



Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 131

Examining Government and Public Officials' Accountability and Responsiveness

By Lena Thompson

March 2014

1. Background

The history of Sierra Leone's development is characterized by mismanagement arising from political governance challenges. Sierra Leone's experience with a one party state, dictatorship, high levels of public official and political corruption and military coups has led to incidents of violence which culminated in a brutal and decade-long civil war (1991-2002). The civil war coupled with the structural weaknesses in governance ruined most of Sierra Leone's economic and public service delivery infrastructure, and consequently slowed down economic growth and development.

The end of the conflict in 2002 ushered in a new atmosphere of democratic governance, which brought public sector reforms to restructure key institutions including the police, army, judiciary and civil service. The reforms were supported by key donor partners including the United Nations with the aim of strengthening Sierra Leone's defunct state institutions in order to forestall a relapse into war and chaos. Civil society and the media, once dormant or compromised, were also encouraged to become more active and are now recognized as key stakeholders in Sierra Leone's democracy. However, challenges still exist. The implementation of principles of accountability and transparency remains a daunting task, as corruption continues to affect the daily lives of Sierra Leoneans. Dealing with corruption is critical for Sierra Leone's quest for continued consolidation of peace and stability in light of the country's past.

This briefing paper assesses citizens' perceptions of government and public officials' accountability and responsiveness using the first Afrobarometer survey data collected in Sierra Leonean in 2012. This survey and analysis comes against a backdrop of a public outcry in response to poor financial management practices in key government agencies and departments as documented in the 2012 Auditor General's Report.

2. Afrobarometer Survey

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, evaluations of the quality of governance and economic performance. In addition, the survey assesses the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries. The Afrobarometer's main goal is to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa

while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research, and sharing research findings to inform policy and practice. The Afrobarometer also provides comparisons over time, as five rounds of surveys have taken place from 1999 to 2013.

Afrobarometer surveys use a common survey instrument and methodology. The instrument asks a standard set of questions that permits systematic comparison in public attitudes across countries and over time. The methodology was based on a national probability sample of 1,200 adult Sierra Leoneans selected to represent all adult citizens of voting age, allowing for inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/- 3% at a 95% confidence level. The sample was drawn randomly based on Probability Proportionate to Population Size (PPPS), thus taking account of population distributions, gender as well as rural-urban divides. The sampling process ensured that every adult Sierra Leone citizen had an equal and known chance of being selected in the sample. Fieldwork in Sierra Leone was conducted by ITASCAP Limited, Sierra Leone between 23 June and 18 July 2012.

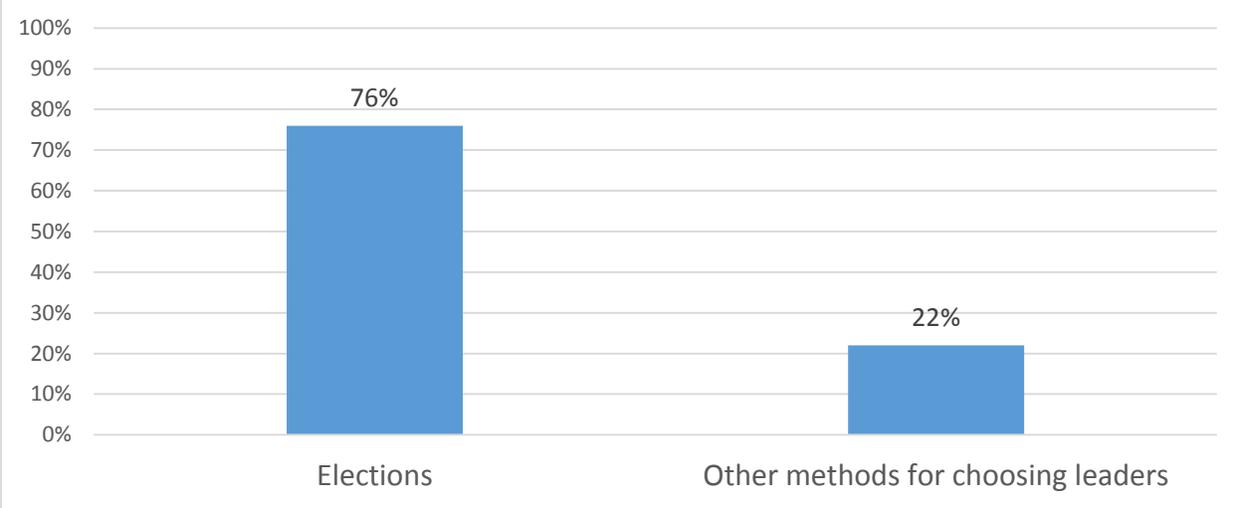
3. Sierra Leoneans’ Support for Particular Methods of Accountability and Responsiveness

Accountability and Responsive to the Citizens

One key approach to ensuring the consolidation of democracy is the institutionalization of the principles of accountability and transparency. Without these elements democracy cannot be viable and the quality of governance would deteriorate. Afrobarometer is able to gauge Sierra Leone citizens’ views on particular methods to ensure accountability and responsiveness of the government and public officials.

