

# Governance and Political Economy Constraints to World Bank CAS Priorities in Sierra Leone\*

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## **Abstract**

In this paper I discuss the political economy of Sierra Leone and how it should influence the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy (CAS). The main focus of the research is to try to understand the extent to which the perverse political incentives which drove the country into poverty and civil war between 1961 and 1991 have re-asserted themselves since the return of peace in 2002. This question is made particularly compelling by the return to power in 2007 of the All People's Congress Party, who presided over the decline of the country. My preliminary conclusion is that while there are some obvious changes in the political environment, appeal remains in the political strategies which were so costly to the nation and some new forces which have emerged have potentially perverse consequences. This likely undermines the effectiveness of advice by the World Bank and also seriously reduces the prospects of successful economic development. There are also changes in the economic environment, such as the terms of trade, which may provide the prospect of sustained economic growth, but without political change such growth will likely be oligarchic, lead to large increases in inequality and unlikely to be pro-poor. I suggest that the best option for the World Bank is to attempt to further deepen the reform of political institutions which it has supported since 2002. Though political institutions are not the whole story, they do heavily influence political incentives and the history of Sierra Leone makes clear that they have first-order effects. While the Bank has, correctly, fostered decentralization, the reform process needs to be deepened and complemented by the reduction of executive autonomy, the strengthening of Parliament and the introduction of greater democracy into the institution of chieftaincy.

# 1 Introduction and Argument

In 2002 Sierra Leone emerged from a 9 year civil war as possibly the poorest country in the World in terms of per-capita income and ranked last in terms of the United Nation's Human Development Index. The political and economy history of the country since independence in 1961 can be easily summarized. After the early governments of Sir Milton Margai and his brother Sir Albert Margai, successive leaders of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), the country was ruled from 1967 by the All People's Congress Party (APC) until it was ejected from power by a military coup in 1992. During this period, under the presidencies of Siaka Stevens until 1985 and subsequently Joseph Momoh, the economy declined almost monotonically and state institutions collapsed. The coup, led by a group of young officers who formed the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), was in response to the widening civil war which began with the first incursion across the border from Liberia of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in March 1991.

The disintegration of state institutions created a vacuum which the RUF easily filled. Though initially very far from a formidable military machine, they pushed on an open door. There is now an extensive academic literature on the war and its' causes (Richards, 1996, Abdullah, 2004, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2004, Gberie, 2005, Keen, 2005) which links it closely to the collapse of the state. Keen (2005, p. 34) reproduces a quote from Abu Turay which rings very true

“by the end of Momoh's rule he had stopped paying civil servants, teachers and even Paramount Chiefs. Central government had collapsed, and then of course we had border incursions, 'rebels' and all the automatic weapons pouring over the border from Liberia. The NPRC, the 'rebels' and the 'sobels' [soldiers-turned rebels] all amount to the chaos one expects when government disappears. None of them are the causes of our problems, but they are symptoms.”

Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) conducted a survey of ex-combatants and non-combatants to investigate the motivations of those who fought for the RUF (although it is worth noting

that 88% of the ex-RUF combatants reported having been forcibly recruited). Grievances also seem to have been important in creating the circumstances that led to the war. These stemmed from the exclusion inherent in the patrimonial style of politics which characterized the country prior to 1991, and also from more deep seated animosities due to elements of the local traditional political and economic structures of the society, such as the dominance of Chiefs over local resources and assets. In support of some of these ideas Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) find that proxies for poverty and lack of access to education predict voluntarily joining both the RUF and the civil defense groups that fought against the RUF. Most scholars also emphasize the lure of diamond wealth and loot as sustaining the war, though most reject this as an important source of the war.

Since 2002 the country, with the help of the international community, has been rebuilding itself. A democratic election in May 2002 reappointed Ahmad Tejan Kabbah as president with 70% of the vote (he had previously been elected in 1996) and gave his Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), which had been ousted from power by the APC in 1967, a big majority in Parliament. Voting patterns in many ways mirrored those from the 1960s where the SLPP had attracted most of its support from the South and East of the country, particularly Mendeland. The performance of the SLPP government after 2002 seems to have been mixed to say the least, and it was freely replaced by the Sierra Leonean people by the APC in the elections in August 2007. The APC's presidential candidate, Ernest Bai Koroma, won 44% of the votes in the first round of the presidential election (55% in the run-off) and the APC took 59 of the 112 seats in Parliament.

In this paper I discuss the political economy of Sierra Leone and how it should influence the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy (CAS). The main focus of the research is to try to understand the extent to which the political incentives which drove the country into poverty and civil war between 1961 and 1991 have re-asserted themselves since the return of peace in 2002 and what the future will hold. The question seems to be particularly poignant given the return to power of the APC in 2007 since the APC was in power during the long decline of the country.

To address this question it is useful to distinguish between political and economic incentives and how these are generated by institutions and the political and economic environment. With respect to the political environment, my preliminary conclusion is that while there are some obvious changes, much appeal probably remains in the political strategies which immiserated the nation. I also note that while we should definitely celebrate the deepening of the process of democratization, there are signs that it may generate a new type of urban bias, exactly the sort of thing that many other institutional reforms, such as decentralization, were designed to fight against. These factors potentially undermine the effectiveness of long-term advice by the World Bank and seriously reduces the prospects of successful economic development and pro-poor growth.

I also argue however that there are also changes in the economic environment, such as the terms of trade, which if they are going to be sustained, may provide the prospect of enduring economic growth, but without political change such growth will likely be oligarchic and lead to large increases in inequality.

I suggest that the best option for the World Bank and the international community more generally is to attempt to further deepen the reform of political institutions which it has supported since 2002. Though political institutions are not the whole story, they do heavily influence political incentives and the history of Sierra Leone makes clear that they have first-order effects. While the Bank has, correctly, supported decentralization, the reform process needs to be deepened and complemented by reducing the power of the executive, strengthening Parliament and introducing greater democracy into the institution of chieftaincy

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section I give a quick analysis of the political economy of economic decline and state collapse in Africa as applied to Sierra Leone. I argue that Sierra Leone fits very well both within the more specialized literature on the political economy of Africa and also the broader work on the impact of institutions on comparative development. In section 3 I articulate two questions which frame the rest of the discussion. First, what features of the society or polity led to such a terrible outcome, second, has governance changed in Sierra Leone since 2002 in such a way as to put the polity and economy onto a different and

better development path? Section 4 addresses the first question taking advantage of the wider social science literature on the origins of patrimonialism, but also focusing on idiosyncrasies of the Sierra Leonean case. Section 5 then moves to the present and discusses in what way the circumstances or structures which produced such bad outcomes prior to 2002 may have changed or persisted. I use here evidence on the behavior of both the SLPP government between 2002 and 2007 and the APC government in its first year in office. Section 6 sums up the evidence so far, focusing on whether or not there has been real political change. In section 7 I consider whether or not, holding constant the political environment, there may have been large enough changes in the economic environment to lead to a different development path. Finally in section 8 I try to draw some lessons for the formulation of the World Bank's CAS.

## **2 Why is Sierra Leone Poor?**

It is clear that Sierra Leone is a poor country because it has had terrible governance. Though the civil war caused further economic hardship and distress, the main reason that Sierra Leone emerged from war as the world's poorest country, is that it entered the war with that status in 1991.<sup>1</sup>

The British colonial administration seems to have little interest in developing the country and even appears to have actively undermined business interests of Krios from Freetown, for example by promoting Lebanese commercial interests. The British also designed political institutions in the 1950s to guarantee that the more educated Krios would not dominate the politics of a newly independent Sierra Leone. From independence until the start of the civil war, a sequence of politicians has had little interest or incentive in providing the most elementary things which can lead a society to prosper. The main reason for this is that post-independent politicians ruled the country using the political strategy of patrimonialism, and the general unaccountability of the political class led to a high degree of kleptocracy.<sup>2</sup>

Patrimonialism, also called 'neo-patrimonialism', personal rule' or more simply 'clientelism',

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<sup>1</sup>There is total consensus in the academic literature on this see Davies (2007) for a recent authoritative view, also Luke and Riley (1989) and Kallon (2004).

<sup>2</sup>See Cartwright (1970) and Clapham (1976) for the politics of the early independence period.

is a style of governance where politicians control power through a system of personal relationships where policies/favors are distributed in exchange for political support. There are several reasons that this is disastrous for economic policy and performance and they hinge mostly on how the exchange is structured in order to maximize the control and bargaining power of those running such regimes.

First, the form in which patrimonial or clientelistic exchanges have to take place is highly inefficient. For instance, patrons will find it politically desirable to use private goods which can be targeted to supporters and withheld from opponents. Public goods are not politically attractive ways to generate support and are thus generically under-supplied under patrimonialism.

Second, patrimonial rulers need to make people reliant on them for their future success or failure. To do this they create insecurity and uncertainty which only they can resolve. To quote a famous example, Rafael Trujillo, who ruled the Dominican Republic for 31 years forced all politicians to write a resignation letter which he kept in his desk. One parliamentarian was served with his resignation during his own speech in parliament (Turits, 2003, for this story)! One robust consequence of patrimonialism is that property rights are insecure. People only have property because patrons allow them to have it, but such rights are always conditional and can be withdrawn. This creates terrible incentives to invest in assets. Moreover, laws are selectively applied with no concept of the rule of law or equality before the law which of course are completely inconsistent with how clientelism is dispensed. In a patrimonial regime you have rights if you are a client of the patron and otherwise you do not. The application of uniform rules or criteria to allocate resources impedes the ability of patrons to use discretion.

Third, as Bates (1981) first pointed out, patrimonial regimes create distortions in market prices to create rents which can then be politically allocated. When supply is not equal to demand, something is in short supply and this is a great political resource to those who can allocate it. This creates massive economic distortions, but it can be good politics.

