

Engage Salone collaborated with the Westminster Foundation in 2024 to conduct a study assessing the financial costs of politics in Sierra Leone. This research indicates that the high cost of politics in Sierra Leone, driven by expensive election campaigns, vote-buying, and the need to fund social obligations, severely hinders the participation of women, youths, and other marginalised voices in the political arena.

In the last two decades, Sierra Leone has made significant progress in solidifying its democratic governance and political stability. There have been two – 2007 and 2018 – peaceful transitions of power between the two main political parties, the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) and the All People’s Congress (APC). However, tensions about the credibility of the 2023 election, which resulted in a three month boycott of the legislature by the opposition APC, and which ended with the signing of a national unity agreement that includes a commitment to electoral reform, in October 2023, has put Sierra Leone’s democratic development back in the spotlight.

This ‘cost of politics’ study builds on a research conducted prior to the 2018 election, aiming to understand how the new electoral system for electing legislators and the gender quota requirements for nomination in 2023 shaped the monetary incentives, with a particular focus on women and youth. Prior to 2023, Sierra Leone used a first-past-the-post constituency-based model, but changes introduced in 2022 led to a switch to a district-based proportional representation system. 2022 also saw the passage of the Gender Empowerment and Women’s Equality (GEWE) Act, which introduced the requirement that party lists for elected officials include a female candidate every third candidate. The effects of these changes on youth and women’s engagement in the 2023 general election, the ways they shifted dynamics around the costs of seeking office, and the implications for democracy are the core focus of this report. Access the full report in the link [WFD_Cost-of-Politics_Sierra-Leone_designed_2024.pdf](#)