Sierra Leoneans overwhelmingly support regular elections (76%) as the method for selecting leaders and thereby assuring a measure of accountability (Figure 1). This clearly indicates a basis of support of democracy’s chief means of responsiveness.

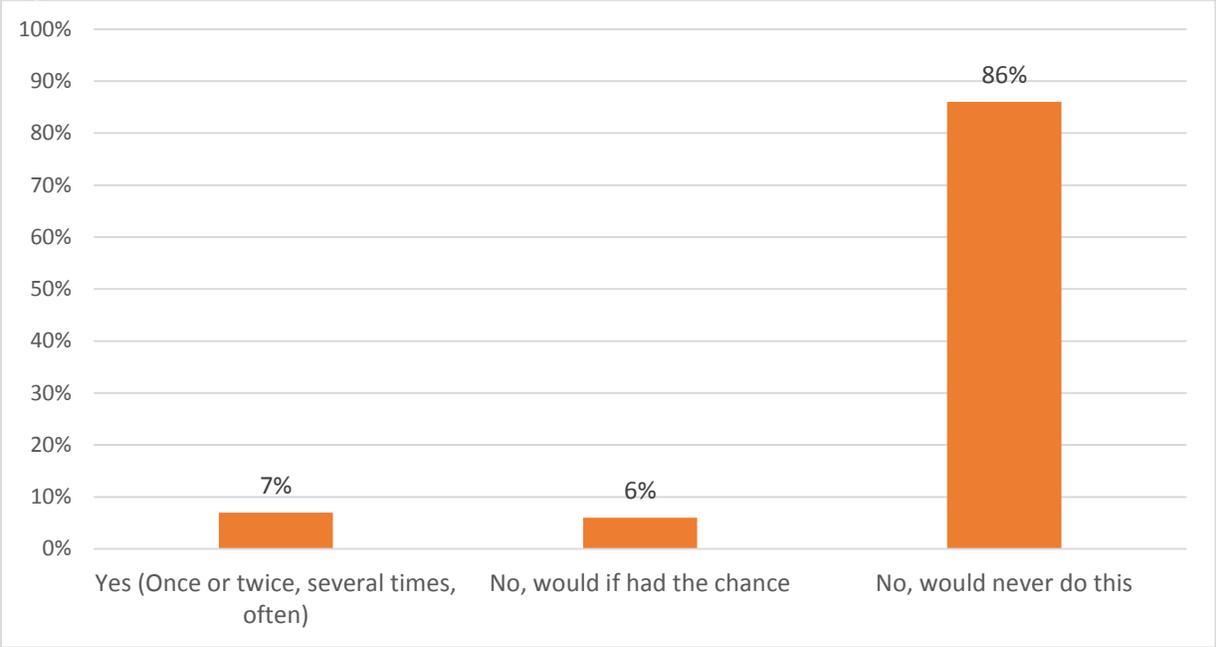
Figure 1: Support for Choosing Leaders through Elections



Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections. (% agree or agree very strongly)
Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country’s leaders. (% agree or agree very strongly)

In a country where democratic governance had been nonexistent since independence the Afrobarometer survey revealed that large majority of Sierra Leoneans (86%) reject the use of violence for a political cause (Figure 2). It appears as though Sierra Leoneans embrace government accountability through peaceful means.

