

## Polity IV Country Report 2010: Liberia

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Polity:</b></td> <td>6</td> <td>6</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Democ:</b></td> <td>7</td> <td>7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Autoc:</b></td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Durable:</b></td> <td></td> <td>4</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Tentative:</b></td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	<b>Polity:</b>	6	6	0	<b>Democ:</b>	7	7	0	<b>Autoc:</b>	1	1	0	<b>Durable:</b>		4		<b>Tentative:</b>		No		
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SCODE	<b>LBR</b>	CCODE	<b>450</b>	Date of Report	<b>1 June 2011</b>																				
<b>Polity IV Component Variables</b>																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	2	4	6	3	4																				
<b>Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)</b>																									
End Date	13 October 2003		Begin Date	16 January 2006																					
<b>Polity Fragmentation: No</b>																									
<b>Constitution</b>	6 January 1986																								
<b>Executive(s)</b>	President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (UP); directly elected 11 October and 8 November 2005, 19.7% and 59.4%.																								
<b>Legislature</b>	<p>Bicameral:</p> <p>House of Representatives (64 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 11 October 2005)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Congress for Democratic Change (CDC): 15</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Liberty Party (LP): 9</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Coalition for the Transformation of Liberia (COTOL): 8</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Unity Party (UP): 8</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Other parties: 17</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Non-partisans: 7</p> <p>Senate (30 seats; 2 senators elected from each county; candidate receiving most votes is Senior Senator and serves nine-year term, while candidate with second most votes is Junior Senator and serves six-year term; directly elected; most recent elections, 11 October 2005)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">COTOL: 7</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">National Patriotic Party (NPP): 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">CDC: 3</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">LP: 3</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">UP: 3</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Alliance for Peace and Democracy (APD): 3</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Other parties: 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Non-partisans: 3</p>																								
<b>Judiciary</b>	Supreme Court																								

## **Narrative Description:<sup>1</sup>**

### **Executive Recruitment: Transitional or Restricted Elections (7)**

Liberia was established in 1821 by US philanthropists as a homeland for freed slaves. Despite being met with hostility from the indigenous population, those who returned to Africa established themselves as the ruling political class in Liberia. The True Whig Party, which represented the interests of Americo-Liberians, dominated politics until the early 1980s. While the indigenous population (ninety-five percent of the total population) was enfranchised in 1963, they remained largely outside the halls of power in Liberia. Following violent political unrest in the late 1970s, President Tolbert, who had succeeded President William Tubman in 1971 as leader of the True Whig Party, was overthrown in a coup by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe in 1980.

President Doe's ten-year rule, which favored his indigenous Krahn ethnic group, was widely unpopular and experienced increasing levels of ethnic violence. Civil war broke out in Liberia in December 1989 and resulted in the execution of President Doe. For all practical purposes Liberia became a "failed state" as warlords throughout the country competed for political power and economic resources. While the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) brokered a cease-fire in November 1990 and established an interim government, this government had little control outside the capital city of Monrovia. Charles Taylor, head of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, controlled most of the country and waged war against competing warlords. The seven-year conflict that ensued was marked by both brutal fighting and massive social upheaval. Over 200,000 Liberians were killed and the vast majority of citizens became internally displaced during this conflict.

After the countless peace settlements throughout the 1990s, the war in Liberia was "officially ended" in 1996 with the Abuja Peace Accords. After most of the rebel warlords transformed their militias into political parties, elections were held in July 1997. Charles Taylor won the presidency with more than seventy-five percent of the vote and his party, the National Patriotic Party, won over three-quarters of the seats in the National Assembly. While opposition parties claimed that the elections were marred by fraud, international observers declared the electoral process to be "free and fair" and all but one of the competing political parties eventually accepted the election results as reflecting the will of the people.

Despite the return of electoral politics in 1997, insecurity and factional fighting continued to plague Liberia. The leaders of the former warring factions made no serious attempts to reconcile their political and economic differences. As a result, the level of civil unrest increased. Most significantly, violence in the northwestern county of Lofa threatened to spillover into the capital city of Monrovia destabilized the entire Mano River Region (which includes parts of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone). In 1999 the Liberia United for Reconciliation and Development (LURD) guerrilla forces, led by Charles Julu, initiated violent struggle for power in the north of the country and has caused a significant displacement of people in this region. In an effort to counter the increasing power of LURD forces, in early 2001 president Taylor reassembled 15,000 fighters formerly associated with his National Patriotic Front of Liberia to fight the insurgents in the north of the country. While largely contained to the northwestern region of the country since its inception in 1999, by 2002 the violence had spread to the outskirts of Monrovia. In early 2002, intense fighting at Klay Junction, only thirty-five kilometers north of capital city, caused a mass exodus of people of a magnitude not seen since the civil war of 1989-96. While the government claimed to have beaten back "serious threats" from LURD insurgents, the stability of the central government was seriously shaken. The security situation in Liberia continued to deteriorate into 2003 as a new offensive by LURD and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) rebels began in November 2002. By March 2003 over 100,000 displaced people lived in camps on the outskirts of the capital as rebel forces continued their march toward Monrovia.

