

Sierra Leone is a small nation, but it guarantees at least one dramatic event a week. So much that requires you to stop and catch your breath; or else, you would be overwhelmed by the running episodes, starring mostly politicians and their sentimental and ever-cheering supporters, and once in a while, you would have extras in self-styled celebrities. So, we did stop to catch our breath and we want to shine a light on the state's "ruling justly" credentials—drawing on the many events that make up the drama in this small country.

"[Ruling Justly](#)" is a fancy term we are borrowing from the [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#) (MCC) scorecard, looking at it literally and beyond its intended scope. We want to use this piece to illustrate how recent and ongoing events undermine the government's "ruling justly" credentials.

To be more current, we start with the government's persistence in changing the country's electoral system a few months to the elections. Parliament rejected this proposal when it passed the new Public Elections Act. The Electoral Commission chief then announced that the President had authorised him to run the elections based on the same system that parliament rejected—Proportional Representation. As much as the government is using legal avenues to push this through, the determination to get it done only a few months before elections makes the whole project very suspicious. First, it was a census that produced some interesting findings that seem more "bongological" than statistical. Outrageous findings that defy reality. A voter registration exercise that was fraught with challenges and concerns regarding first-time registrants. And now it is an enduring effort to change the electoral system by all means possible. This is not how to "rule justly".

A government that trusts its track record and is confident about its popularity would not be employing shady tactics that make an already uneven playing field even more rugged. These events will undermine whatever little trust there is in the electoral process, as well as the peace and stability that we all enjoy. Members of Parliament are already exchanging blows and tirades in the House, but Parliament calls it an "attack", using the same narrative the State used in the August protests. "Attack" is a strong word, but it is also an attempt to simplify a complex issue and avoid responsibility, blaming only MPS from the opposition for the shameful events in the House. That is not how to "rule justly".

We do not want to go into the pros and cons of the two electoral systems but those who push the PR system with the argument that it could better democracy and inclusion must not forget that we have been there before, and nothing changed.

The relative cohesion we enjoyed was largely due to Tejan Kabbah's magnanimity and style of leadership that prioritised peace and unity, given the brutal war. Nothing to do with the PR system. Sierra Leone's problem has nothing to do with its electoral system. It is a leadership deficit on many levels that translates into bad governance and there is absolutely no guarantee that this will change with a system that strengthens the political parties and limits the voter's options. Anyway, back to "ruling justly".

The second indicator we want to use to illustrate our point on "ruling justly" is the trial and conviction of people arrested around the country in connection with the August protests. The trials have been swift and the [conviction rates and sentences](#) clearly show how the State fast-tracks cases of interest to them, while other equally, if not more, important matters remain unattended by the same judiciary that has moved with supersonic speed to convict protesters. The determination "to teach them a lesson" exposes not only the vindictiveness of the powers that be but also the double standards. And the administration of justice, which is fundamental to our collective freedom and liberty, is not spared in the State's continued assault on institutions that are supposed to foster democracy and rule of law. As we write, dozens of protesters have already been convicted, with sentences and fines. And there is a good number of women among these protesters. With this speed, you wonder how much time the courts had to go into individual cases and personal circumstances. Some of these young people and women are going to jail, becoming criminals just because someone wants to prove a point and send a message. Meanwhile, those who ordered the killing of unarmed civilians like [young "plakas" seller Fatmata](#), will get away with their crimes because no one has been and will be held accountable. Families will never get closure and the manner in which victims were boxed up and buried by the State makes it even worse. This is not how to "rule justly".

Sierra Leone is steadily inching towards a state of repression where freedoms are curtailed as the civic and political space is shrinking. The indications are many—with harassment of opposition figures and prosecution of all manner of people. Even those with mental health conditions are not spared. The state has enacted new security and intelligence laws that give secret police sweeping powers to surveil and arrest. This comes after a cybersecurity law that poses the same threats to people's liberty and freedoms. All of this sets us up for some interesting times ahead. The leaders seem determined to make the state stronger and sadly no one (parliament, civil society, international community) is able to stop them. In fact,

some members of the international community supported the dangerous [cybersecurity law](#). Countries with similar anti-people security and intelligence laws are not some of the best when it comes to rights and freedoms and you can hardly say that they rule justly.

With the risk of this piece becoming too long, it is important to spare a paragraph for the Auditor General and her deputy who were removed from office by the President for doing their job and the tribunal set up to inquire into their alleged misconduct is not going anywhere. Their case against the President's decision has also not moved an inch. Another case of a government that is clearly not "ruling justly".

Whatever you are up to this weekend, do not get locked up because your bail won't be guaranteed; rapper, [LAJ is still banged up](#). In this country, power is concentrated and we are not "ruling justly".

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