Finally, patrimonialism undermines the coherence of the bureaucracy. This is because the bureaucracy represents a potential source of political opposition to patrons, and a consequence

is that bureaucrats are continually “shuffled” so that they cannot conspire against rulers. Another reason seems to be that bureaucrats in patrimonial regimes are even encouraged to be corrupt and steal, perhaps because this gives patrons more leverage over them. As Mobutu Sésé Seko famously said in this context

“If you want to steal, steal a little in a nice way. But if you steal too much to become rich overnight, you’ll be caught” quoted in Gould (1980 , p. 485)

This strategy of patrimonialism makes it very difficult for a central state to really establish and institutionalize its’ capacity and control over its’ territory. At some level, as I shall shortly discuss, patrimonialism is an attempt to create a national political order, but it does so not by eliminating alternative sources of authority in society, but by co-opting them. It does so not by trying to create a national identity, but by attempting to disarticulate potential sources of opposition or alternative identities. This leaves many sources of potential challenges to patrimonial rule simmering close to the surface and is why many of them break down. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that civilian control of the military seems to be inconsistent with patrimonialism, possibly because the regimes lack legitimacy and also because by their nature highly personalized regimes are very easy for even small groups of dissident soldiers to overthrow.<sup>3</sup> The reaction to this is that patrimonial regimes tend to keep the military very weak so as not to mount a credible threat. Instead, they often privatize security with presidents having bodyguards, often consisting of foreign nationals.

This somewhat stylized vision of how a patrimonial regime functions seems to fit quite well with accounts of how Stevens and Momoh ran the country. They used the control and discretion that this gave them to loot the nation’s wealth. This description also seems to help understand the utter lack of provision of public services and the increasing inability of the central state to impose its’ writ on the country. The characterization fits right down to the decision by Stevens shortly after assuming power to cut the army to 1,000 men since it was initially a coup that had stopped him assuming power in 1967. Stevens also privatized violence

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<sup>3</sup>For example, the 100 year rule of the True Whig Party in Liberia was overthrown in 1980 by just 18 men led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe.

creating a private security force initially named the Internal Security Unit and afterwards the Special Security Division. In the end it was a group of only 30 soldiers led by Captain Valentine Strasser which pitched the APC regime from power on April 30, 1992.

The APC came to power on the basis of strong support in the North of the country, particularly from the Temne and Limba ethnic groups but the regime really came to revolve around the personality of Stevens who perfected patrimonialism to a fine art and was known as 'Pa Siakie' (father of the nation - Kpundeh, 1995, p. 23).<sup>4</sup> Though Stevens built his patrimonialism on the social networks of the APC and much of the academic literature on this topic emphasizes the importance of informal relations, the strategy was greatly facilitated by changes in political institutions which began soon after he assumed power. Importantly, these involved making himself president and concentrating power in the executive, suspending democracy and creating a one-party state, first *de facto* in 1973 and then *de jure* in 1977. Stevens also seriously manipulated traditional political institutions such as Chieftaincy, buying support through the distribution of patronage and jobs, privatizing and personalizing state finances and looting the diamond wealth of the country (Barrows, 1976, Tangri, 1978b, Reno, 1995).<sup>5</sup> Violence and the coercion of political opponents, if not on the scale of Omar Al Bashir, Idi Amin, Samuel Doe, Mengistu Haile Miriam or Charles Taylor, was a regular feature of life and criticism was not tolerated. A notorious example being the murder in 1980 by defenestration from a top floor office window of Sam Bangura, the governor of the central bank (Reno, 1995, pp. 137-141). This was 'politics of the belly' writ large (Bayart, 1993). The regime also featured the dominance of Freetown over the rest of the country and an urban bias (Lipton, 1979, Bates, 1981) which involved the reversal of decentralization and the abolition of district councils in 1972.

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<sup>4</sup>A wonderful story about Stevens which I was told by a district councilor in Freetown goes as follows: in the 1970s Stevens was visiting Koidu and met with local APC activists to thank them for their support. He asked one of them "what can I do for you"? The main replied that all he asked was that at the meeting which Stevens was due to address in the afternoon he should go over to him and whisper in his ear, it didn't matter what he said. Stevens agreed. During the meeting, as promised, Stevens went over and whispered in the mans' ear. After this the man became rich and powerful since people believed he was a confidant of Stevens and came to ask him to intervene for them with the president!

<sup>5</sup>Stevens was not of course the first to interfere with chiefship. The British colonial state had one this as did early SLPP governments (see Kilson, 1966).

Casual empiricism suggests that barely any public goods were provided in the country in the 40 years prior to the end of the civil war and re-democratization in 2002. After coming to power in 1967, Stevens famously pulled up the railway to Bo, Kenema and Pendembu and sold off all the track and rolling stock to make the change as irreversible as possible. Though interpretations of this event differ, a salient one is that he did this to isolate Mendeland which was the area which most strongly supported the SLPP (for instance Abraham and Sesay, 1993, p. 120, Richards, 1996, pp. 42-43, Davies, 2007, pp. 684-685). The roads fell to pieces and schools disintegrated. National television broadcasts stopped in 1987 when the transmitter was sold by the Minister of Information and in 1989 a radio tower which relayed radio signals outside Freetown fell down ending transmissions outside the capital (Reno, 2003, p. 48 for these stories). Other aspects of economic policy also fit very well with the classical analyses of patrimonial regimes. For example, the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board, inherited from the British, had a monopsony over all export crops, and paid farmers very low prices (Bates, 1981) as low as 40% of the world level (Davies, 2007). The exchange rate was massively over-valued creating a black market and a scarce resource which Stevens' allocated through what Reno (1995) dubbed the 'shadow economy'. According to Maddison's data, GDP per-capita fell almost monotonically from the early 1970s onwards and declined to about 40% of the level recorded at independence by the end of the civil war.

I am not claiming that Stevens or Momoh could have turned Sierra Leone into Singapore or South Korea, but Botswana is a good example of what can be done with prudent policies and investment in public goods financed by diamond income. Sierra Leone could be a prospering middle income country today and its citizens could live much longer and healthier lives and enjoy far more of the amenities that modern technology has created.

### **3 Two Questions**

At a proximate level then, it is clear why Sierra Leone has done so badly since independence. I do not see any plausible alternative hypothesis and this claim is consistent with the conventional wisdom about the causes of comparative development (see Acemoglu Johnson and Robinson,

2001, 2002). This leads to two inter-related questions. First, what features of the society or polity led to such a terrible outcome, second, has governance changed in Sierra Leone since 2002 in such a way as to put the polity and economy onto a different and better development path? This latter question involves an interpretation of the current incarnation of the APC, so closely associated with the decline of the country. In political science, party labels are supposed to carry reputations which voters use when making decisions. Reputations are acquired by the actions that party members and politicians of the party take. On this basis the reputation of the APC ought to be quite bad.

The first question is more academic, but it is important to raise it since answering it will allow us to see if any of the circumstances which led to the decline of Sierra Leone in the first place have changed. Indeed, other political science models, such as that proposed by Downs (1957) suggest that politicians do what it takes to win power. Maybe in the 1970s and 1980s to win power one engaged in clientelism, but the world could have changed in such a way as to make providing public goods the way to win power today.<sup>6</sup> Such a vision of politics was actually articulated by Joseph Momoh after assuming power in 1986. Though he promised change he immediately came under criticism for filling his cabinet of 20 with 13 people who had served in the previous Stevens' cabinet. In response he noted

“Quite honestly, I believe the question about the old guard is being grossly overplayed. The impression is being given that new guards ... are going to be saints. This is far from the truth. My long years in government have proved that when cabinet changes take place, the new ones make little difference from the old ones they succeed ... I do not think emphasis should be put on the personality but rather on the system itself ... The very best of men brought into a bad system will become bad before long. So when we talk about old and new guards, if the system does not change, the result will always be the same” (quoted in Kpundeh, 1995, p. 26)

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<sup>6</sup>An interesting comparison here is with the former Soviet Union where in several countries ‘reformed’ communist parties were freely returned to power after the introduction of democratic elections in the 1990s.

In the model of Downs the leopard can change its spots and we would not expect the APC of 2008 to behave in the same way as the pre-1992 APC.

## 4 The Roots of Patrimonialism

Let me start then with the first question: what do we know about what causes patrimonialism? There are two sides to this question, the supply of patrimonialism and the demand. Almost the entire academic literature focuses on the supply side, namely the circumstances under which patrimonialism is an attractive strategy for politicians to use to stay in power. The demand side, the circumstances under which citizens demand patronage instead of, say, public goods, is neglected though may be important.

There are some basic ideas about what causes the supply of patrimonialism. First, it seems to be attractive in circumstances where national identities are lacking and there is no a settled social contract or legitimate structure of authority in the country. This was obviously quite a common circumstance in Africa after independence where countries inherited the arbitrary boundaries created by European colonialism.<sup>7</sup> Though we do not have good analytical models of this, Zolberg's (1966) insights about 'creating political order' still seem germane today. Patrimonialism may have great social costs but it is a very effective way of governing in a fissiparous nation.

Second, patrimonialism seems to be encouraged by heterogeneity of identities. There seem to be a few reasons for this. One is that patrimonialism heavily uses various forms of divide and rule and this strategy appears to be much more feasible in societies have distinct ascriptive identities (Padró-i-Miquel, 2007). Another, stems from the demand side. In a very heterogeneous society there may be much less demand for public goods, which reduces the opportunity cost of the massive under-supply of public goods which is the natural by-product of patrimonialism. Another facilitating factor on the demand side may stem from the fact that in a society divided by ascriptive differences it is easy to conceive of a polarization between different groups which may lead people to be disposed to reject the application of universal

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<sup>7</sup>As Englebert (2000) has shown the arbitrariness of a country's boundaries in Africa are correlated with poor development outcomes.

rules, so undermining principles which would impede the creation of patrimonialism. Heterogeneity of identities also seems to make it more difficult to establish civilian control of the military. When the military cannot be relied on it becomes very difficult to establish such key state functions as monopolizing violence and this again makes patrimonialism more attractive as a method of political control (see Horowitz, 1985, on how civilian control of the military is fraught in ethnically divided societies).

