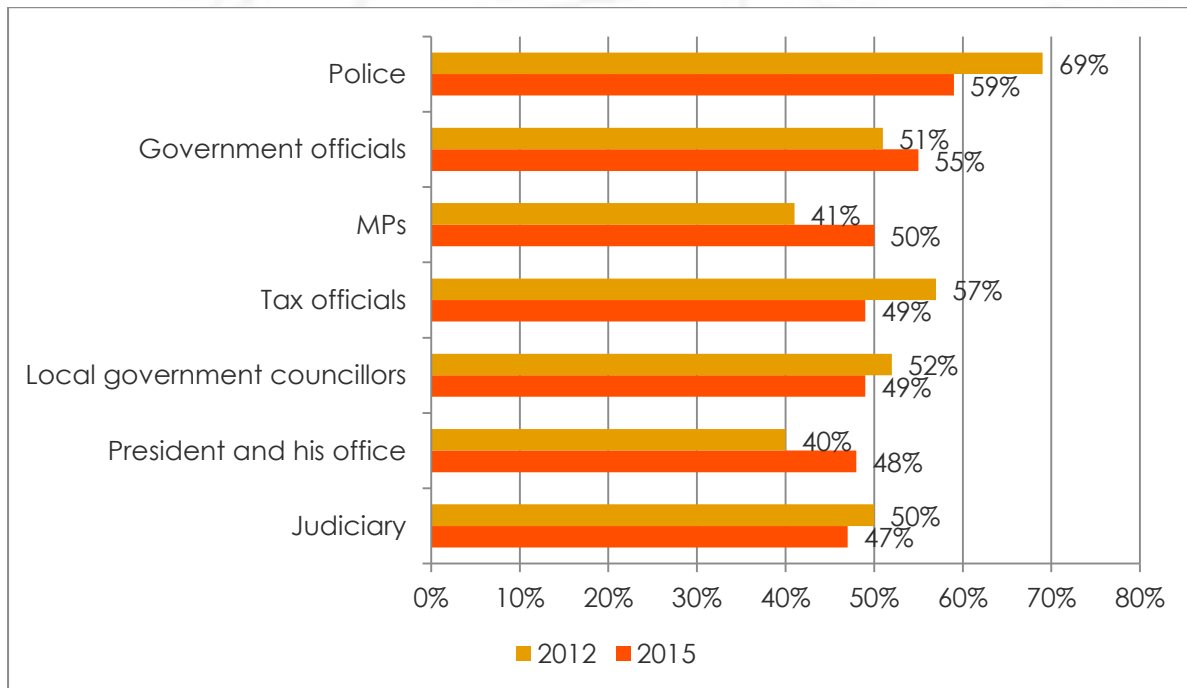
Figure 1: Increase in public perceptions of corruption | Sierra Leone | 2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?*

Perceptions of corruption in specific state institutions remain high. About six in 10 respondents (59%) say "most" or "all" police officials are corrupt – an improvement of 10 percentage points from 2012, but still the highest level of perceived corruption among public officials. Public perceptions of corruption increased with regard to the presidency (from 40% in 2012 to 48% in 2015), MPs (41% to 50%), and government officials (51% to 55%), while they decreased with regard to tax officials (from 57% to 49%) (Figure 2). But even where fewer citizens see "most" or "all" officials as corrupt than in 2012, the proportion who see "none" or only "some" of them as corrupt did not increase significantly. Instead, across the board, the proportion of "Don't know" responses grew substantially, from 1%-4% of responses to 10%-16%.

Figure 2: Perceived corruption among public institutions | Sierra Leone | 2012-2015