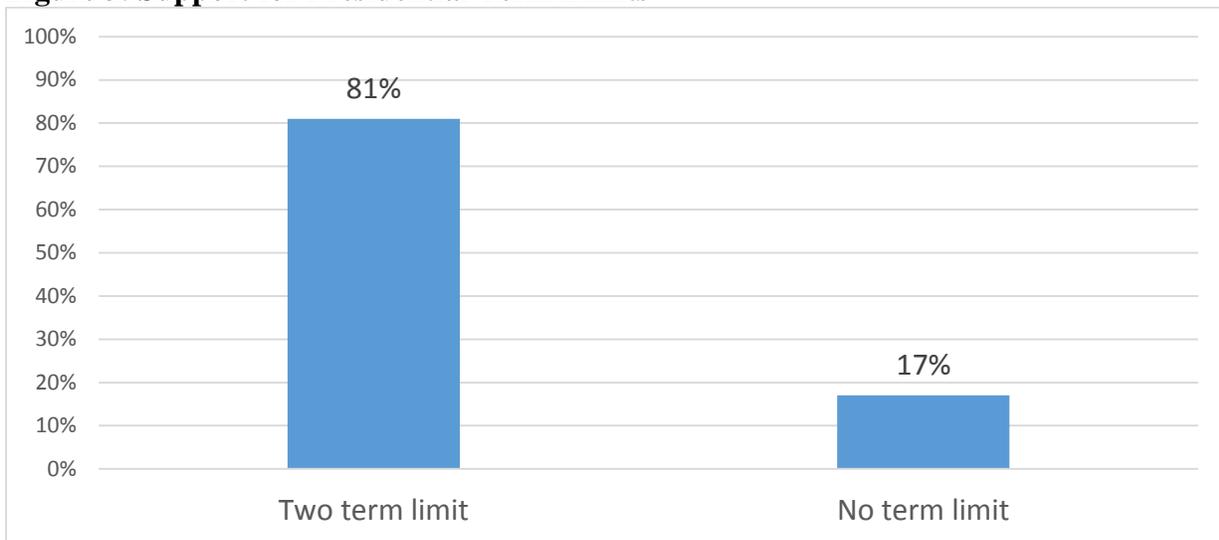
Figure 2: Use of Violence for a Political Cause



Question: For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: (1) Attended a demonstration or protest march; (2) used force or violence for a political cause?

One of the highest trending, most controversial and contentious issues today in Sierra Leone politics is the debate in the media and amongst civil society about the possible extension from two five-year terms to three terms for office of the President. The 1991 Sierra Leone Constitution includes a two five-year term limit for president. There was speculation that after winning his second term in the November 2012 elections, the incumbent President Ernest Bai Koroma of the All Peoples Party Congress (APC) would seek a third term. This possibility has been raised because a constitutional review process is about to commence. The widespread speculation in the media compelled the government to deny that the Koroma will seek a third term in office in 2017. The Afrobarometer survey reveals that in line with a perceived public consensus, an absolute majority of Sierra Leoneans interviewed (81%) “agree strongly” or “agree” that the constitution should limit the president to a maximum of two terms in office (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Support for Presidential Term Limits



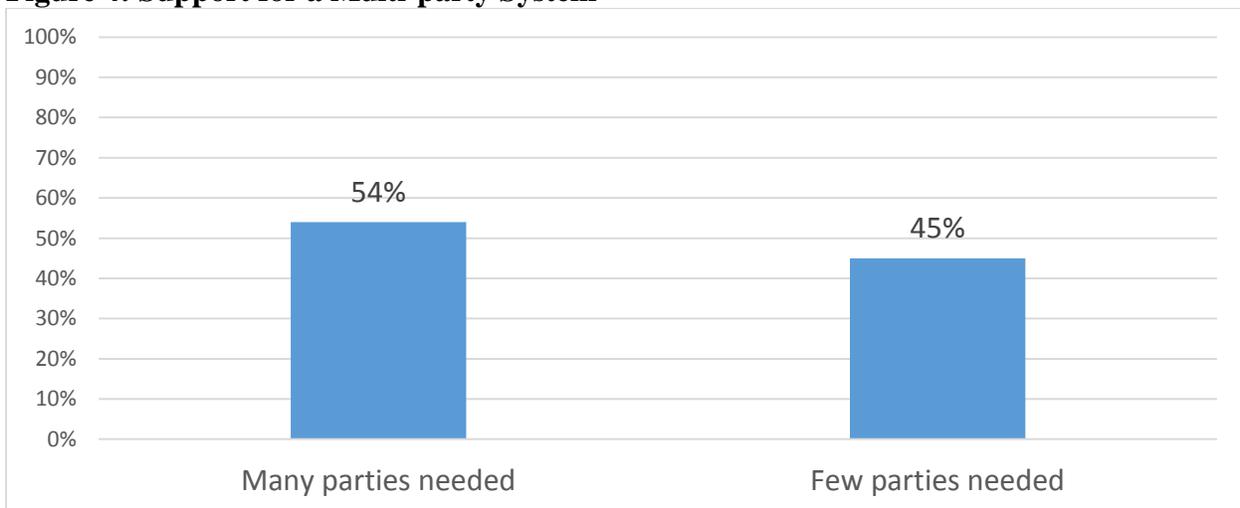
Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: The Constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office. (% agree or agree very strongly)

Statement 2: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the president can serve. (% agree or agree very strongly)

Despite broad support for regular elections and term limits, there is a divided opinion about the degree to which there should be political and electoral plurality in elections and governing the country. About five out of ten Sierra Leoneans “agree very strongly” or “agree” that political parties are needed for citizens to have real choices as to who governs them (54%) (Figure 4). This leaves a sizable minority (45%) that believe political parties create divisions and confusion and not many are needed.