The third potent source of patrimonialism seems to be a type of path dependence from the institutional structure and operation of the colonial state. A large amount of recent empirical and historical work has emphasized the path dependent influence of colonial institutions (e.g. Engerman and Sokoloff, 1997, Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson, 2001), and this work resonates with arguments made by Africanists. Cooper (2002), for example, coins the term ‘gate-keeper state’ to refer to the institutions the Europeans created. They built governing centers on the coasts and constructed infrastructure and institutions only to the extent that this was needed to extract valuable resources or provide the thinnest veneer of order. Cooper’s argument suggests that center-periphery relations in post-independent African states were heavily influenced by the structure of the colonial state. Young (1994) specifically argues that the political strategies adopted by post-colonial African regimes were directly modelled on the way that colonial states functioned. For example, indirect rule practiced in British colonies precipitated indirect rule by post independent governments.<sup>8</sup>

It is also possible to make path dependent arguments about the creation of state institutions more generally. The institution of indirect rule was the antithesis of the construction of effective central state institutions and the development of what Mann (1986) calls ‘infrastructural power’. Indirect rule was not a strategy for building state institutions, rather it was a minimum cost way of creating order which gave up the desire of ‘penetrating’ society so as to provide public goods or structure public life, in order to focus on resource extraction. As

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<sup>8</sup>Many other types of arguments appear in the literature, for example patrimonialism is linked to central traits of African indigenous political systems or maybe African political culture (see Carlson, 1999). Another set of arguments involve the claim that patrimonialism is more attractive when countries are ‘resource dependent.’ Unfortunately, resource dependence is hard to measure in an objective way since economic decline will naturally lead a country to become resource dependent, at least if measured by the share of natural resources in GDP or exports (see Robinson, Torvik and Verdier, 2006, for this point).

Fanthorpe (2005, p. 4) points out in the case of Sierra Leone,

“even today, the vast majority of rural Sierra Leoneans obtain primary rights of residence, land use, and political/legal representation as ‘natives’ of chiefdoms rather than as citizens of the state.”

Here the academic literature builds firmly on the work of those like Hintze (1975) and Tilly (1975, 1990) who studied the development of central state institutions in Europe. These scholars emphasized how fiscal and tax institutions, bureaucracy and political institutions such as parliaments evolved out of the desire of states to raise resources to fight inter-state wars. Herbst (2000) and Bates (2001, 2008) specifically attribute the poor capacity of African states to the absence of the historical factors that led to them in Europe. To these scholars, as to Max Weber, patrimonialism was the natural state of affairs before the creation of states and “rational-legal authority” and it sees no natural tendency for patrimonialism to change without external challenges.<sup>9</sup>

Though the deep roots of the phenomenon are therefore complex, what is clear is that the strategy is complementary to certain types of political institutions. Throughout Africa, the creation of patrimonial rule went hand in hand with changes in political institutions. This involved a strengthening of the executive which was achieved by a move away from parliamentary to presidential constitutions. One can think of several reasons why being a president was more attractive than being a prime minister for politicians such as Stevens, but there seems to be a natural affinity between presidentialism and patrimonialism. It also involved a reduction in accountability which was implemented by the suspension of democracy. During the consolidation of patrimonialism power was also concentrated in the central state and capital city.

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<sup>9</sup>Herbst (2000) and Bates (2001) tend to emphasize ‘fundamentals’ such as population density and resource endowments as the main reason for the lack of incentives to build states, rather than the institutional inheritance of colonialism.

## 4.1 The Sierra Leonean Context

Some of these ideas obviously apply to Sierra Leone. Like most Sub-Saharan African countries Sierra Leone was ‘arbitrary’ and, the Western Areas aside, made up of a patchwork of different pre-colonial states and polities with different languages, histories and cultures. At independence, there was probably little notion of a national identity or agreed rules for structuring the contest for power and this no doubt led different groups to perceive that the stakes were very high.

Sierra Leone also seems to fit well with ideas of the ‘gate-keeper state’ centered on Freetown and of course the Protectorate was ruled indirectly through a system of chiefs institutionalized by the British in the 1890s.<sup>10</sup>

Civilian control of the military was also highly problematic and Sierra Leone even appears as a case study in Horowitz (1985) of a society where the colonial military recruitment policies gave post-independent civilian governments severe problems. For instance the British recruited primarily from the South of the country and this is one of the reasons why the Mende dominated officer corps opposed the election of the APC in 1967 and mounted a coup to block the transfer of power. Though Stevens quickly moved to replace Mende officers with northerners, his primary strategy was to emasculate the military, something which proved a disaster when the RUF invaded.

This being said, the intensity of patrimonialism in Sierra Leone might not have been anticipated in 1961. For one, unlike most Sub-saharan African countries it actually had a national language, Krio, something which is associated with political stability in Tanzania, or with very good development outcomes in Botswana.<sup>11</sup> Second, though there were distinct ethnicities in Sierra Leone, these were not based on the type of socioeconomic differences seen in Rwanda or Burundi and at no point does the civil war seem to have degenerated into anything approximating an ‘ethnic conflict.’<sup>12</sup> Herbst (2000) even classifies Sierra Leone into one of the rare

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<sup>10</sup>See Migdal (1988) for an analysis of indirect rule and its’ consequences in Sierra Leone.

<sup>11</sup>Though of course there is Somalia and Rwanda as well.

<sup>12</sup>Indeed though Humphreys and Weinstein’s (2008) data shows that being Mende does predict membership in the RUF, this effect comes only from those who were coerced into joining the movement. This effect almost certainly stems from the fact that the RUF began in the south of the country, which is more explained by the

African countries with ‘easy’ political geography based on its’ small size and distribution of population.

Despite these advantages there seem to have been some other factors that may have exacerbated the intensity of patrimonialism in the country. Most commonly cited is not the extent of natural resources but the *form*. It is widely observed that the alluvial nature of diamonds and their wide spread across the country makes it very difficult for the state to control diamond mining. This breeds illegality, smuggling and evasion and as Clapham (2003, p. 12) puts it

“a situation highly uncondusive to the maintenance of legal norms and bureaucratic state structures”.

It seems quite likely that the failure of the British colonial state and post-independence governments to bring the diamond mining economy under the control of formal state institutions helped to stimulate different ways to control it and extract wealth from it. The contrast with the deep mined capital intensive diamonds of Botswana is interesting.

Another factor often quoted in favor of Sierra Leonean distinctiveness is an undertow of socioeconomic and political conflicts possibly missing in most African countries. For example, Richards (1996), Sawyer (2004) and Fanthorpe (2005a) see historical roots of the civil war stemming from inegalitarian patterns of access to land and resources and many have written about the extent of ‘gerontocracy’ in Sierra Leone and the grievances this created amongst young men. It is possible that the existence of a large strata of disillusioned young men also facilitated the creation of patrimonialism since excluded from local resources, they may have valued very highly what rents were on offer from the political patrons in Freetown.

It may also have been that an added incentive to undermine the bureaucracy and create a shadow state’ in the post independence period came from the fact that the state inherited from the colonial powers was dominated by Krios, while politics was dominated by people and interests from the former protectorate (Clapham, 2003, p. 12).

Finally, one could also argue that the fact that the Mende and the Temne, each with about 30% of the population, formed the basis of the two main political parties gave politics a type location of Liberia and Charles Taylor than anything else.

of ‘polarized structure’ in the sense of Esteban and Ray (1994) which may have been very conducive to conflict.

## **5 Political Economy Fundamentals since 2002**

Having laid out some possible factors that led to the adoption of patrimonialism in Sierra Leone, let me now turn to the second question: have things changed in Sierra Leone in such a way as to remove the underpinnings of patrimonialism? We can address this question in two ways, one with a general discussion of the changing environment and one with a more specific discussion of how the SLPP and APC regimes have behaved and to what extent this is similar or different from what was observed prior to 1992.

### **5.1 Structural Change in Society?**

First let me ask if any of the structural conditions I identified in section 4 might have changed in such a way as to reduce the attraction or feasibility of patrimonialism as a political strategy.

The first three factors I emphasized were the arbitrariness of the nation state and lack of a social contract, the extent of heterogeneity, and path dependence from the colonial period. It is very difficult to be sure whether the situation with respect to the first factor has improved and it is difficult to establish if more people identify as Sierra Leonean in 2008 compared to 1961. My guess would be that neither factors one nor two had changed very much in the past 40 years and recent election results and political events suggest that ethnic identities are probably just as strong now as ever.<sup>13</sup>

One piece of evidence in favor of this is the continuity in the distribution of votes in elections over time. It is clear that the APC is still strongly associated with the north of the country while the SLPP is associated with the south and east. For instance in the 2007 elections the SLPP took only 3 of 39 parliamentary seats in the traditional APC provinces of Port Loko, Kambia, Tonkolili, Bombali and Koinadugu while the APC took 2 of 53 seats in the southern and eastern districts of Bo, Bonthe, Moyamba, Kono, Pujehun, Kenema, and Kailahun. In

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<sup>13</sup>See Kandeh (1992) on the politicization of ethnicity in Sierra Leone.

the presidential run-off Koroma took 80% of the vote in the old APC areas while Berewa won heavily in the South and East.

Related evidence is the make-up of the APC cabinet. As has been much discussed in the press, this is dominated by northerners.<sup>14</sup> There does seem to be a continuity in the regionalism and ethnic make-up of the political parties which one would conjecture reflects continuity in underlying political identities and ethnic identification.

Whether or not path dependence has been broken is also very difficult to tell. Freetown still dominates the country, and key parts of the old institutions of indirect rule, such as the chiefs, are still in place. Chiefs also still appear to be heavily involved in politics with Wyrod (2008, p. 79) noting of the 2007 elections “paramount chiefs tried to deliver votes for the SLPP.”<sup>15</sup> As I discuss later, there also seems to be persistence in political strategies.

Finally, thinking of factors more specific to Sierra Leone, though according to many reports the extent of alluvial diamond mining is now on the decline with most of the future in kimberlite pipes (as in Botswana), my own impression is that if not in absolute terms, then at least relative to the rest of the economy, diamond mining probably retains its’ significance as a source of wealth in society. With respect to traditional institutions governing the allocation of land and other local resources, these appear to have changed little since the end of the war. Indeed, the decision to re-instate chiefs with little change in the scope of their authority seems to have been tantamount to a reaffirmation of the old socioeconomic order governing the rural populace of Sierra Leone.

Where there has been clear change is in unravelling some of the changes in political institutions that went along with the consolidation of patrimonialism in Sierra Leone. Significant here is not just the democratic election of 2002, which came in for much criticism (see Kandeh, 2003), but the election of 2007 which saw the first peaceful transition of power in Sierra Leone. Some political scientists argue that one cannot tell whether or not a country is a democracy

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<sup>14</sup>Several people in Sierra Leone expressed the opinion to me that “you have to speak Temne or Limba if you want to get access to the presidential palace”.