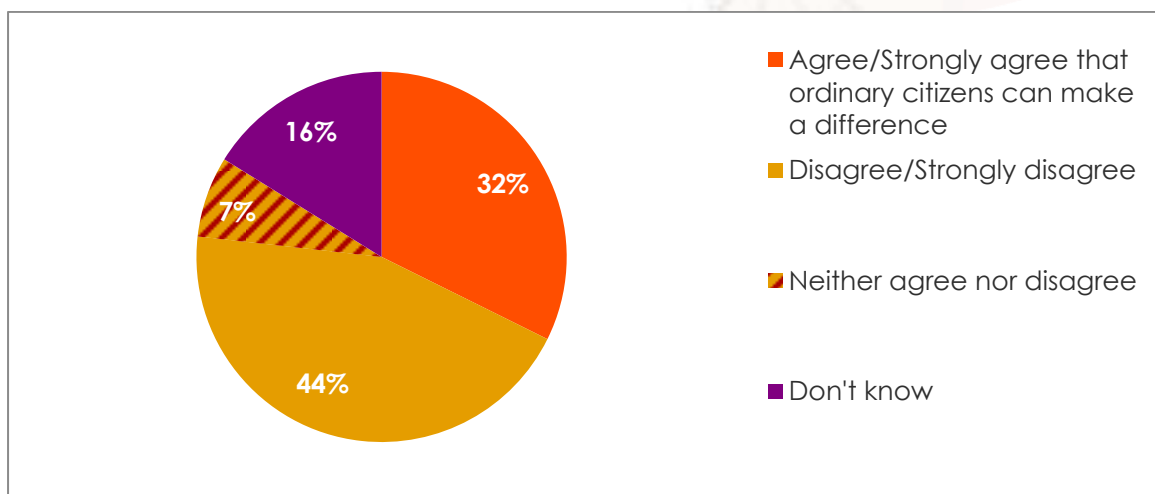


Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

The fight against corruption

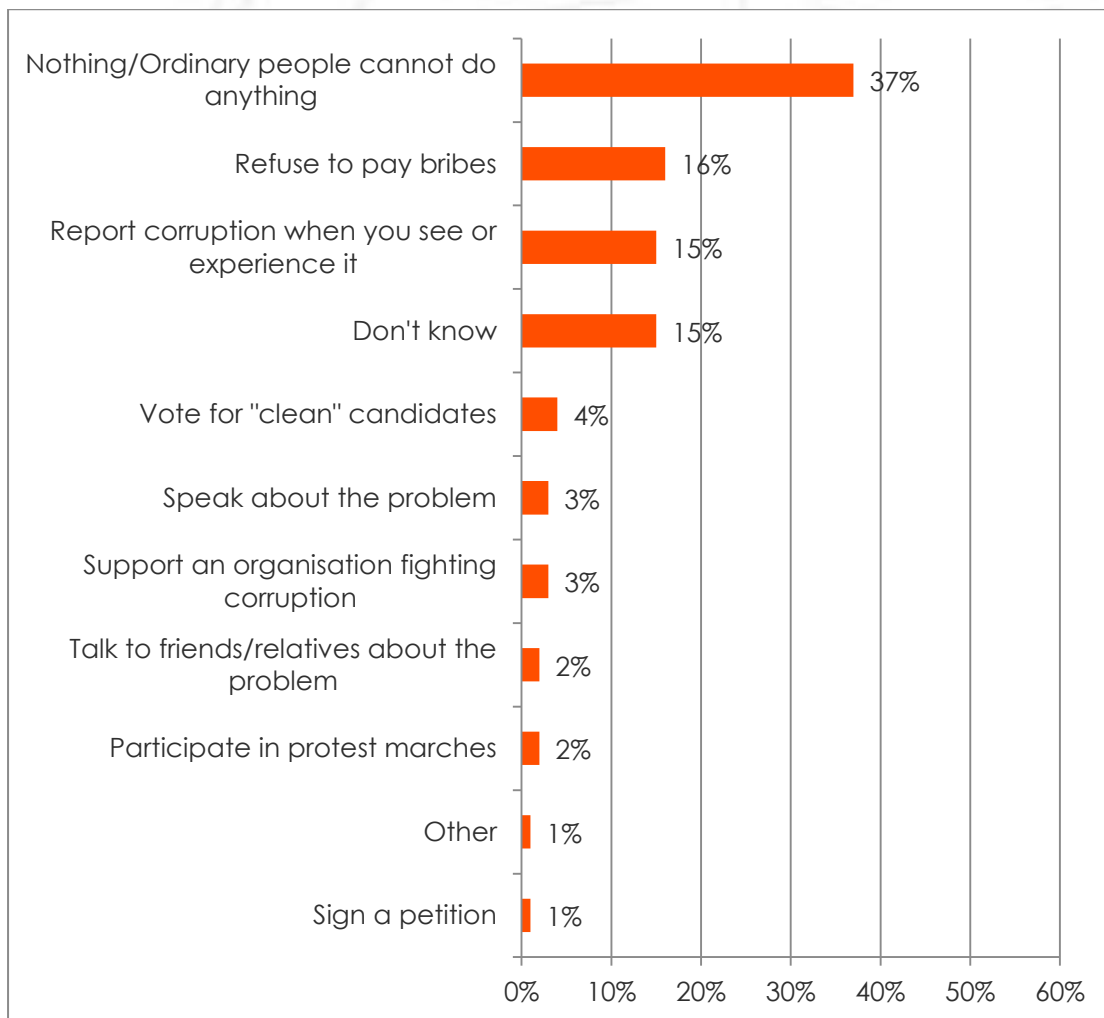
Faced with high levels of public corruption, most Sierra Leoneans seem resigned. Only one-third (32%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that ordinary citizens can make a difference in the fight against corruption (Figure 3), and when asked what are the most effective actions that ordinary citizens can take to help, the most frequent response (offered by 37% of citizens) is “nothing” (in addition to 15% who say they “don’t know”) (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Can ordinary citizens make a difference in the fight against corruption? | Sierra Leone | 2015



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption?