Figure 4: Support for a Multi-party System



Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Sierra Leone. (% agree or agree very strongly)

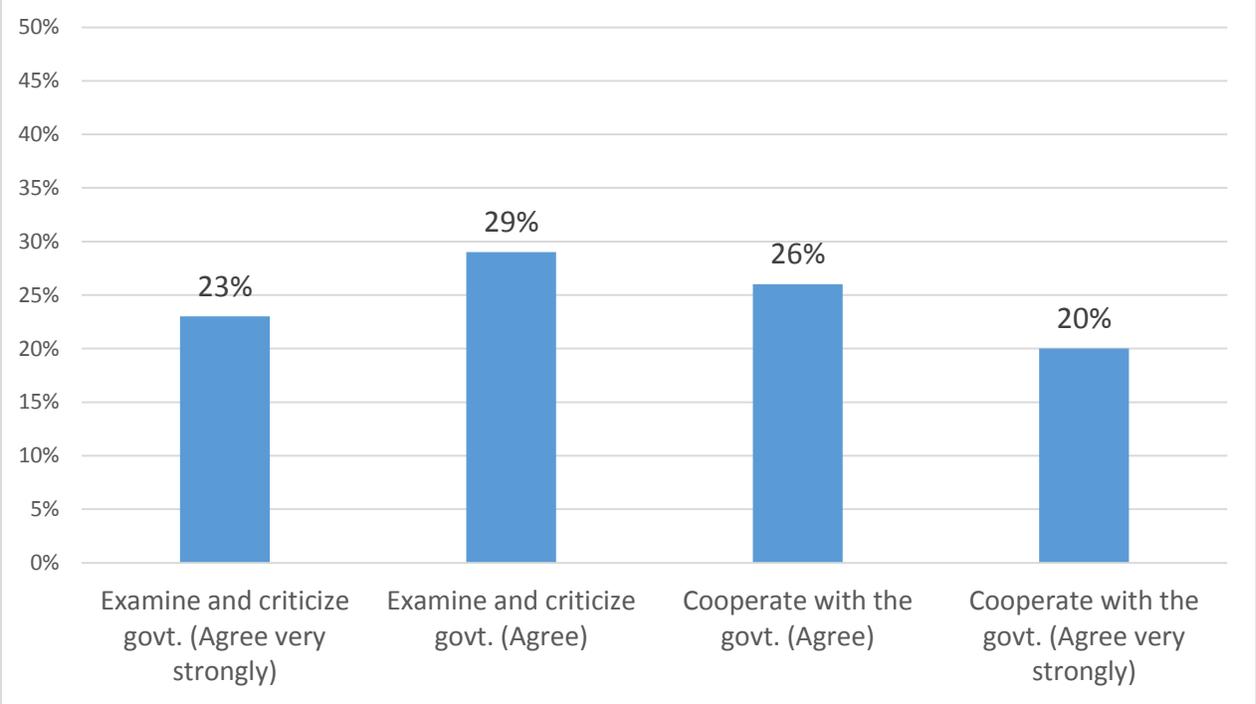
Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Sierra Leoneans have real choices in who governs them. (% agree or agree very strongly)

These results may be a reaction to the high number of small political parties that contest elections in Sierra Leone but fail to make any impact during elections and in between elections. Sierra Leone has “two ethnic groups who dominate politics and influence voting behavior” (Yusuf Bangura, Cocoriocko, 2012). This pattern of voting as confirmed by the results of the November 2012 elections persists in Sierra Leone (Yusuf Bangura, Cocoriocko, 2012).

Accountability and Responsive to Opposition Parties and Parliament

Looking more specifically at how Sierra Leoneans desire the behavior of political parties and their role in ensuring accountability, there is a divided opinion about whether opposition parties should work with the government or scrutinize and criticize the government’s policies. Only 52% of Sierra Leoneans want opposition parties to scrutinize and criticize government policies (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Opinion on the Role of Opposition Parties



Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
Statement 1: Opposition parties should regularly examine and criticize government policies and actions.
Statement 2: Opposition parties should concentrate on cooperating with government and helping it develop the country.