<sup>15</sup>Although in person chiefs declare themselves to be all loyal to the government and not to be involved in politics, this is not the view of most of the political commentators I talked to in Sierra Leone. One high ranking official in the SLPP suggested to me that chiefs could deliver 20% of the vote in their chiefship while others disagreed that this was too high and a more plausible figure was 10%.

until power has changed hands (e.g., Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi, 2000) and these authors do not code Botswana as a democracy since the Botswana Democratic Party has been in power continually since independence in 1966. Not only may a peaceful change of power indicate the presence of real democracy, but Kudamatsu (2006) shows that it is precisely in such situation that one observes improved socioeconomic outcomes in Africa. He shows that in African countries which democratized in the 1990s but where the old leaders got themselves re-elected, there were no such improvements.

That the SLPP gave up power peacefully (albeit with a few trembles) may suggest that the stakes from politics are lower today in Sierra Leone. So the successful elections of 2007 may well indicate that there has been positive structural change. This could stem from many sources. Maybe diamonds are less important, so being in power is less valuable, possibly path dependence has been broken and a genuinely new politics has emerged. An alternative, less optimistic interpretation is that the international community is now much less tolerant of coups than it used to be and provides such a huge proportion of the state's resources in Sierra Leone that the politicians cannot behave as they used to.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the positive aspects of democracy, one must also be aware that democracy in itself is unlikely to solve the key problems I identified above. This is because the way democracy works depends a lot on the other political institutions with which it interacts.<sup>17</sup> Democracy in deeply polarized societies can quickly turn into the tyranny of the majority over the minority, as is evident from the current situation in Venezuela and the Latin American experience suggests that patrimonialism can survive democratization. To deliver better development outcomes democratization needs to be accompanied by other institutional changes, particularly increases in checks and balances. As I pointed out above, the consolidation of patrimonialism in Africa and Sierra Leone did not just involve the suspension of democracy.

There seem to be three pathologies of political competition under democracy which create potential problems for Sierra Leone. The first stems from my discussion so far. If strong

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<sup>16</sup>Though I find this argument quite convincing it is not wholly so. For example, the recent behavior of the incumbent regime in Zimbabwe after the March 2008 elections suggests that African governments still have a lot of leeway to rig elections if they see this to be to their advantage.

<sup>17</sup>This is why there is no simple cross-country correlation between economic growth and democracy.

regional or ethnic identities exist in much of the country then this massively reduces the extent of political competition and increases the ability of politicians to extract rents. Politicians are only constrained to the extent that they face the threat of being thrown out of office, but this threat is much diluted if people vote on the groups of ethnic or regional appeal, instead of on the basis of performance. Ethnic voting tends to allow politicians to allocate resources to themselves, rather than public goods.

The second related point is that in a democracy politicians target policies to people who can be persuaded to change their vote - so called swing voters' (Lindbeck and Weinbull, 1987, Dixit and Londregan, 1996). In practice such people tend to be those who are more educated and or informed (Strömberg, 2004). In Sierra Leone these people tend to be in the urban areas, primarily Freetown.<sup>18</sup> A survey undertaken for the BBC World Service Trust (2007) showed, for example, that knowledge about political parties and issues was far higher in the Western Areas than elsewhere and a greater proportion of people also tended to think that the parties were indistinguishable in terms of policies in these areas. Indeed, while in 2002 the SLPP took 9 of the 16 seats in the Western Areas, Freetown and the peninsular, in 2007 the APC took all 21 seats. So there was a big 'swing' away from the SLPP. Wyrod (2008, p. 80) concludes that the main determinant of the vote in the Western Areas was the track record in office of the SLPP arguing that "these residents voted on the SLPP's peacetime record, and they were not pleased."<sup>19</sup>

Though the fact that people are voting on the basis of the performance of the government can be interpreted as a good sign, the fact that such people are concentrated in Freetown raises the spectre of renewed urban bias with a new microfoundation. According to Lipton (1979) and Bates (1981) urban bias arose because the biggest threat to the political stability of African regimes stemmed from urban discontent.<sup>20</sup> Urban citizens were better able to solve

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<sup>18</sup>The success of the PMDC in Bo at the expense of the SLPP may also indicate that political preferences are more fluid there.

<sup>19</sup>The fact that Freetown and the Western areas overwhelmingly supported the APC in 2007 in itself is not necessarily proof that swing voting is going on. The APC was traditionally strong in these areas motley as a result of patterns of migration with many Temne moving to the capital (Banton, 1957). Indeed, Stevens was mayor of Freetown in the 1960s. So it is possible that the 2007 results reflect the impact of the reconstruction of the APC after the end of the civil war. Nevertheless, the opinion polls do support the swing voter hypothesis.

<sup>20</sup>The classic example being the 1969 coup against the government of Kofi Busia in Ghana. This was preceded

the collective action problem and in consequence regimes subsidized and placated them at the expense of relatively disorganized rural dwellers. The same phenomenon now risks arising again but from a different mechanism, now urban residents are the swing voters who determine who wins democratic elections and political competition will naturally deliver policies which they favor.

The final pathology that I would emphasize is that political competition does not always generate better policy outcomes. If politicians can use inefficient instruments, such as clientelistic provision of private goods as opposed to public goods, then increased competition increases their incentives to use such policies. An example of this from the 2007 election is that the PMDC campaigned on the basis that if they won people would not have to pay taxes. Politicians (non-PMDC admittedly) in both Bo and Koidu told me that this had made it more difficult to collect taxes since the election.

This all sounds quite pessimistic and it is important to add that the country is at peace, a quite remarkable achievement and 72,000 ex-combatants demobilized. Nevertheless, this in itself does not tell us much about whether or not the conditions that led to the demise of Sierra Leone have changed, they just indicate that the war has not left some of the more pernicious legacies that it might have done.

Some have argued that the war actually left something of a positive political legacy. For instance Richards, Bah and Vincent (2004) and Bellows and Miguel (2008) argue that involvement in the war has led to greater political participation. While not denying that this may have happened, it seems second-order to me compared to the phenomenon I have discussed above. Most accounts still portray ‘civil society’ was very weak in Sierra Leone and unable to exert much influence over the political system.

## **5.2 The Track Record: 2002-2007 the SLPP in power**

What does the record suggest? I begin with the SLPP administration between 2002 and 2007.

The consensus view seems to be that the government generated quite a lot of disappointed  

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(maybe ‘precipitated’ but this causal statement is complicated) by food riots induced by increases in prices caused by a devaluation in the much over-valued exchange rate.

expectations. Wyrod (2008, p. 72) states a common view when he notes “Kabbah and his SLPP neglected the underlying problems of corruption, poverty, and marginalization that fueled the conflict.”<sup>21</sup> A charitable interpretation of this period is that the government ‘rested on its’ laurels’ after having achieved peace. A less charitable interpretation is that its’ behavior began to reproduce that seen in Sierra Leone prior to 1992.

There are several things worth emphasizing. The first was the support from President Kabbah for the resuscitation of the chieftaincy system in a form more or less unchanged from the colonial period. As I noted above, in the early independence periods chiefly families were heavily involved in national and local politics and under the APC there was a great deal of manipulation of the appointment of chiefs. In consequence, the chieftaincy must have been quite tarnished as a political institution at the end of the war. In addition to this involvement in high politics, as I discussed, the literature on the origins of the civil war suggests an important role for grievances emanating from the abuse by chiefs of their power. One might have imagined that the SLPP government and the international community would have embraced this window of opportunity to reform this somewhat anachronistic institution.<sup>22</sup> Yet they did not and this seems to have been an important failure.

Instead, what happened was the reconstruction of chieftaincy as it existed prior to 1991, with all the potential for the types of abuse which occurred before. This was accompanied in 2004 by the re-creation of the 12 district and 5 urban councils. The relationship between the councils, originally created by the British in 1950 to be in charge of ‘development’, and the chieftaincies is in many ways similar to that which existed before 1972. For example, they are reliant on chiefs to raise revenues for poll taxes which they remit to them, though the councils now set the rate of poll tax. The SLPP government successfully resisted allocating a fixed amount of the government budget to councils (Fanthorpe, 2005a, p. 35).

Much analysis has focused on the potential and actual conflicts built into the relationships

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<sup>21</sup>Others who voiced similar judgements include the secretary general of the UN who noted “there is a general perception that the Government’s inability to deliver basic services or to respond to the needs of the population is due to corruption and mismanagement of public resources” quoted in International Crisis Group (2008, p. 1).

<sup>22</sup>The window was made quite wide by the fact that 63 of the 149 chiefs have been elected since December 2002 as a result of chiefs having been killed or died during the war.

between district councils and chieftaincies and these conflicts in many ways resemble those that existed prior to 1972 (see Tangri, 1978a, Jackson, 2006, World Bank, 2007)

Clearly the issue of chieftaincy is complex because while chiefs and the rules governing their elections look fairly anachronistic they also command quite a lot of local legitimacy. Indeed, there is evidence that in the 1970s and 1980s they provided some protection for citizens facing the predatory state in Freetown. As Fanthorpe (2004, pp. 6-7) puts it

“In an environment where ruthless pursuit of self-interest among the comparatively wealthy and well educated is perceived to be the norm, chiefs continue to be seen as a lesser evil: there is at least some chance that rulers with the appropriate hereditary credentials can be prevailed upon to protect the hereditary rights of the rural populace.”<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, the many consultations which took place after 2000 indicated that while chiefs enjoyed some legitimacy, they also came in for a lot of criticism. I discuss potential reforms of chieftaincy later but there was wide support at that time for the creation of universal suffrage into chieftaincy elections, which was ignored.<sup>24</sup> For instance Fanthorpe (2005b) concluded his review of the facilitators’ reports in the following terms, “the overwhelming preference among participants was for expanding the franchise in paramount chieftaincy elections yet still restricting candidature to members of historic ruling houses.” Yet such recommendations were ignored in preference for a return to the status-quo ante.<sup>25</sup>

The second area where the SLPP regime’s lack of commitment to reform was in its anti-corruption campaign. The Anti-Corruption Commission was formed in 2000 with a great deal of donor support and pressure and the government launched its’ Anti-Corruption strategy in February 2005. However, when the head of the commission, Val Collier, attempted to do

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<sup>23</sup>I think this is the reason why recent surveys, for example World Bank (2007), portray the chiefs in such a good light relative to district councils or the central government.

