



Freetown, Sierra Leone
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News release

As elections approach in Sierra Leone, citizens' attitudes raise warning flags

As Sierra Leoneans approach a crucial election in June 2023, popular attitudes recorded by the latest Afrobarometer survey raise several warning flags for leaders committed to peace in a fragile post-war state.

While overall survey findings portray a country that is more unified and tolerant than divided, they also highlight trends toward polarisation and intolerance. These include a decrease in the proportion of citizens who identify more strongly with their country than their ethnic group, and a growing number – especially in the North and North-West regions – who say the government discriminates against members of their ethnic group. This perception of unfair treatment mirrors the situation in 2012 when identity groups in the Eastern region felt unfairly treated by the then-ruling party.

Although a rise in tolerance was recorded in 2020, this was lost as a result of renewed feelings of unfair treatment in opposition areas.

In the wake of violent anti-government protests in parts of the country last August, these findings point to risks of playing on political divisions along ethno-regional lines in the run-up to the election.

For more detailed analysis, see Afrobarometer's [latest dispatch](#).

Key findings

- For almost nine out of 10 respondents (88%), their identity as Sierra Leoneans is at least as strong as their ethnic identity; very few say they feel exclusively (7%) or predominantly (5%) attached to their ethnic identity (Figure 1).
 - However, the proportion of citizens who prioritise their Sierra Leonean over their ethnic identity has dropped by 20 percentage points over the past decade.
- About one-third (35%) of citizens say the government treats members of their ethnic group unfairly, at least occasionally – a 22-percentage-point increase compared to 2020 (13%) (Figure 2).
- Citizens from opposition-controlled areas are more likely to say they experience unfair treatment when their party is not in power. In 2012, under the All People's Congress (APC) government, one in four (25%) respondents from the East said members of their ethnic group "often" or "always" experienced unfair treatment, compared to 5% in the North. In 2022, under the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) government, one in four respondents in the North (26%) feel discriminated against, compared to 13% in the East (Figure 3).
- While almost nine in 10 respondents (86%) say they trust their relatives "somewhat" or "a lot," far fewer express trust in people of other religions (65%), their neighbours (60%), other citizens (55%), and people from other ethnic groups (53%) (Figure 4).

- Majorities of Sierra Leoneans express tolerance for social differences except for differences in sexual orientation (Figure 5).
 - But welcoming attitudes toward people of different religions, ethnicities, and political parties have dropped sharply, especially in the past two years (Figure 6).

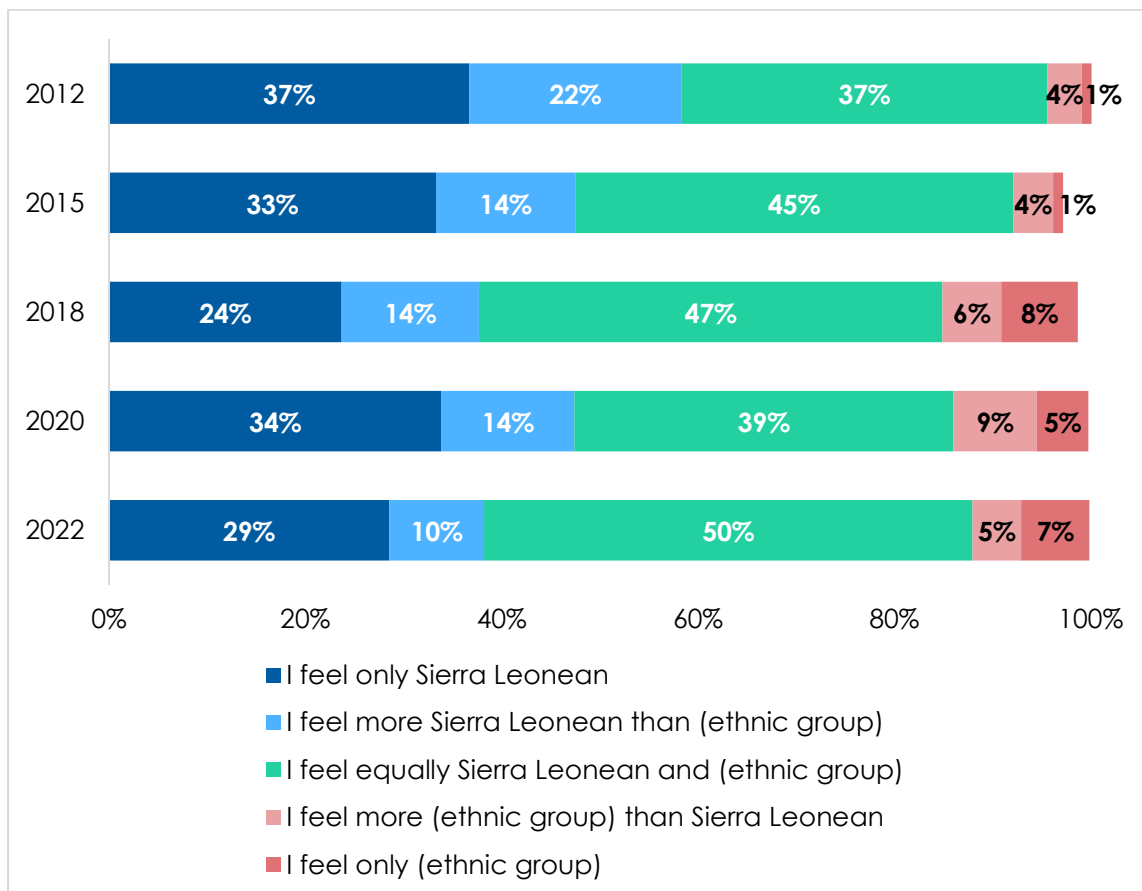
Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999, and Round 9 surveys are being completed in early 2023. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Sierra Leone, led by the Institute for Governance Reform (IGR), interviewed 1,200 adult citizens of Sierra Leone between 13 June and 9 July 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Sierra Leone in 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2020.

