



Freetown, Sierra Leone  
8 February 2021

## News release

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### **Majority of Sierra Leoneans approve of government's measures to address SGBV but want more to be done**

Most Sierra Leoneans approve of the government's declaration of rape as a national emergency as well as its toughening of the Sexual Offences Act, but a majority believe more needs to be done to address the country's sexual-violence problem, a new Afrobarometer survey shows.

Majorities believe that the government was right in declaring rape a national emergency and that harsher new punishments will reduce sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the country. But few citizens believe that these measures will be enough. Many want the government to do more to educate people and change sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Following pressure and protest by civil society groups after the rape and paralysis of a 5-year-old girl, President Julius Maada Bio declared rape and sexual violence a national emergency. Parliament subsequently passed the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act of 2019, incorporating some of the punishments articulated by the president in his declaration.

#### **Key findings**

- Most Sierra Leoneans are aware of the president's declaration of rape as a national emergency (91%) and the passing of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act of 2019 (86%) (Figure 1).
  - Awareness of the government's SGBV interventions is higher among men and urban residents than among women and rural dwellers, and increases with individuals' level of education (Figure 2).
- Overwhelming majorities support the president's declaration of a national emergency (93%) and believe the new harsher punishments will help reduce sexual violence in the country (89%) (Figure 3).
- However, seven in 10 (71%) say that these changes will not be enough to solve the problem of rape and sexual assault and that government should do more to educate people and change sexual attitudes and behaviors.

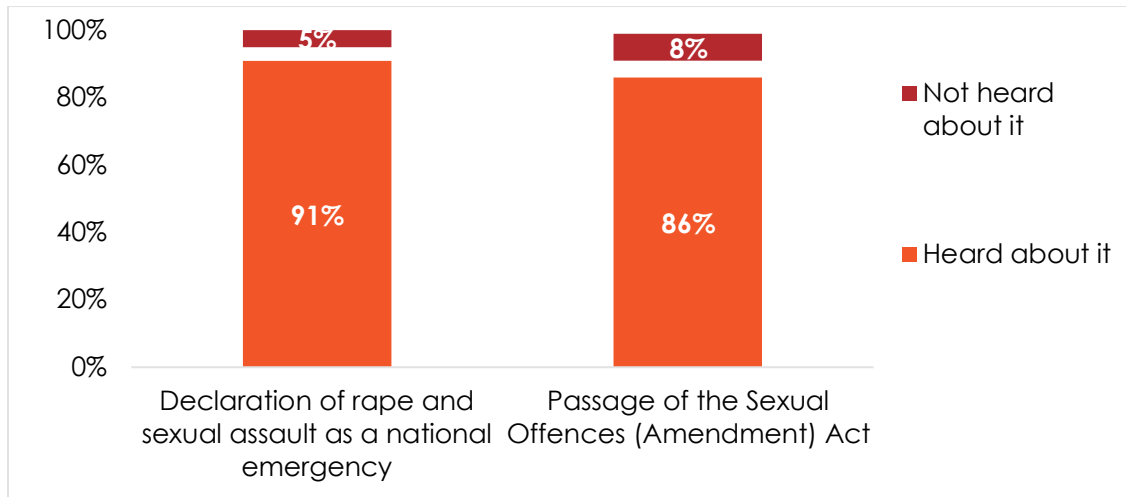
#### **Afrobarometer surveys**

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2021 are planned in at least 35 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Sierra Leone, led by the Institute for Governance Reform, interviewed 1,200 adult Sierra Leoneans in March 2020. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Sierra Leone in 2012, 2015, and 2018.