<sup>24</sup>At the moment chiefs are elected for life using a system introduced by the British. To be eligible to be a chief a candidate must come from one of several ‘ruling houses’ whose identity was determined during the colonial period. Elections are indirect via an electoral college with one elector elected by every 20 taxpayers. There are many reports of abuse of this system.

<sup>25</sup>See Hanlon (2005) for a trenchant analysis of the possibility that re-creation of the chieftaincy system is helping to return the country to the conditions that started the war.

his job too vigorously he was replaced by Henry Joko-Smart, the brother in law of President Kabbah. The International Crisis Group (2007, p. 9) notes

“While Collier brought charges against ministers, an Appeals court judge and several senior civil servants, Joko-Smart has focused almost exclusively on junior and mid-level officials.”

The analysis of Mahony (2003) is very similar,

“Government legislation states that all cases investigated and approved for prosecution by the Anti Corruption Commission must receive the assent of the Attorney General who is also the Minister of Justice. This intentional infrastructural flaw has meant that cases put forward by the Commission which raise allegations of corruption against individuals with political connections have been interfered with through the political link of the Attorney General. Such an influence cannot occur on a continual basis without the knowledge and subsequent approval of the President. Cases involving such individuals as the former Deputy Minister of Finance, Mohamed Daramy, who was to be tried for false pretences had his case handed over to the police in November 2002 with little or no action since.”

The lack of seriousness about eradicating corruption and persecution of those who take this job too seriously is disconcertingly reminiscent of the bad old days. For example, Alfred Akibo-Betts, the former chairman of the Freetown City Council, played a key role in exposing some of the worst excesses during the Stevens administration. Akibo-Betts was not only dismissed, but beaten up and had to flee the country (Kpundeh, 1995, p. 98).

Third, apart from the insistence of the Kabbah government to re-create chieftaincy, it showed many other signs of wanting to reinforce the institutional status-quo ante. A notable example was its' opposition to the DFID sponsored project ENCISS (Enhancing Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State to improve poor people's lives) (International Crisis Group, 2008, p. 13)

Fourth, in terms of the style of politics, there seems to have been little change from pre-1991 strategies. Many appointments in the bureaucracy, for example, appear to have been made on the basis of dispensing patronage. The new Human Resources Management Office found in 2007 that there were no records for 60% of civil servants (9,300 of 16,000) and that there was a huge problem of ghost workers. For example, salaries were paid to 236 people of the senior civil service list but only 125 were found to actually be at their posts (International Crisis Group, 2008). Results from public expenditure tracking surveys were also disconcerting, for example with one finding that only 5% of essential drugs which were supposedly transferred from the Central Medical Stores actually reaching the Primary Health Units for which they were intended. There were other examples like this for educational supplies.

Electioneering also seems to have been highly clientelistic. Prior to the 2007 election Freetown newspapers were full of stories about how Vice President and SLPP Presidential candidate Solomon Berewa was dispensing money from his residency in an attempt to buy votes. This became so intense that he gained the nicknames ‘the World Bank’ and ‘Western Union’. An interesting anthropological study by Jackson (2004) undertaken during the early SLPP government also shows great continuity in the style of politics where politicians were regarded as ‘big men’ who had to dispense money and favors though in return received ‘Kola’.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, there were clear autocratic tendencies. For instance, the Newspaper Bill and Media Practitioners Bill passed in Kabbah’s first term gives the government extraordinary powers to revoke licenses and fire journalists and editors. In addition the 1965 Public Order Act has been used by both SLPP and APC governments to restrict the freedom of journalists.<sup>27</sup> In countries where political institutions do not work very well, a free press may be the institution which is most important for government accountability, something vividly brought home by the experience of Peru during the presidency of Alberto Fujimori (see McMillan and Zoido,

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<sup>26</sup> A prominent parliamentarian told me in Freetown that when he returned to his constituency this was regarded as ‘big man cooking’ and people queued up to demand private favors. Interestingly, he portrayed this as a terrible dilemma which seriously undermined his ability to do his job, putting the focus on the demand side of clientelism, rather than the supply side. This may be an interesting insight into the constraints that even reforming politicians face.

<sup>27</sup> On the use of the Public Order Act by the APC in February 2008 see, [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=25745](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=25745)

2004).

Nevertheless, there are signs that other institutions have begun to work much better than might have been anticipated. One such institution is the Electoral Commission headed by Christiana Thorpe. The Commission was created by the SLPP in 2005 after highly negative international reaction to irregularities in the 2004 local elections which induced a partial suspension in British aid. However, it acted in an impressively independent manner during the 2007 election. In particular, in the critical presidential run-off the Commission noted 477 polling stations (out of 5,679) with turn-outs of over 100% (i.e. more votes cast than the registered electorate) which is impossible without fraud or illegal action. In response, the Commission invalidated the results from such polling stations. These stations came from nearly all districts but they were predominantly in the south, so their disenfranchisement hurt the SLPP far more than the APC.<sup>28</sup>

### 5.3 The Track Record: The APC back in Power

We are in the early days of the presidency of Ernest Bai Koroma and the APC administration, but nevertheless there are quite a few things one can say. The first thing to observe is that while there are some obvious continuities in terms of personalities with the old APC Koroma himself was not deeply connected with the Stevens or Momoh regimes.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, to some extent the rise of Koroma reflects the relative reduction in power of the APC old guard – he was not the preferred presidential candidate of the old elite of the APC and in 2006 five party heavyweights, Edward Turay, Abdul Karim Koroma (foreign minister under Stevens), Jengo Stevens (son of the ex-president), A.F. Serry and Moses Sesay tried to unseat him.<sup>30</sup> Still, as I noted earlier, continuity in personalities alone is neither necessary nor sufficient for the political strategy to remain the same. People may find it optimal to change their strategies if

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<sup>28</sup>By district the number of polling stations disenfranchised was: Kailahun: 90, Kenema: 65, Kono: 9, Bombali: 17, Kambia: 8, Koinadugu: 12, Port Loko: 2, Tonkolili: 6, Bo: 123, Bonthe: 2, Moyamba: 24, Pujehun: 113, Western Rural: 1 and Western Urban: 5.

<sup>29</sup>There are also continuities in the SLPP as well, such as the Margai dynasty. Though Charles Margai left the party after loosing the battle to succeed Kabbah, the recent poor performance of his People's Movement for Democratic Change in the July 2008 local elections, may eventually induce his return.

<sup>30</sup>"History of the Conflict in the APC", *We Yone*, 18 December 2006, Freetown.

the political environment changes, and new people adopt the strategies of the old.

Second, other continuities, already mentioned, include the patterns of electoral support for the APC and the dominance of northerners in the cabinet. There are also many signs of a re-invigorated clientelism suffusing the bureaucracy. For instance soon after taking power the APC began replacing bureaucrats which it claimed were too political and too closely associated with the previous regime. These included the governor of the Central Bank, the commissioner of the National Revenue Authority, the commissioner and deputy commissioner of the National Commission for Social Action, the ombudsman, the chairman of the telecommunications commission, the finance director of the health ministry, the managing director of the state lottery, the board of directors of all parastatals, and even the Clerk of Parliament. As with the previous SLPP regime, clientelism in the bureaucracy seems to go along with a quite traditional approach to elections.<sup>31</sup>

Third, there is evidence of some of the authoritarian practices of the past. For one, the bodyguard of the president was headed during the election by Idrissa Kamara nicknamed ‘Leather Boots’, a former member of the AFRC junta and subsequently adviser to Foday Sankoh and an RUF nominated minister of the transitional government. Another piece of evidence is the closing of the SLPP’s radio station ‘UNITY’ in the run-up the July district elections. The government claimed that the radio tower of the station had not been properly registered and subsequently the president himself took part in the re-inauguration, Still, the fact that this station was closed in troubling.

There are also positive signs. One good sign is that the new regime appears to be much more serious about anti-corruption than the previous regime. President Koroma came to

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<sup>31</sup>When asked what was the most important determinant of election outcomes I was told by a senior local APC politician in Freetown “money”. I asked, but surely someone who provided a new school or built drains (it rains a lot in Freetown and many people complain of flooding) and roads would win votes, he said “maybe, but this was less good than money.” I noted a generational difference between politicians who were asked this question with younger ones more readily voicing the notion that what people wanted was “development” rather than private benefits. However, when I suggested this to the Freetown politician he said “young people only say that because they have no money”. I pointed out that Vice-President Berewa had supposedly spent large amounts of money in a very ineffective attempt to sway Freetown voters. He argued that this strategy had been useless because it had been done right at the last minute. The SLPP had been convinced it would win the 2007 elections and so had not “treated” (to use the expression common in 19th century English elections) the voters until it was too late.

power “we have to run this country like a business concern” which compared to the relevant counterfactual might signal a huge improvement in governance. President Koroma announced a 60 man presidential transitional team and he commissioned a transition report to document the governance failures of the previous regimes. Koroma announced a pledge that he and all ministers would make declarations of assets and ministers and senior civil servants signed performance contracts which they had to report on every quarter. If these initiatives are really acted on then this could lead to large improvements in governance. At the moment, however, the jury is out.<sup>32</sup>

## 6 Persistence or Change? A Preliminary Conclusion

The last three sections suggest the following conclusions. Though quite a lot has changed since the end of the civil war, more striking than the changes are the continuities. The war left little political legacy, notwithstanding some evidence that those who participated in it are more politically mobilized than those who did not. Far more impressive is the re-assertion of the competition between the SLPP and the APC and the recreation of the ethnic and social networks that galvanized political action in the 1960s and 1970s. It is perfectly possible that the same parties and even the same politicians could return with new policies and strategies, but even if some of the structural features have changed, they have probably not changed enough to remove the attractiveness of patrimonial politics. Brown, Fanthorpe, Gardener, Gberie, and Sesay (2006) also express the view that there has been a large amount of persistence in the political equilibrium in Sierra Leone and in the incentives to adopt patrimonial strategies. There is enough change, in democracy, in the presence of different interests such as many people from the diaspora who have returned, in the clear presence of some committed to reform, and in the important role of the international community, that this is unlikely to lead to a return to the situation prior to 1991. However, it will probably be sufficient to seriously inhibit the

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<sup>32</sup>For instance the concept of a ‘transition report’ is hardly new in Sierra Leone. After 1967 the Stevens government created commissions to investigate malpractices during the SLPP administration and after the 1992 coup the NPRC regime did the same thing for the APC. In both cases this was simply a bit of politicking and did not reflect any genuine change in political strategy or even attitude towards corruption (see Riley, 1983, on the earlier period, Kpundeh, 1995, on the latter).

prospects for sustained pro-poor economic growth in Sierra Leone.

