

Summary

Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) leader Julius Maada Bio was declared the winner of the June 24, 2023, elections, after surpassing the required 55% threshold by a small margin. The opposition has contested the results, claiming electoral fraud. International monitors have questioned the transparency of the process. President Bio has responded by accusing external actors of fomenting instability in the country. Meanwhile, the economic outlook remains dire. Both the political and economic situations can lead to social turmoil and violence in the near future.

Recent events and developments

Political tensions continue to increase in Sierra Leone, after the contested June 24, 2023, elections. On July 5, opposition All People's Congress (APC) representatives announced that they won't take part in governance at any level, including in the parliament. This comes after the APC demanded on July 4 the resignation of President Julius Maada Bio and new elections to be held in 6 months. Earlier on, on June 27, Bio was sworn in as President after receiving 56% of the vote. Several observers, including the US and EU, have raised questions over the transparency of the elections. In response, President Bio on July 4 accused these actors of interfering with Sierra Leonian politics in order to foment instability. According to estimates, aid by Western countries, the World Bank, and the IMF account for 70% of Sierra Leone's annual budget. These events have taken place amid a worsening economic situation, as the yearly inflation rate has reached 43% and the price of staple foods has surged by 50%. In August 2022, increasing living costs had sparked violent protests throughout Sierra Leone. 26 people died as a result of these demonstrations.

Impact assessment

The highly polarized situation makes future social turmoil in Sierra Leone possible. If the APC decides to contest the election results by mobilizing its supporters, then violence may follow. Clashes between demonstrators and security forces, such as those of June 21 in Freetown, where 1 protestor was killed, can happen. Violent confrontations between supporters of rival parties are also likely. Attacks, such as the one on June 28, when alleged SLPP supporters attacked suspected APC members, burned houses, and destroyed market stalls in Freetown, could occur. Furthermore, the hostile rhetoric between donors and President Bio can lead to a deterioration in relations with the authorities in Freetown. Such a development could affect Sierra Leone's budget, at a time when high living costs and unemployment already represent serious challenges. A worsening economic situation could trigger another wave of riots. As evidenced by the events of August 2022, the police are known to respond with live ammunition against protestors. All of the instances mentioned above can place even unrelated passersby at critical risk.

Advice from Forth Global

- Make sure all employees traveling to Sierra Leone undertake a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Advise staff to avoid all kinds of demonstrations.
- Advise staff to abstain from commenting on the political situation in Sierra Leone, either in person or via social media.
- Continuously monitor local news and liaise with local partners to stay up to date with any developments in the region.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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