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Mercenaries of democracy: The 'Politricks' of remobilized combatants in the 2007 general elections, Sierra Leone

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Abstract

The 2007 general elections in Sierra Leone marked a decisive moment in the country's post-war recovery. In this article we show how political parties strategically remobilized ex-combatants into 'security squads' in order both to protect themselves and to mobilize votes. We look at the tactical and strategic motives behind ex-combatants' choice to join the political campaigning and the alternatives (such as 'watermelon politics'), and we also examine the deep distrust between politicians and ex-combatants. Focusing on politics as the domestication of violence, we shed light on the continuation of pre-war and war-time mobilization of youth into politics and demonstrate how electoral moments can legitimize violence. In hindsight, the 2007 elections strengthened the democratic process in Sierra Leone, but this article shows on what fragile ground this success was built.

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