I emphasize pro-poor because I also believe that even if the underlying political environment has not changed, or changed little, it is possible that large changes in the economic environment can lead to alternative outcomes. I now consider this possibility.

## **7 Changes in the Economic Environment**

So far I have focused mostly on the political incentive structure in Sierra Leone and the question of whether or not there has been a structural break in the political equilibrium of the society. This seems crucial to me because the most obvious source of economic decline in Sierra Leone is the behavior of the government. Nevertheless, politicians, even patrimonial ones, operate in an environment of economic incentives. One meta factor underlying the trajectory of African countries after independence may have been that this was not a very auspicious period in which to engage in economic activities in which Africa had a comparative advantage - namely agriculture. This may have influenced the opportunity cost of immiserizing farmers to the benefit of urban consumers and elites.

But this situation may be changing. Over the past few years the economic expansion of China and India has begun to create the expectation that we are about to see sustained changes in the terms of trade between agricultural and manufactured goods. If this is correct, then it implies that the economic costs of the types of policies pursued in Sierra Leone prior to 2002, will become much larger. This may increase the incentives for more rational economic policy, at least in the sense of exploiting comparative advantage, even if political institutions are unchanged. I believe this may very well be correct, but I also believe that the way in which political elites in Sierra Leone or elsewhere in Africa will take advantage of this is unlikely to lead to the type of economic growth desired by the World Bank.

The basis for such a prediction comes from the economic and political history of Latin America. Though one can make many analogies with historical episodes, that with Latin America in the 19th century seems by far the most apposite to me. Latin American nations emerged from European colonialism in the 1820s and, as with Africa, many were plunged into

decades of civil war and economic decline. Best documented are the contests for power that took place in Argentina and Mexico. As in Africa, the removal of colonial authority left a vacuum of both political power and authority which led to long conflicts for power.

It is not a coincidence that the relative cessation of civil war and conflict in Latin America coincided with a growing awareness amongst political elites that the changing situation in world markets along with existing structures of comparative advantage, presented vast economic opportunities. In Argentina it is clear that it was these economic incentives which led political elites in Buenos Aires to finally reconcile themselves with the warlords of the interior and devise an institutional solution to guarantee peace so that they could get on with making money (Mazzuca, 2007). In Colombia it was these incentives which induced the Liberal and Conservative parties to stop fighting and also find a set of rules for allocating power in a peaceful way (Mazzuca and Robinson, 2008). In Mexico, the change international economic order led to a different outcome where elites became reconciled to the long personal dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz which brought stability and the opportunity to make money (see Haber, Maurer and Razo, 2004, Chapter 3).

What happened after the fighting subsided? In most cases, Costa Rica and Colombia being partial exceptions, the relative peace and the new economic model that emerged in Latin America after the 1860s and 1870s certainly generated increased rates of economic growth. Prior to this per-capita growth was probably zero on average, and quite likely negative in some countries, such as Mexico. But the growth that emerged after 1870 was based on a highly oligarchic and inegalitarian set of institutions. After elites stopped fighting, the change in world market conditions meant that land became a highly valuable asset, at least once infrastructure such as railroads were in place. The result of this was that in country after country, in Mexico Guatemala, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile, indigenous peoples who had kept possession of immense tracts of lands since the conquest, were expropriated and forced to work in large export oriented plantations (see Solberg, 1969, on Chile, Coatsworth, 1974, on Mexico, McCreery, 1986, on Guatemala, and Klein, 1992, on Bolivia). The prime beneficiaries of this were political elites who were able to determine the allocation of land. So investment and

growth occurred as agricultural exports took off in economy after economy in Latin America, but the initial distribution of political power led to very inegalitarian outcomes. Indeed, scholars such as Coatsworth (1998) have argued that this is precisely the period when high levels of inequality appeared in Latin America, not earlier. Not only was this outcome inegalitarian, it was definitely not pro-poor. For instance in the Mexican case there is some evidence that during the *Porfiriato* both real wages and heights (of military recruits) fell in the decades leading up to the Mexican Revolution which broke out in 1910.

Is there something different about Africa which would lead to the inapplicability of this scenario? There are several arguments one could make here. One is that in most Latin American countries the political elite which emerged in the 19th century were Creoles of Spanish descent who were very distinct from indigenous peoples. In Africa, with the possible exception of Liberia, creole elites have not succeeded in controlling independent countries and from Algeria to Zimbabwe they have already been ejected from power and expropriated. Yet the pattern I described above happened in all Latin American countries, even Argentina where there was much less of an ethnic distinction between elite and non-elite.

Another possible counter argument is that the technology of violence has changed. The Argentine military were finally able to obliterate the gauchos with the aid of the Remington rifle. But now one could argue that the ready availability of cheap AK-47s and rocket propelled grenades makes the expropriation of land by political elites impossible. Evidence against this argument comes directly from the history of Sierra Leone. In 1995 the NPRC regime brought in the private firm Executive Outcomes to help it deal with the RUF. Executive Outcomes, better organized and disciplined than the RUF quickly pushed it out of most of the country and it was with disastrous consequences for the Kabbah government that they were forced to leave by the opprobrium of the international community in 1996.

A final possibility is that a more democratic modern world will not allow the type of constitutional solutions which Latin American countries devised in order to take advantage of international market conditions. Yet this argument does not seem very plausible either. Africa may be more democratic today than Latin America in 1860, but I am not sure how

much more democratic. There are many countries with quite unreconstructed regimes, such as Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Sudan, and Zimbabwe and other African countries seem more than able to adopt highly oligarchic constitutions, an interesting recent example is the recent constitutional ‘solution’ in Burundi which creates a massive over-representation of minority Tutsi interests (Lemarchand, 2007).

I believe then it is quite possible that the change in the terms of trade facing African countries could lead to a new development model rather different than the previous one which has dominated the continent since independence. In this scenario, patrimonial politics starts to become much too costly because it stops the development of the export economy which has suddenly become much more attractive. This leads political elites to change their strategy but it may also lead them to attempt to gain control over land. This may well lead to the end of chieftaincy in Sierra Leone and a massive concentration of lands in the hands of political elites (including no doubt former chiefs). Whether or not this is a bad scenario really depends on what the counterfactual is. If it is a persistence of the last 50 years, this may be an improvement. Yet the Latin American experience also suggests a lot of path dependence. Though the oligarchic model generated growth after 1870 it also created a lot of political instability and was unable to make the transition to successful industrial growth.

## **8 Implications for the Country Assistance Strategy**

How can the World Bank respond to the issues I have raised? Can it use this information to improve the way it operates in Sierra Leone to achieve its’ ends and how should this influence the priorities of the next Country Assessment Strategy (CAS)?

The 2006-2009 CAS emphasizes three priority areas, (1) Governance, decentralization and public sector financial management, (2) sustainable growth, food security and jobs creation, and (3) human development (World Bank, 2006, pp. 15-24). Progress has been mixed on all three fronts. I have already extensively discussed governance matters, but the other areas are just as moot. For instance the recent IRCBP (2008) report on the 2007 national public services survey notes that “The official policies of free primary education and free medical treatment

for children under 5 were not generally respected” (p. 2).

How could the political economy analysis I have advanced aid the formulation of the next CAS? This is a complex question and let me break it down into two parts. This recognizes that while part of the existing CAS, primarily the first priority emphasizes institutions, the rest emphasizes particular policies which I think it is useful to think of as being implemented within a given set of institutions. With this dichotomy in mind, one could first more or less take the set of institutions as given and try to figure out if CAS priorities or specific policies could be designed in a sophisticated way which would to some extent mitigate any perverse political incentives that might be there. Second, one could try to nudge the institutions in the direction of endogenously generating better policies by changing the perverse incentives.<sup>33</sup>

I shall have much more to say about this second strategy because I think it is likely to bear much more fruit. The World Bank cannot generate a development success by continually breathing down the neck of recalcitrant politicians. There are too many possibilities for subterfuge and too many margins on which politicians can substitute one bad policy with another (see Robinson, 2005). Indeed, this is one of the sad lessons of the previous experience of structural adjustment in Sierra Leone, which Herbst (1990), Griffiths (2003), Reno (1995, 1998) and made so much of. More generally in Africa van de Walle (2001) has shown how programs of structural adjustment were continually undermined because they themselves did not change the underlying political equilibrium. In the context of structural adjustment he argues (2001, p. 76)

“Often, the policies have changed on paper, but in practice, something resembling the status quo ante continues to prevail. In some cases, the old policies were reinstated under a new name or with some new policy objective ... In other cases, governments ignore the spirit of their own liberalization efforts by continuing to interfere in officially deregulated markets.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>This dichotomy is more or less used in the innovative political economy analysis of World Bank CAS policy options in Zambia by Levy and Palale (2007) and Taylor and Simutanyi (2007).

<sup>34</sup>See Acemoglu, Johnson, Querubin and Robinson (2008) for a theoretical and empirical investigation of this issue in the specific context of central bank independence.

Acemoglu, Johnson, Querubín and Robinson (2008) conduct theoretical and empirical investigation of this issue in the specific context of central bank independence. They introduce the idea of a *See-Saw Effect*, whereby when the underlying political equilibrium of society is unchanged, reform in one dimension of policy leads to ‘disreform’ in another dimension with little change for the overall policy environment or economic performance of society.

In consequence I am quite sceptical about coming up with sophisticated ‘politician proof’ ways of promoting CAS priorities (2) and (3) more cleverly. Indeed, grappling with exactly this issue in Zambia Levy and Palale (2007) come up with various “guiding strategies” such as (p. 20) “Guiding Strategy #1: focus engagement narrowly - targeting very specific interventions where developmental goals are aligned with the incentives of Zambian elites.” Targeting narrowly is subject to the *See-Saw Effect* and if the analysis of this paper is correct, focusing policy on issues where developmental goals are aligned with the political elite is not going to be an effective way of developing a country. The work of Levy and Palale (2007) is important, but they focus on the wrong target.