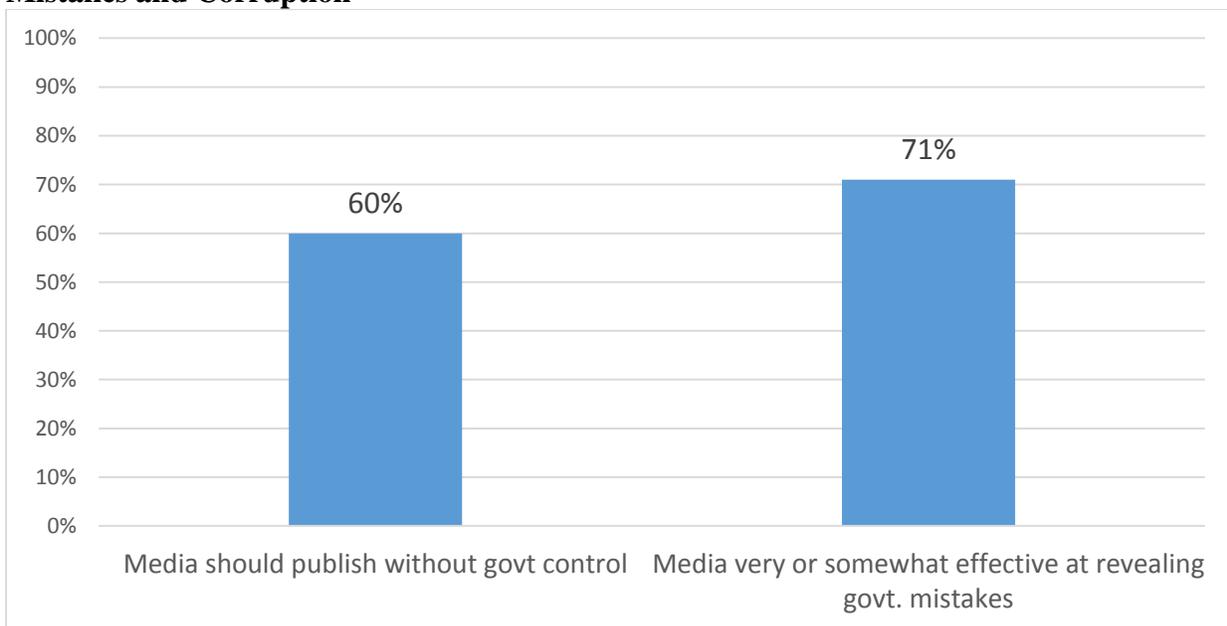
Further, only one in six respondents “very strongly agree” or “agree” that parliament should ensure that the president explains on a regular basis on how taxpayers’ money is spent. This suggests that most Sierra Leoneans do not think that president should be immediately accountable to the parliament in budgetary matters. In addition, sizable segments of the population, 33%, think that the presidency should not be accountable to parliament and should rather develop the country and 26% believe that the president should pass laws without the consent of parliament. Although these figures do not represent a majority of the opinions expressed, the results suggest that there is a reservoir of support for a powerful president who does not submit to the accountability of the parliament.

4. Role of the Media in Accountability

The media plays a pivotal role in a democracy by providing information and ensuring government and public officials are accountable to the people. The media has always had a troubled relationship with the state, which has involved state attempts to control the press and limit press freedom. More recently, press freedom has greatly improved despite the lack of a freedom of information act. The number of privately-owned radio stations has increased significantly in the last few years, and although there are challenges, Sierra Leone's independent media is vibrant according to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Country Review Report (January 2012: 267).

Sierra Leoneans' support for a burgeoning independent media is present. The Afrobarometer survey reveals that a majority of Sierra Leoneans (60%) "very strongly agree" or "agree" that the media should be free to publish without censorship or control (Figure 6). In line with the APRM Country Review (2012), 71% of Sierra Leoneans also believe that the media is effective ("very" or "somewhat") in exposing government mistakes and corruption (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Uncensored Media Reporting and Media's Effectiveness Exposing Government Mistakes and Corruption



Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement 1: The media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control. (% agree or agree very strongly), OR Statement 2: The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it considers harmful to society.

Question: In this country, how effective is the news media in revealing government mistakes and corruption? (% "very effective" or "somewhat effective")

5. Public Officials, Delivery of Services and Corruption

The scourge of corruption continues to be pervasive in the political and economic life in Sierra Leone. The civil war period accentuated the problems of all state institutions, including the civil service and the emergent centralised political system also exacerbated corruption, nepotism and other patron-client practices. There was a pronounced lack of transparency and accountability in the public administration system. Lack of access to justice, corruption and politicisation within the judicial system was another palpable dimension of bad governance in Sierra Leone. Despite these challenges, there has been some progress made to counter or minimize corruption in state institutions.