Figure 4: Most effective action that ordinary citizens can take | Sierra Leone | 2015



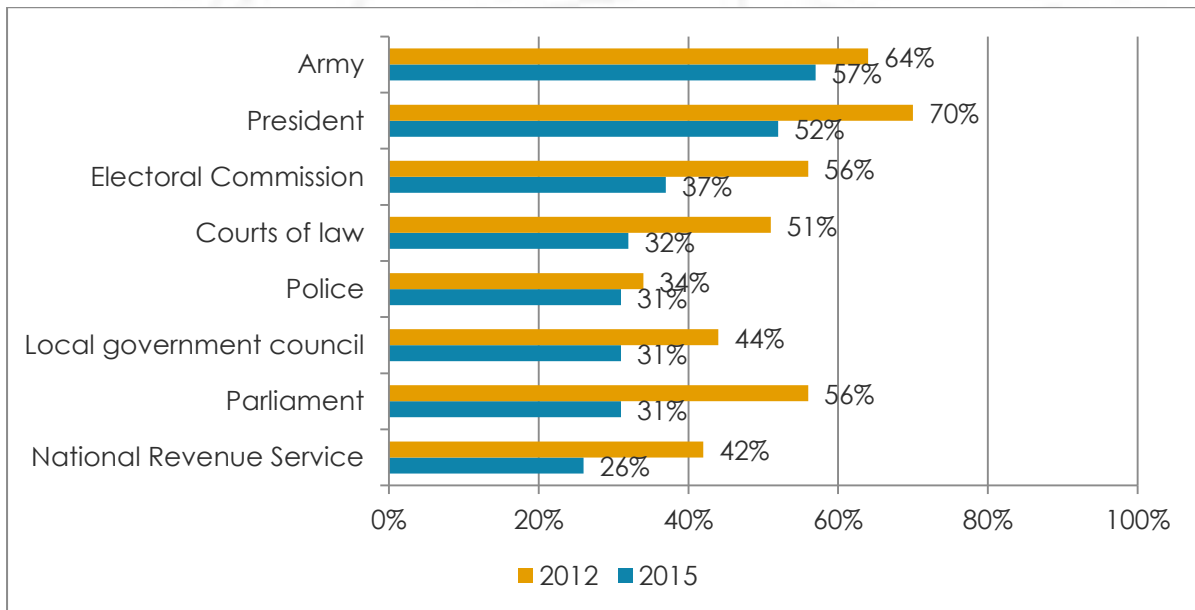
Respondents were asked: *What is the most effective thing that an ordinary person like you can do to help combat corruption in this country?*

Declining trust in public institutions

In any democracy, trust in the government and public institutions is of paramount importance. The survey found that Sierra Leoneans express lower levels of trust in public officials than in the previous survey round in 2012 (Figure 5).

Trust in the president dropped dramatically: Only 52% say they trust the President Ernest Bai Koroma "somewhat" or "a lot," down from 70% in 2012. Even larger drops in public trust were recorded with regard to Parliament (a 25-percentage-point decline, from 56% to 31%), courts of law (from 51% to 32%), and the National Electoral Commission (from 56% to 37%). Trust in the National Revenue Service also declined sharply, to a low of 26% of citizens who say they trust the tax department "somewhat" or "a lot." Less than one-third (31%) of citizens say they trust the police "somewhat" or "a lot," a slight decrease from 34% in 2012. The army suffered a 7-percentage-point decline in public trust, from 64% to 57% – a concern considering the negative role of the army in Sierra Leone's torturous political history.