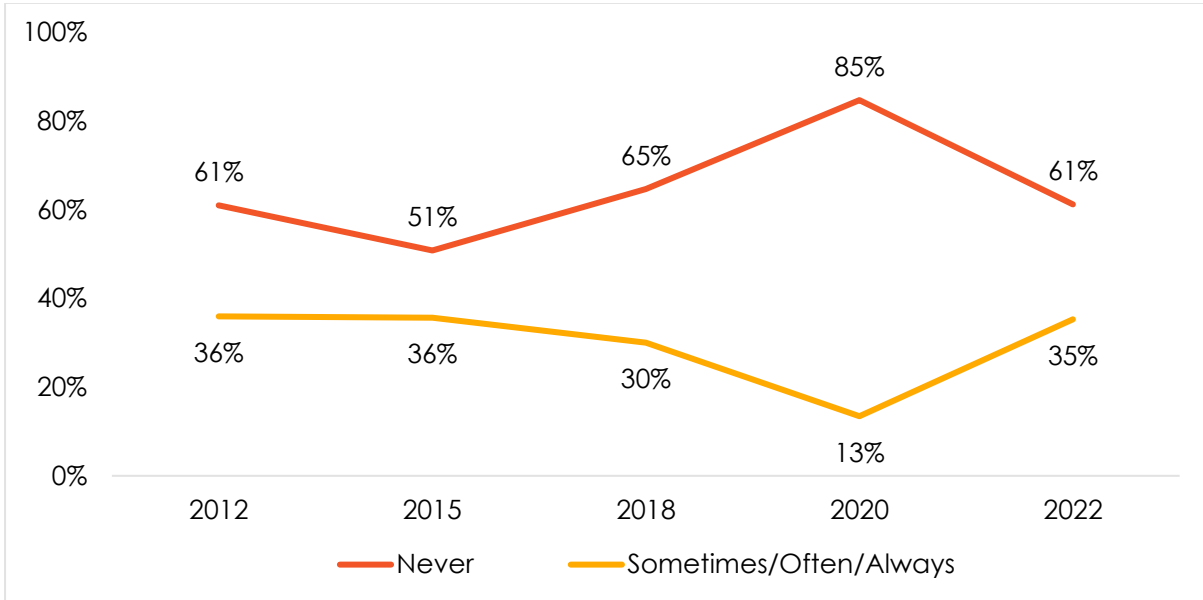
Charts

Figure 1: Sierra Leonean vs. ethnic identity | Sierra Leone | 2012-2022



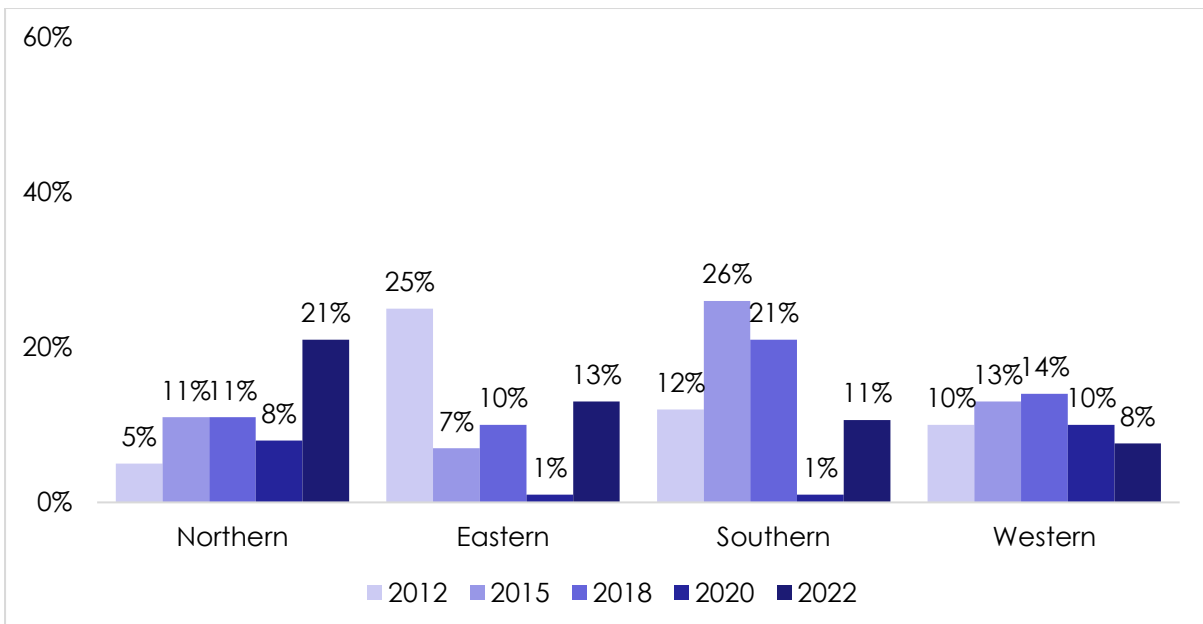
Respondents were asked: Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a Sierra Leonean and being a [member of respondent's ethnic group]. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?