For instance, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was established by an Act of Parliament in 2002 to fight all forms of corruption in the country. Further, Sierra Leone was the eighth country to sign and fully ratify the UN Convention against Corruption. After becoming president in 2007, Koroma declared zero tolerance of corruption in support of the ACC and also established the Attitudinal and Behavioural Change (ABC) Secretariat to promote the values of patriotism, integrity and diligence in the service of the country. The ACC has achieved a number of successes, such as prosecuting some high profile officials (e.g. government ministers). Efforts to confront corruption were noted in Sierra Leone's improvement in its Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI)'s ranking to 123rd in 2012 from 134th in 2010.

Despite these aforementioned efforts, corruption remains a major challenge. An ironic illustration of the persistent challenge posed by corruption was the conviction of the ABC's three senior-most managers (Executive Director, National Coordinator and Regional Coordinator) on corruption charges in May 2011. These convictions seriously compromised the integrity of ABC secretariat. In addition, the prosecution of high profile officials leads most Sierra Leoneans to believe that corruption is endemic amongst state officials. This is reflected in the Afrobarometer survey, in which Sierra Leoneans perceive that a large number of public officials are involved in corruption. Specifically, 69% of Sierra Leoneans believe that most or all of the police are corrupt followed by tax officials (57%) (Table 1).

The results are comparable with several surveys including the National Public Perception Survey on Corruption (2010), which also identified the Sierra Leone Police and the National Revenue Authority (NRA) as the most corrupt state institutions in the country. Further, more than half of citizens perceive corruption among "some" (48%) and "most" (32%) officials at the presidency, and "some" (53%) and "most" (34%) members of parliament are believed to be corrupt. One in four Sierra Leoneans perceive the same for local councillors (Table 1).

Table 1: Perceptions of Corruption among Public Officials

	None Corrupt	Some of them Corrupt	Most of them Corrupt	All of them Corrupt	Don't know/Haven't heard
The President and Officials in his Office	10	47	33	7	2
Members of the National Assembly	5	53	34	7	1
Judges and Magistrates	6	40	36	14	4
Police	5	25	40	29	1
Local government councilors	5	43	39	13	1
Government officials	4	44	43	8	1
Tax Officials (e.g. NRA/Local Govt. tax officials)	6	34	43	14	4

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

Corruption in Delivery of Services

The high level of corruption perceived amongst public officials is also compounded by the corrupt practices citizens claim to experience. The Afrobarometer gauges respondents' views regarding problems encountered while accessing services in the preceding year, such as healthcare and education.

Across different state services, at least one-in-four Sierra Leoneans report paying bribes once/twice/few times in the past year (Table 2).

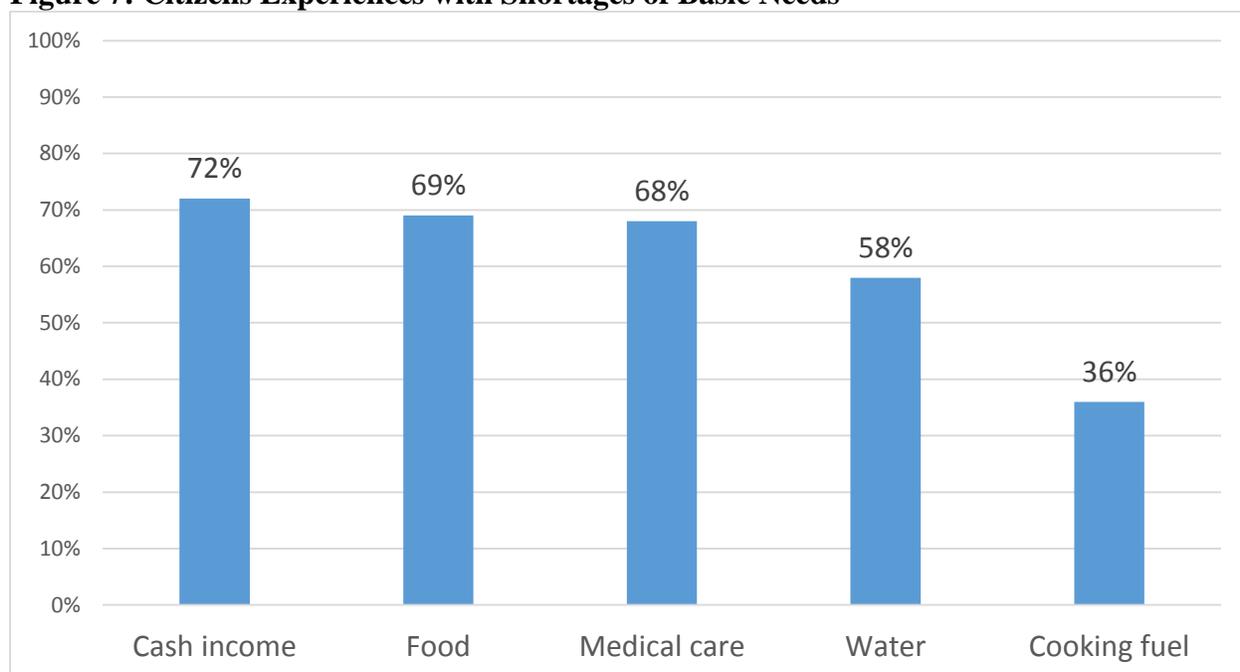
Table 2: Paying Bribes for Public Services in Past Year