It is the political elite who must want to develop the country and must be rewarded by their citizens for doing so. But this is not a call for “leadership”, elites respond to incentives which are created by the institutional environment. CAS priorities (2) and (3) will bear fruit endogenously if governance in Sierra Leone is improved.

How might the World Bank nudge institutions in a direction which might be propitious for generating better development policy and outcomes? How might this be done with an eye to making sure that the perverse aspects of the political equilibrium on the 1970s and 1980s do not resurface in Sierra Leone?

To think about this let me return to the patrimonialism of the Stevens regime. At some deep level it is difficult to change the attractiveness of patrimonialism as a political strategy. It is obviously an incredibly effective way of binding your supporters to you and disarticulating your opponents. Things of course may have changed. First, Sierra Leone may be more of a nation state now and there may be more of a sense of national identity than there was in the 1960s or 1970s, the lack of which I have argued makes patrimonial rule attractive. Second, as I

discussed above, people's preferences (I am tempted to use the word 'values') may have changed in a way which makes the 'patrimonial exchange' more difficult to consummate. In essence citizens may be less happy with patronage now, they want development. As I noted however the evidence on this seems to be very mixed and it remains to be seen if President Koroma's current appeal for 'attitudinal change' will be very effective. So the structural underpinnings of patrimonial rule may have changed, but they probably have not have changed much. I don't think the World Bank can do much about this in any case. What they can do is to focus more on how institutions were changed to facilitate patrimonialism.

Leaving the social structure aside, it is clear from the facts about Stevens' rule and from the wider African evidence that certain sorts of political institutions facilitate patrimonialism. Stevens didn't just suspend democracy, he also made himself president and concentrated power in the executive. He also accumulated power in Freetown. The international community clearly recognized this when they pushed for decentralization after 2002 and the re-introduction of district councils and more generally of course the support for multi-party democracy in the country. Trying to decentralize power and resources out of Freetown was surely an excellent idea. But I do not think that they took this view to its' logical conclusion in the formulation of CAS priority (1). In itself, my impression is that just establishing elected district councils has not done much to undermine executive dominance or strengthen the system of checks and balances which are so crucial to a successful democracy. Therefore to make decentralization and the creation of district councils the focus of the governance part of the CAS is to focus on only a small part of the necessary reforms in political institutions.

The obvious conclusion from the discussion so far is that other reforms of political institutions are needed which would further unwind the legacy of patrimonialism. The most important aspect of this is the power of the executive, particularly relative to parliament. I discuss proposed reforms here first. The second aspect is deepening and improving the coherence of decentralization, I discuss this second.

## 8.1 Strengthening Parliament

I emphasized above the overwhelming fact that in Africa, the consolidation of patrimonialism went along with the switch from parliamentary to presidential rule.<sup>35</sup> Presidents have great powers in Africa, though these powers are often more de facto than de jure, something which greatly complicates reform. Elsewhere in the world, the formal agenda setting powers of presidents are much greater. For instance in Argentina, Chile and Taiwan, only the president can introduce a budget and congress cannot increase expenditures (Haggard and Shugart, 2001, p. 79) and it is quite general for presidents to have the agenda setting powers with respect to budgets (Carey and Shugart, 1992, Table 8.2, p. 155). In Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Russia presidents can decree new legislation without getting any authority from the legislature (see Carey, Neto and Shugart, 1997, for a comprehensive discussion of the powers of Latin American presidents). In Africa the situation is even more extreme with scholars referring to the “imperial presidency” (Carlson, 1999, p. 39, Nwabueze, 1975).

In Sierra Leone, the situation seems to be one of de facto executive dominance - here is a real legacy from the pre-1991 period. Indeed, a whip of one of the political parties described the parliament to me as “an appendage of the executive” and he also expressed the opinion that “we can’t hold government accountable right now.” Parliament seems to be massively under-resourced relative to the executive with MPs lacking offices, computers and research support. I was told that for the 22 parliamentary committees there were only 5 clerks and 4 computers. Every parliamentarian I talked to from all parties voiced the same concerns. This is clearly reflected in a massive lack of morale amongst MPs and a frustration that they cannot do what they are supposed to do. I was also told that this reflected itself in low attendance and often problems with getting a quorum though I have not found any data on this yet (and there are obvious issues of causality). I do not believe it is very feasible to move back from a

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<sup>35</sup>Scholars who have examined the transitions to presidentialism have seen it in terms of a strengthening of the powers of the executive and reducing checks and balances. For instance, Widner’s (1992) analysis of the 10th Amendment to the Kenyan constitution in 1968 which established a presidential system is that the amendment “eliminated Kenyatta’s dependence on a parliamentary majority” (p. 67) and this served to “insulate the presidency from the battles within KANU [the Kenyan African National Union - Kenyatta’s party] and to hamper efforts to challenge the allocation of resources favored by the Kenyatta government” (p. 68).

presidential to a parliamentary constitution, since no African country has actually done this since the wave of democratization that started in the 1990s. It is very feasible to strengthen parliament however.

How to do this? I am not suggesting convening a constitutional convention and re-writing the constitution. A proposed referendum on constitutional reform including such issues as introducing a second Chamber was shelved and though I was told there is discussion of constitutional reform there does not seem to be a great deal of political momentum behind this (perhaps surprisingly given the circumstances in which the existing constitution was written). One can think of the creation of a second chamber as strengthening the constraints on the executive, but frankly unless it is better resourced or stronger compared to the current unicameral parliament, I doubt it would make much difference.<sup>36</sup>

I would suggest a two-track approach to strengthening parliament. Most obviously, as the first track, parliament needs more resources and much better infrastructure. It also needs more regular channels of communication between it and the international community. There was general discontent amongst MPs that international institutions only negotiated with the executive and that everything was brought to parliament as a *fait accompli*. If decentralization is regarded as an important institutional reform and basic to the priorities of the CAS to which resources can be allocated then I think strengthening parliament is even more pressing as a target for resources. These things would all strengthen the *de facto* power of parliament relative to the president.

The second track concerns *de jure* issues. Though I emphasized above that African “Imperial Presidencies” often rely more on *de facto* than on *de jure* powers, in the case of Sierra Leone there seem to be a couple of instances where *de jure* reforms would aid the empowerment of parliament. To motivate the first, in contrast to parliament, political parties are strong. Perhaps this fact does not need explaining given the recrudescence of the APC and

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<sup>36</sup>Other comparative evidence also suggests that trying to re-write the entire constitution is often not a good way of reconciling conflicts in society. The recent experience of Colombia or Bolivia suggests that this brings onto the table more issues than can be resolved (see Dominguez and Shifter, 2003, on how Latin American countries that attempted marginal reforms of political institutions do better than those that attempt radical constitutional engineering).

SLPP after the collapse of the society and the civil war, but there are many other pieces of evidence for it. One is that prior to the July 2008 local elections both parties de-selected many sitting district councilors in favor of new candidates. It takes a very strong party to do this. In parliament, MPs mentioned that the parties had a tyrannical control over dissident members which stemmed from Section 77 of the 1991 Constitution “Tenure of Members of Parliament” which states that a “Member of Parliament must vacate his seat in Parliament” on the basis of any of 14 clauses. Two important ones are

“k. if he ceases to be a member of the political party of which he is a member at the time of his election to Parliament and he so informs the Speaker, or the Speaker is so informed by the Leader of that political party; or;

j. if by his conduct in Parliament by sitting and voting with members of a different party, the Speaker is satisfied after consultation with the leader of that Member’s party that the Member is no longer a member of that political party under whose symbol he was elected to Parliament.”

Nearly all of the parliamentarians who I talked with complained that clauses k and j were used by party leaders to wield great power over members since if a member had the party ‘symbol’ withdrawn, they would lose their seat in parliament. Thus it is very difficult for members to dissent from policies composed by party elites.<sup>37</sup>

It is possible to dissent from this argument. There is a large literature in political science arguing that strong parties are crucial for holding government’s accountable and the institutional reform I am suggesting might ‘weaken’ the parties. In contrast I would argue that it is impossible to talk about the consequences of party strength, without understanding the nature of the parties. Both political parties in Sierra Leone have a long traditional of hierarchical elite control where strength’ is more a sign of elite power than anything else. I would argue that allowing individual MPs greater scope for dissent would make them more accountable to their

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<sup>37</sup>There are other de jure reforms which would be good, though probably less important. The recent experience, for example, suggests that it would be good to change Section 82 of the Constitution which stipulates that the Clerk of Parliament should be appointed by the President.

own constituents and improve the performance of parliament.

One could think of other ways of strengthening parliament de jure. For instance several members suggested to me that it would be a good idea if the president was forced to choose his ministers from parliament (almost like a type of semi-presidential system as in France). This measure, at least if implemented on its own, may not have the desired outcome. For one thing this was the system which existed in Sierra Leone prior to the 1991 Constitution, a period which Kpundeh (1995, p. 53) describes as having “no separation, but a fusion of powers” though of course this was also the period of the one-party state. For another, in Zambia, 50% of members of parliament are regularly in the Cabinet and the recent experience in Kenya of massive expansion of the size of the Cabinet to buy off the opposition, does not suggest that forcing the president to choose members of his cabinet will reduce the powers of the executive. Parliament needs to be strengthened, not co-opted.