Figure 2: Unfair treatment of ethnic groups by government | Sierra Leone | 2012-2022



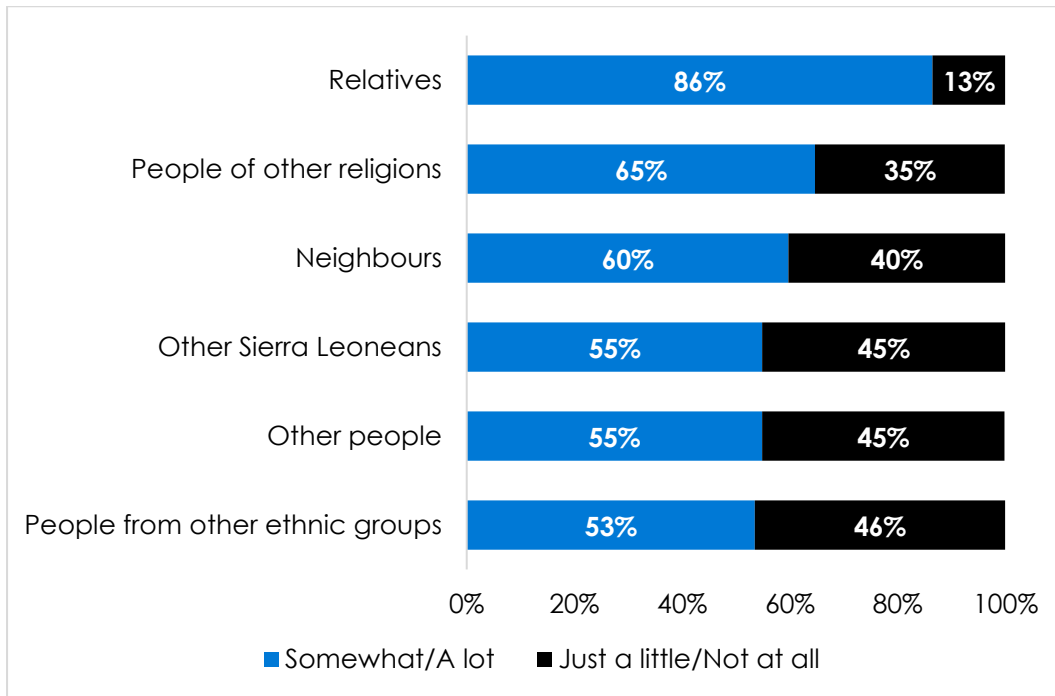
Respondents were asked: How often, if ever, are [members of the respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government?

Figure 3: Frequent unfair treatment of ethnic groups by government | by region | Sierra Leone | 2012-2022