	Never	Once or Twice + A few times + Often	No experience in past year
Bribe to get treatment at a local health clinic or hospital	39	40	19
Bribe to avoid a problem with the police	39	36	24
Bribe to get a document or a permit	36	34	29
Bribe to get a place in a primary school for a child	44	34	20
Bribe to get water or sanitation services	50	24	25

Question: In the past year, how often, if ever, have you had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to government officials in order to: ["get treatment at a local health clinic or hospital" ...]?

Corrupt practices within these service sectors exacerbate the already difficult conditions facing Sierra Leoneans by making service delivery inefficient and unequal. As can be seen in Figure 7, a majority of Sierra Leoneans experienced shortages in cash income (72%), food (69%), medical care (67%), water (57%) and cooking fuel (64%).

Figure 7: Citizens Experiences with Shortages of Basic Needs



Question: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family [e.g. Gone without enough food to eat]? (% of respondents reporting “just once or twice”, “several times”, “many times”, or “always”)

To this point, healthcare and education service delivery at the local level is largely confronted with myriad of problems. When asked “*Have you encountered any of these problems with your local public clinic or hospital during the past 12 months*”, appreciable percentages of Sierra Leoneans experienced a lack of medicines/supplies (61%), long waiting time (60%), absent medical doctors (59%), expensive service/inability to pay (55%), lack of attention/respect from service providers (52%) and dirty facilities (45%) “once or twice,” “a few times” or “often” in the past year (Table 3).

Table 3: Problems Encountered in Healthcare Delivery

	Once/twice + A few times + Often	No experience in past year	Never	Don't know
Lack of medicines/supplies	61%	25%	12%	2%
Long waiting time	60%	25%	12%	2%
Absent Doctors	59%	25%	13%	2%
Service too expensive/unable to pay	55%	24%	17%	2%
Lack of attention/ respect	52%	25%	20%	2%
Dirty facilities	45%	25%	28%	1%

Question: Have you encountered any of these problems with your local public clinic or hospital during the past 12 months?

It is worth noting that the government, in the midst of these challenges has instituted free healthcare services for pregnant women and children under the age of five. Local civil society groups and the media are also highlighting shortcomings and corruption within the healthcare sector in order to improve delivery.

A majority of those interviewed also claimed they faced some difficulties “once or twice,” “a few times” or “often” in accessing education services in the past year. At least 4 in every 10 Sierra Leoneans interviewed had problems with absent teachers (50%), lack of textbooks supplies (49%), poor teaching (48%), poor conditions of facilities (47%), over-crowded classrooms and found that education fee were too expensive or had an inability to pay (43% each) (Table 4).