Figure 5: Public trust in state institutions | Sierra Leone | 2012-2015



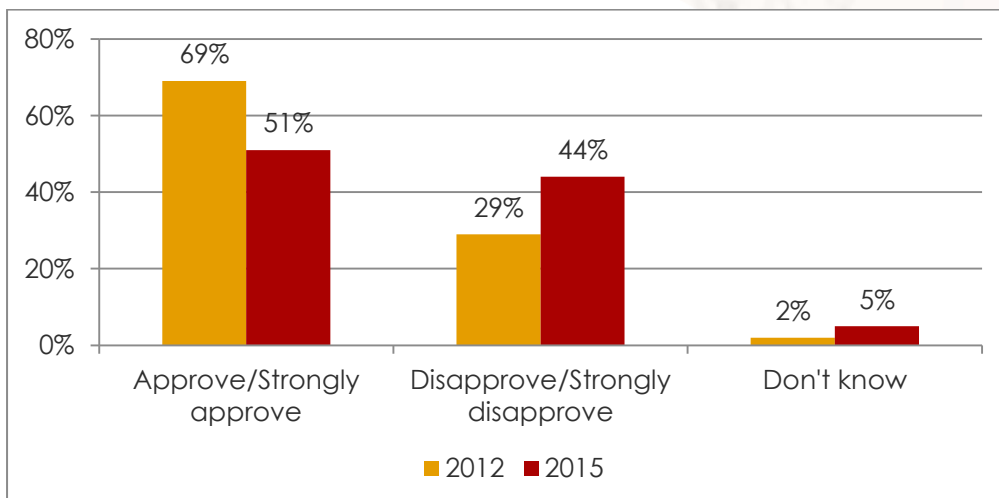
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president?

Performance of political leaders

Over the past year, Sierra Leoneans have endured considerable hardships, including having to fight against the spread of the deadly Ebola virus. Despite this, a slight majority (51%) say they “approve” or “strongly approve” of President Koroma's job performance (Figure 6). However, this proportion is 18 percentage points lower than in 2012.

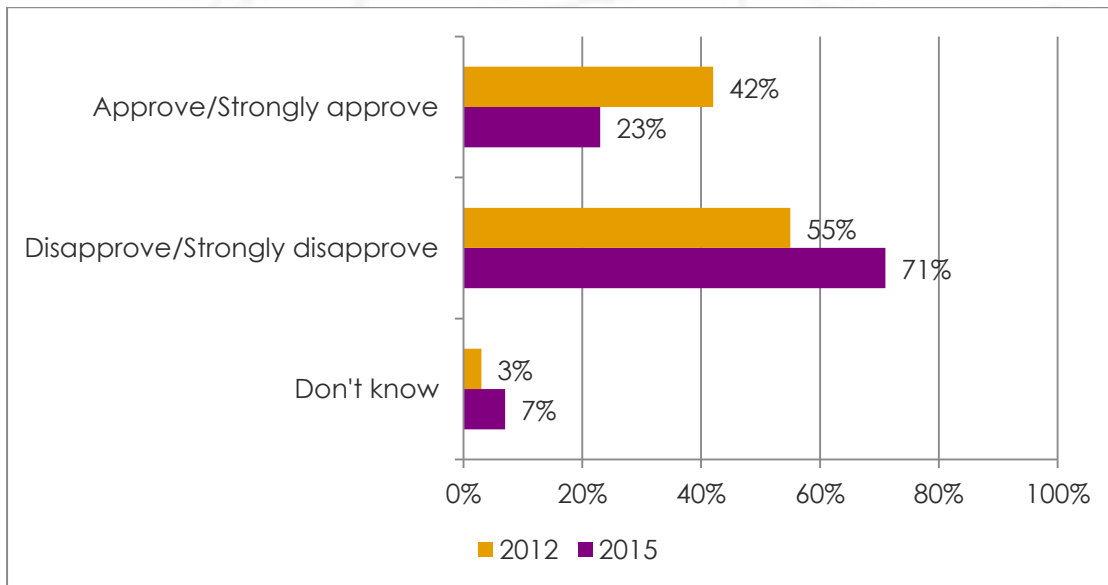
MPs and local government councillors fare far worse: About seven in 10 respondents “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove” of the job their parliamentarians (71%) (Figure 7) and local councillors (68%) (Figure 8) are doing. Both ratings are significantly worse than in 2012.