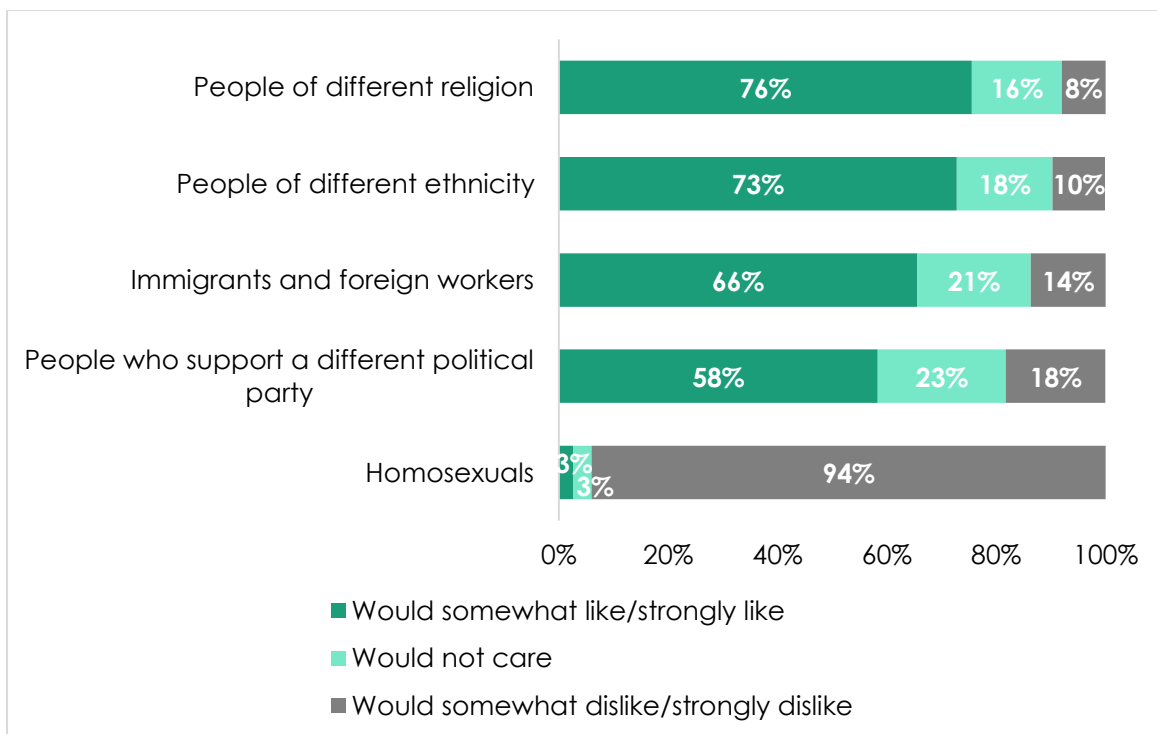
Respondents were asked: How often, if ever, are [members of the respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government? (% who say "often" or "always")
 (Note: In this figure, the Northern region includes the North-West region, which was created in 2017 and was not reported separately in earlier Afrobarometer surveys.)

Figure 4: Trust in people | Sierra Leone | 2022



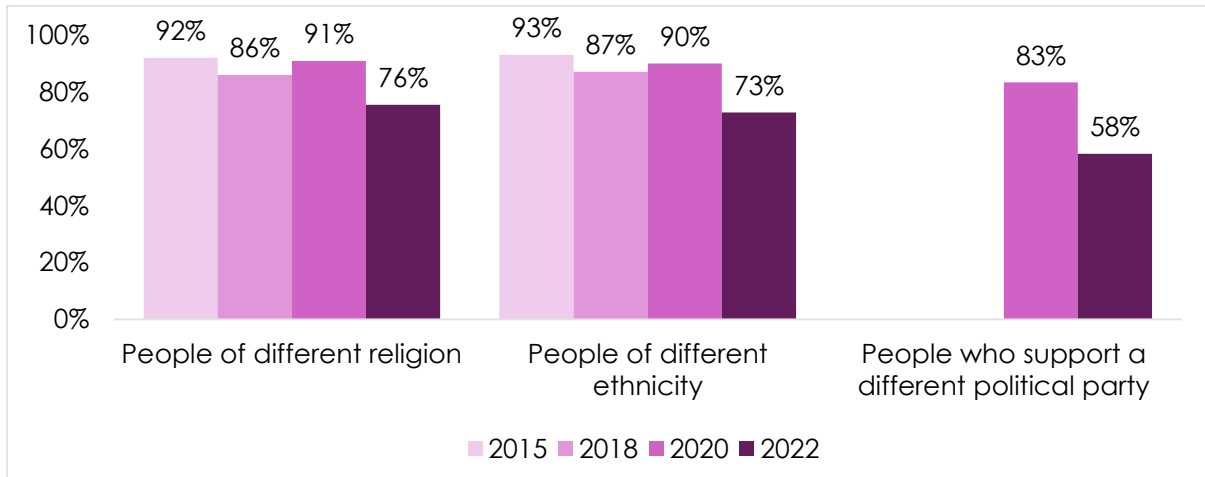
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following types of people?

Figure 5: Social tolerance | Sierra Leone | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care?

Figure 6: 'Would like' social differences: Religion, ethnicity, and political party
 | Sierra Leone | 2015-2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care? (% who say they would “strongly like” or “somewhat like”)

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