Table 4: Problems Encountered in Education Service Delivery

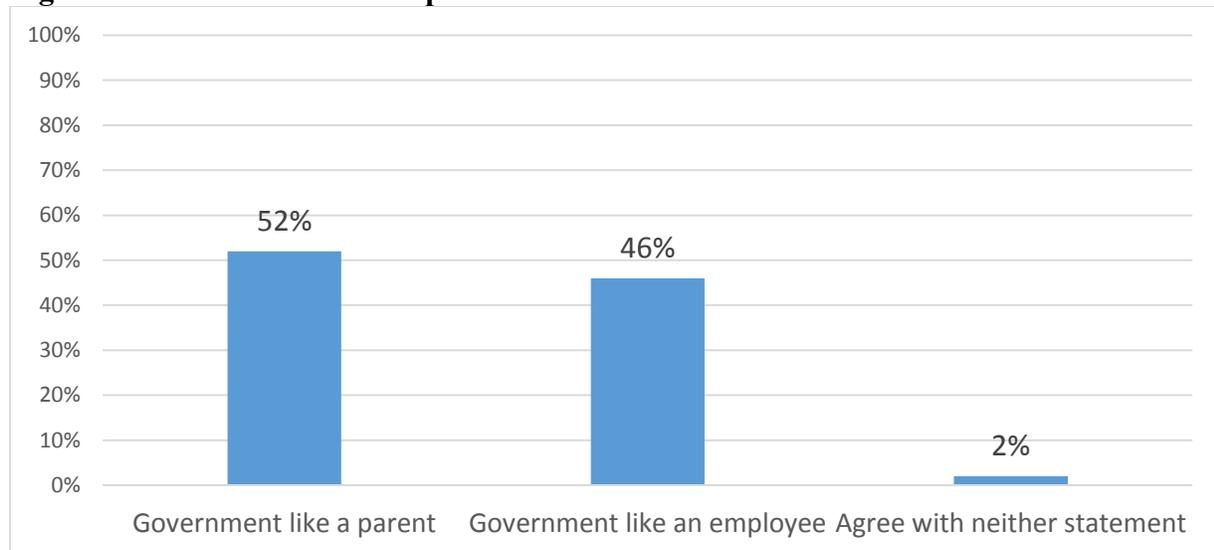
	Once/twice + A few times + Often	No experience in past year	Never	Don't know
Absent teachers	50%	35%	12%	2%
Lack of textbooks supplies	49%	35%	13%	2%
Poor teaching	48%	35%	14%	2%
Poor conditions of facilities	47%	35%	16%	2%
Over-crowded classrooms	43%	35%	19%	2%
Service too expensive/unable to pay	43%	33%	20%	2%

Question: Have you encountered any of these problems with your local public schools during the past 12 months?

6. Citizens’ Expectations for the Government

In looking at the high perception of corruption and mixed support for political competition, it is interesting to observe that Sierra Leoneans have a mixed opinion about whether the government should behave like a parent (52%) or be like an employee accountable to the people (46%) (Figure 8). This illustrates that there is no divisive opinion in favour of government accountability despite the myriad of challenges (e.g. corruption and service delivery).

Figure 8: Citizens’ Relationship to the Government



Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: The government is like a parent. It should decide what is good for us. (% agree or agree very strongly)

Statement 2: The government is like our employee. We are the bosses and should tell government what to do. (% agree or agree very strongly)

7. Conclusion

Sierra Leoneans perceive significant levels of corruption amongst public officials and the problems with service delivery (e.g. healthcare and education) suggest that persistent corruption leads to poor outcomes. The basis for dealing with corruption and inefficient service delivery is democratic accountability. Sierra Leoneans embrace democratic accountability through non-violent means, regular, open and free elections and the adherence to constitutionality, such as the term limits of the president. This bodes well for the consolidation of democracy in Sierra Leone, and the country's fight against corruption. Nevertheless, there is little consensus about the necessary pieces needed to ensure public accountability and responsiveness. For instance, Sierra Leoneans are divided about the virtues of multi-party competition and whether the state should be treated as an "employee" of the people rather than the government acting as a "parent" to the people. Further, there is no consensus about the role that opposition parties should play in monitoring the ruling party. There is also an overarching mix of opinion about whether the president should submit fully to the oversight of the parliament. Amidst these potentially troubling opinions is the widely held belief that the media should be free to investigate the government and report on mistake and corruption. Sierra Leoneans regard the present media as fairly effective in playing this role, which is a hopeful sign.

Corruption is hindrance to adequate the social service delivery, and a majority of the people of Sierra Leone indicate that they experienced various problems (e.g. the need to bribe officials) when accessing healthcare and education services at the local level in the past year. A majority also believe that public officials and state institutions are highly corrupt. There must be a concerted and robust effort made by the government to minimized corruption.

Accountability and responsiveness are key to furthering development and sharing its benefits among citizens. It is clear that there are divisions within Sierra Leonean society about how accountability and responsiveness should be. To consolidate opinions favorable to political means for accountability, it is incumbent on the political parties, the Political Party Registration Commission (PPRC) and civil society groups to offer civic education on citizenship and the role government in people's everyday lives.

This Briefing Paper was prepared by **Lena Thompson**, Lecturer at the Department of Political Science at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. Email: lenathompson@yahoo.com

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in South Africa (IJR), the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Survey implementation in Afrobarometer's work in Namibia is coordinated by the Institute for Public Policy Research. We gratefully acknowledge generous support from the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank for Afrobarometer Round 5.

For more information and further requests for analysis please visit Afrobarometer website: www.afrobarometer.org or contact Daniel Armah-Attoh, AB Project Manager for Anglophone West Africa on +233 (0302) 784293/4; 776142 or email: daniel@cddghana.org.