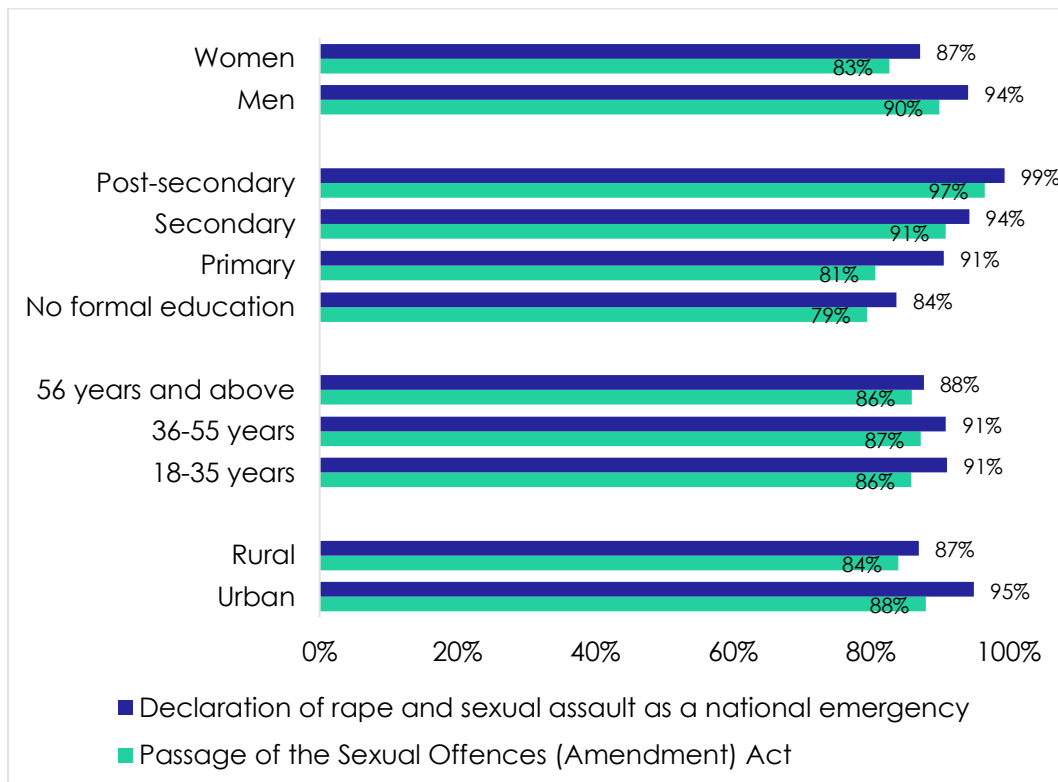
**Charts**

**Figure 1: Awareness of government's SGBV interventions | Sierra Leone | 2020**



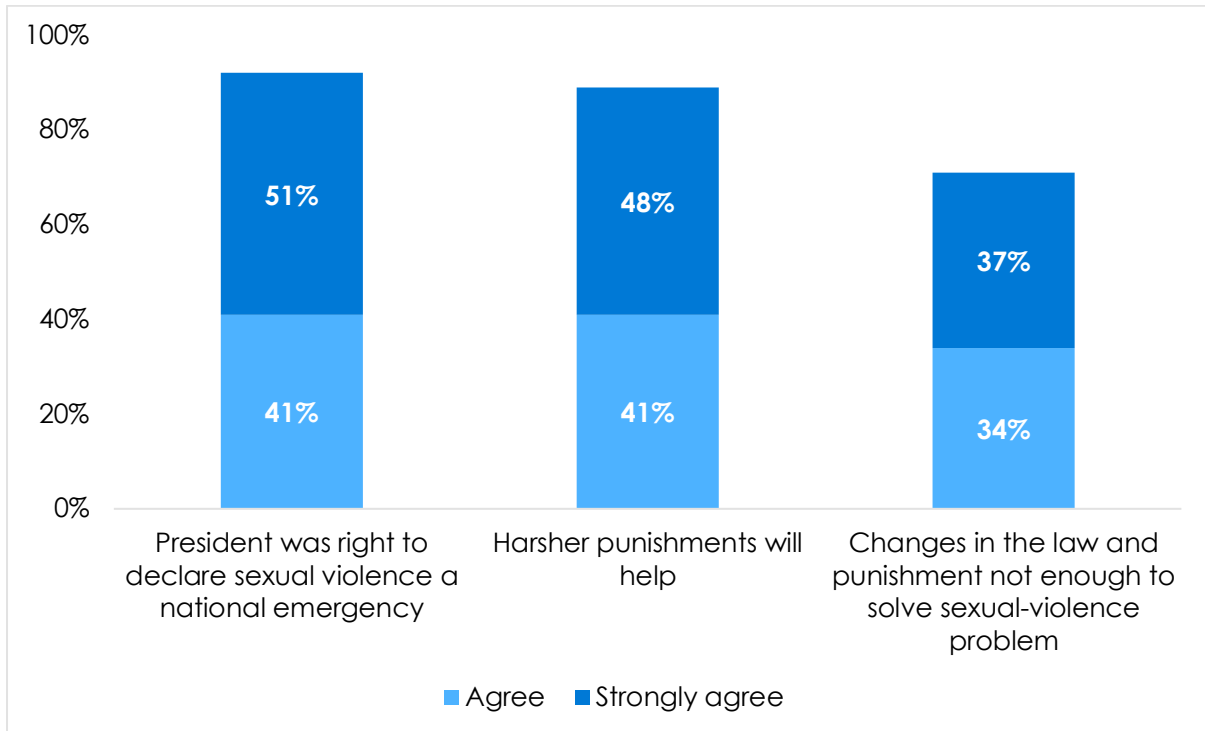
**Respondents were asked:** Have you heard about:  
 The declaration of rape and sexual assault as a national emergency by the president last year?  
 The government's passage last year of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act of 2019?

**Figure 2: Awareness of government's SGBV interventions | by socio-demographic group | Sierra Leone | 2020**



**Respondents were asked:** Have you heard about:  
 The declaration of rape and sexual assault as a national emergency by the president last year?  
 The government's passage last year of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act of 2019?  
 (% who say "yes")

**Figure 3: Views on government's SGBV interventions** | Sierra Leone | 2020



**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, or haven't you heard enough to say?

*The president was right to declare a national emergency on rape and sexual violence because this has been a big problem in Sierra Leone.*

*The new harsh punishments for sexual and gender-based violence included in the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act will help to reduce the problem of rape and sexual assault.*

*Changes in the law and harsher punishments are not enough to solve the problem of rape and sexual assault; the government should do more to educate people and change sexual attitudes and behaviors.*

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