Figure 6: Job performance of the president | Sierra Leone | 2012-2015



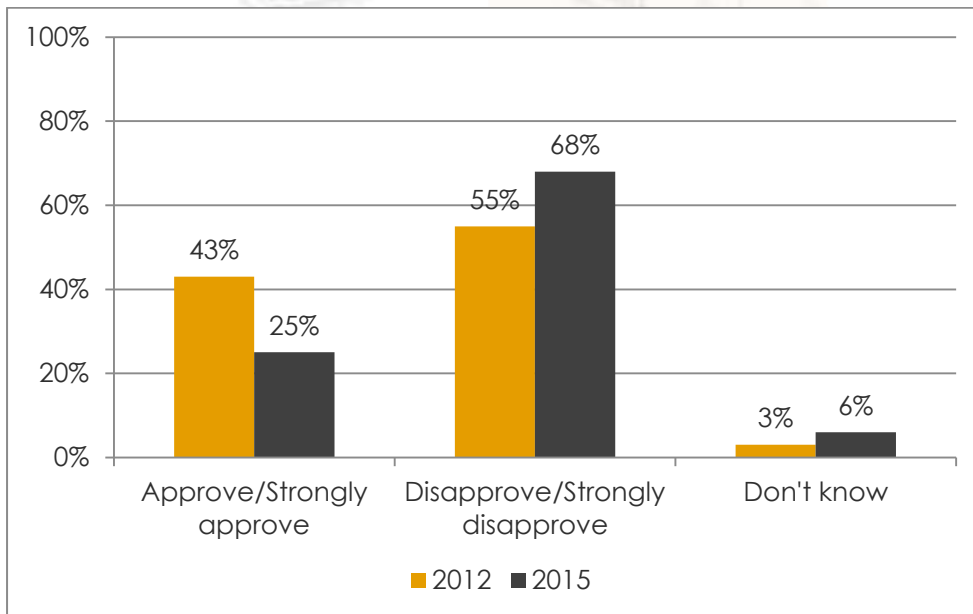
Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: President Ernest Koroma?

Figure 7: Job performance of MPs | Sierra Leone | 2012-2015



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your member of Parliament (MP)?

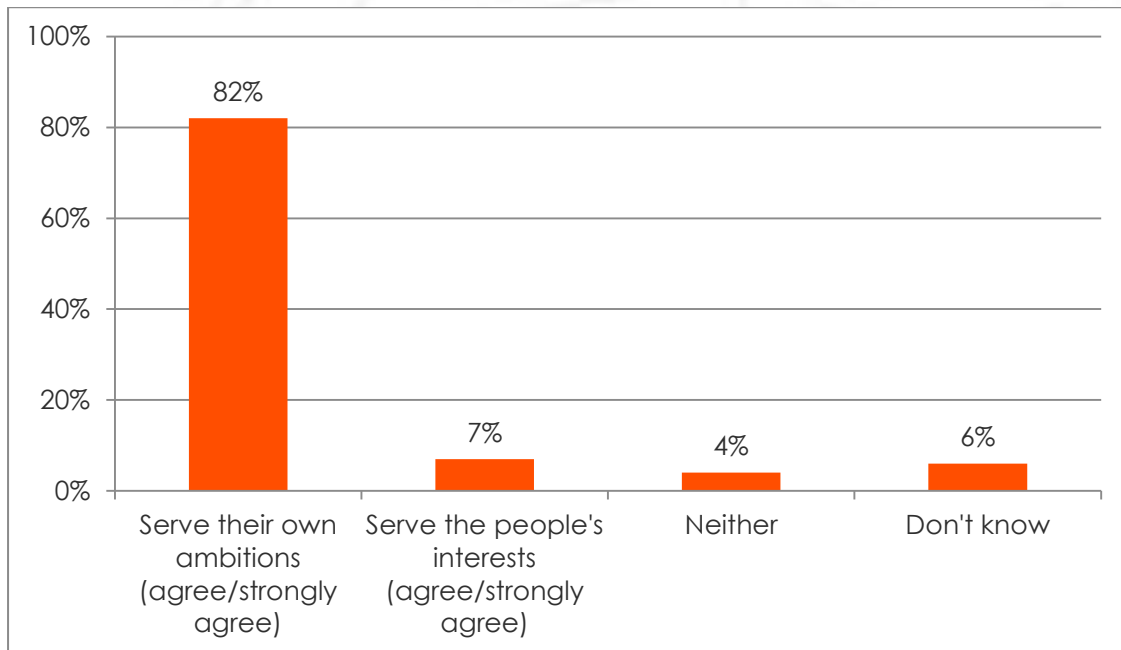
Figure 8: Job performance of local government councillors | Sierra Leone | 2012-2015



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your elected local government councillor?

Given high levels of perceived corruption and low levels of trust of political leaders and state institutions, it may not come as a surprise that a huge majority (82%) of Sierra Leoneans “agree” or “strongly agree” that political leaders are more interested in advancing their own ambitions than in serving the interests of the people (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Politicians serve their own interests | Sierra Leone | 2015



Respondents were asked: Do you think that the leaders of political parties in this country are more concerned with serving the interests of the people, or more concerned with advancing their own political ambitions, or haven't you heard enough to say?

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

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