## 8.2 Strengthening Decentralization

The other obvious area of reform of political institutions is with respect to decentralization. While I agree that we are still in the early days of the decentralization process and that it is difficult to tell what the ultimate implications of the current system will be, there seem to be very strong arguments in favor of reform, particularly of the chieftaincy. An enormous amount of evidence suggests that while chiefs have respect and legitimacy, the current system also needs to be democratized. Indeed, it is a bit difficult to understand why international agencies are so adamant about introducing democracy into national but not local politics. Exactly the same principles seem to apply. Many practical suggestions have been made already about how to do this, for example abolishing the current system of an electoral college and introducing universal suffrage for chieftaincy elections<sup>38</sup> and also introducing fixed terms of office rather than election for life. These reforms would strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the chiefs

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<sup>38</sup>As is well known, having a franchise based on taxpaying, which is the current system for the election of chieftaincy, is very corrosive for democracy and democratic accountability. It tends to lead to the disenfranchisement of poor people, who in avoiding taxation give up the right to representation, and the creation of oligarchic political control. The classic example of this would be the US South where until the Voting Rights Act of 1965, elites disenfranchised blacks and poor whites using literacy tests and tax requirements.

and I completely agree with Fanthorpe (2005a) that they would also make it more difficult for central elites to manipulate the institution.<sup>39</sup>

Further reforms would be very useful to clarify the scope of authority of councils and chiefs. Though the system whereby councils set taxes and chiefs collect them and remit them to councils has been defended as designed to induce councils and chiefs to work together, I would argue that this causes problems for representation. One of the biggest forces which binds citizens with representative institutions is that of taxation. If people see themselves paying taxes to a legislative body then they are more likely to demand that it performs its' functions well, These is a huge amount of historical evidence on this topic, and what it finds is indisputable. This suggests that the councils should raise taxes themselves. Though they currently have some scope for doing this via rates and markets fees, the current system of poll taxes levied by chiefs with a portion paid to councils should be abandoned and councils should themselves have greater rights to set and collect taxes. It is telling I think that the recent World Bank survey of the state of chieftaincy finance notes in its' detailed discussion of various sharing rules between chieftainships and councils that "The public, however, has no knowledge of how sharing of the revenue is done" (World Bank, 2008, p. 16).

Strengthening decentralization is important if one is concerned about highly centralized patrimonial politics reemerging. It is also vital is one is concerned about the new sources of urban bias I discussed above. If swing voters are concentrated in urban areas, particularly Freetown, then democracy will naturally cater to them. The only way to reduce the bias that this force can create is to move resources into the rural and peripheral areas in ways which cannot be reallocated to Freetown as a consequence of electoral incentives. This means greater decentralization of taxes and resources to local government.

Finally, I think reforming the chieftaincy along the lines of greater democracy and accountability would create large positive externalities in the area of citizenship and state formation. Or at least it would create the potential for such externalities, since to realize them may entail changing the incentives and behavior of national political elites. The legacy of indirect rule

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<sup>39</sup>They might also help legitimize the presence of 12 chiefs in the national parliament. By 'tradition' these chiefs always support the government, making one wonder what exactly is their role in the democratic process.

in Sierra Leone, however much legitimacy it may have gained from the highly dysfunctional policies of the central state since independence, surely impedes the project of the formation of a more uniform and competent national state.

### **8.3 Political Institutions and Economic Fundamentals**

What of the potential consequences of changes in the economic environment I discussed in section 7? I believe that reforms to political institutions along the lines I suggest would be the best response to concerns about these forces as well. The World Bank can do little about changes in world markets or the terms of trade facing Sierra Leone, so it cannot directly influence the economic incentives I identified. Nevertheless, what happened in Latin America in the 19th century was an outcome of a political equilibrium which was very much conditioned by the initial distribution of political power in society and the political institutions. After all, rather than the massive concentration of land that went on in most Latin American countries, the US passed the Homestead Act in 1860 giving poor people access to frontier lands.

### **8.4 Changing the Institutional Equilibrium**

It is important to ask whether or not making these changes in institutions which I am proposing would lead to a different equilibrium. After all, political institutions are themselves part of an equilibrium so the fact that there has been no renewed move back to parliamentarism, for example, might suggest that if such an institution were re-created in Sierra Leone it would be unlikely to be stable or persist. So what would be the point of the World Bank or the international community pushing this? This is a good point which needs addressing.

Let me start though with discussing democracy.<sup>40</sup> Democracy does seem stable in Sierra Leone despite being undermined in the 1970s. Above I suggested that this may well reflect some underlying structural changes in the polity. For instance, the stakes from winning or losing office may now be lower, this persuading the SLPP to voluntarily give up power and respect the outcome of the 2007 vote. It could also be the impact of the international community that is driving this. Nevertheless, just because it is the international community which is forcing

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<sup>40</sup>See Ndegwa (2001) for a more general discussion of the issues surrounding democratization in Africa.

politicians in Sierra Leone to abide by the rules of democracy, does not mean that democracy cannot subsequently be stable even if the international community withdraws from the country. For one thing, those who play by the democratic game make specific investments in democracy which are useless under other political institutions. Parties build networks, personal relations, reputations, all of which are destroyed when democracy collapses. Maybe this is most obvious in the case of the SLPP who experienced the short end of the stick when democracy collapsed in Sierra Leone. But it may also be true of the APC, at least to the extent that the party became a personal vehicle of the interests of Stevens and Momoh, rather than an institution which represented the interests of its' members more generally.

More important, democracy facilitates the organization and mobilization of civil society and a sufficient period of democracy may lead to a change in the political equilibrium in a way which is highly favorable to the subsequent sustenance of democracy because those who benefit from it are much more able to defend it.<sup>41</sup> Though most people I talked with regard civil society as weak in Sierra Leone, hopefully this will change.

These arguments can be applied to any change in political institutions, not just re-democratization. Indeed, one could ask whether the decentralization implemented since 2004 was really going to be sustained in Sierra Leone in the sense that there was actually a deep political commitment to it in the country. Existing theories of this in the African context (Boone, 1995, 2003a,b) relate the equilibrium level of decentralization to deep features of the society such as the form of rural social and economic hierarchy and whether or not rural elites rely on the central state for their power. If these are the factors which are important in Sierra Leone, they are unlikely to have changed. Since the period prior to 1991 clearly saw little commitment to decentralization of power, Boone's theory would suggest that there would be little commitment today.

As I discussed above, there is quite a bit of evidence consistent with such a hypothesis. The SLPP government between 2002 and 2007 was reluctant to institutionalize budgetary support for the district administrations, and the local government act set up a complex and in many ways contradictory set of relationships between district councils and the chiefs. Nevertheless,

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<sup>41</sup>See Bratton and Chang (2006) for a related argument about the coevolution of democracy and other institutions.

as with democracy, it could be that the re-creation of district councils and the attempt to decentralize power out of Freetown sets in motion processes which tend to help these changes to persist, exactly as I described with democratization.

I think these arguments suggest that there is some hope that institutional reforms which the World Bank might promote would be sustainable. Clearly, parliamentarians have a large interest in being stronger relative to the president. For one, this will make them better able to deliver what their constituents want, which will naturally improve their re-election prospects. Once empowered, they will have a big incentive to fight for this. There are also many other sources of irreversibility. For instance, once changed, it is difficult to reverse constitutional amendments. Also some institutional changes in the past no doubt were facilitated by circumstances that are no longer likely to be relevant, For instance, it is plausible that it was the threat of coups or perpetually losing power to the SLPP (Albert Margai, the then leader of the SLPP, had already mooted the idea of a single-party state prior to the 1967 election) that helped Stevens' to induce his otherwise potentially reluctant APC colleagues to go along with his political project. This gave Stevens a 'window of opportunity' that hopefully will not be available to future political leaders in Sierra Leone.

Finally, let me observe that in principle institutional reforms of the type I suggest are also subject to the *See-Saw Effect*. Maybe one can give parliament more resources but the executive can respond with tactics to offset their effects. This is possible, but I think much less likely than with policy reforms. The idea with the reforms I discussed above is to change the power relations between different actors. The *See-Saw Effect* really arises when policy reform is mandated with no change in the distribution of political power.

## **9 The Political Feasibility of Reform**

Discussing whether or not institutional reforms can persist given the political equilibrium in Sierra Leone naturally leads to a discussion of the political feasibility of the reforms I suggest. Above I restricted attention to the case where the reforms could be adopted and I asked would they last. Now I want to ask if the reforms I suggested might gain political support in Sierra

Leone other than from the obvious sources - i.e. parliamentarians are in favor of more power to parliament.

Even given the arguments above and even if such international institutions as the World Bank apparently have a lot of leverage over the government, it is probably unlikely that such reforms would be adopted unless they were in the interests of some politically mobilized actors other than the obvious beneficiaries. This is so since the reform proposed would lead to the reduction of the powers of the president and the chiefs, both of whom are obviously very powerful political actors.<sup>42</sup> Of course there are many instances where circumstances lead such actors to implement reforms which might not be to their obvious benefit. This is true of the introduction of democracy in many countries in the world, which was rarely to the advantage of pre-democratic political elites (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006). One of the extraordinary things about Sierra Leone however, is that probably as a result of the civil war not having left an organized political legacy, political elites have managed to re-create a great deal of the status quo ante. Of course, if the arguments that I advance are correct, then the reforms are certainly to the benefits of society more widely. But such social interests may be too diffuse to represent a strong source of pressure for such reforms (otherwise they might already have happened).

In both the strengthening of parliament and the strengthening of decentralization, however, their appear to be possibilities for forging coalitions which would make the reforms more likely. First consider initiatives to strengthen parliament. During the last parliament President Koroma was the head of the opposition and he consistently demanded reforms to strengthen parliament. Thus it could be argued that he has a great deal of ownership in such reforms. Though I previously mentioned the example of Kibaki, I think the fact of the matter was that Kibaki's advocacy of reforms was a highly strategic one which was merely a strategy adopted right before the election after he had split with Moi. This is not the case with Koroma. One could also note that to the extent that the president sees himself in the opposition again in the

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<sup>42</sup>Witness the reluctance of president Kibaki in Kenya to change the constitution to reduce the excessive presidential powers introduced by Daniel Arap Moi. Even though Kibaki campaigned on a platform to reduce such powers once in office he had second thoughts.

future, this would also strengthen his resolve for such reforms. So there seems some prospect that the president would be much less opposed to such reforms than one might otherwise imagine.

With respect to the democratization of chiefship there appear to be a couple of factors which might make such reforms more feasible politically. For one, the fact that chiefs are elected for life means that after an election losing ruling houses in a chieftaincy have to wait a long time to be able to contest power again. Though such elites may not be in favor of universal suffrage for the chiefship a reform which packaged universal suffrage with limited terms might gain the support of important local political elites.<sup>43</sup> It may also be the case that the APC, which although it has had links with chiefs seems to be much less associated with them than the SLPP, would be more in favor of local government reform.

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<sup>43</sup>Indeed, some prominent national political elites like Charles Margai are advocates of both the introduction of universal suffrage into chieftaincy elections and he also having a 5 year term for chiefs.

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