Under intense domestic and international political pressure, Charles Taylor resigned from office in August 2003. The rebel political factions (LURD and MODEL) and the former Taylor regime were all represented in a government of transition which, under the chairmanship of Gyude Bryant, was tasked with beginning Liberia's reconstruction and staging elections in 2005. Despite this shaky political truce, violence in the countryside continued to occur. While the 15,000 UN peacekeepers had hoped to complete the task of demobilizing and disarming the estimated 65,000 military combatants in the country by April

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<sup>1</sup> The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

2004, the factional groups actively sought to undermine the attainment of this goal. By late October, however, the task of demobilizing the armed factions had largely been completed. In November 2004, shortly after the UN had certified disarmament, the heads of all three military factions signed an agreement to dissolve their military wings and disavow violence, paving the way for them to stand for office in 2005.

On 7 February 2005 Frances Johnson-Morris announced that new elections would take place on 11 October of that year. On August 13, the electoral commission announced the names of the twenty-two candidates certified to run for office. Although football star George Weah won the first round of voting, he lost the run-off to Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, former Finance Minister, in an election held on 8 November 2005. Although Weah alleged that Johnson won her fifty-nine percent majority through ballot box stuffing, he rescinded his comments on 22 December when international observers from multiple institutions described the election as free and fair. Johnson-Sirleaf, the first female elected head-of-state in Africa, was inaugurated on 16 January 2006.

**Executive Constraints: Near Parity (6)**

Under the Taylor regime there were virtually no effective constraints on the executive branch in Liberia. In preparation for the democratic elections of 1997, President Taylor converted his military organization into an effective mass-mobilizing party. President Taylor's party, the NPP, dominated the National Assembly and did not provide a serious check on executive actions. Moreover, the judiciary remained weak and was subject to presidential interference. With the establishment of a transitional government of national unity in October 2003 a new interim legislative assembly was formed. In this assembly the former government and the two main rebel groups (LURD and MODEL) were each assigned twelve seats. The remainder of the legislature was filled with representatives of the major political parties (eighteen seats), civil society (seven seats) and the provinces (fifteen seats). In short, while the removal of Taylor from office opened the political space for increased political participation within institutional channels, nevertheless, this space became dominated by the warring military factions rather than the mainstream political parties or civil society.

New legislative elections were held on 11 October 2005, marking a significant change in the nature of the legislature and the country's political parties, although they remained connected to the military forces and leaders of the civil war. Since the 2005 elections the legislative and judicial branches have emerged as significant constraints on executive power.

**Political Participation: Political Liberalization or Democratic Retrenchment: Persistent Overt Coercion (8)**

Political participation in Liberia is driven by decades of political uncertainty, civil war, and violence. For much of the country's history participation was limited to a small but dominant minority of Americo-Liberians. This changed with the ascension of ethnic-Krahn Samuel Doe to the presidency following a 1980 coup, which dramatically changed the political landscape in the country and opened the doors to ethnic factionalism and militancy. Between Doe's execution in 1989 and 1996 the country fell into "failed state" status, with local warlords, generally with support along ethnic lines, waged war for control of the country's meager resources. 1997 brought a brief return to democratic rule under Charles Taylor, who had been elected not for his policies, but to end the recurring violence. Taylor did little to calm the underlying factional tension, and within three years the polity had once again fragmented, leading to another period of civil war that ended in 2003.

The transition government opened the political space for increased participation, but this space continued to be dominated by the same individuals and organizations, albeit reformed into political parties, that had led the violence during the civil wars. In practice, the interim legislature was characterized by participation among military factions rather than mainstream political parties. Despite significant violence in 2004-05 between the transition government, UN forces, and rebel factions, UN peacekeepers succeeded at disarming the political factions and holding elections in 2005. These elections were considered free and fair by international observers, accepted by opposition groups, and led to the election of President Johnson-Sirleaf and a new legislature.

Despite the promise of the 2005 elections, the political future of Liberia remains uncertain. Parties are still personalistic and ethnically divided, and significant tension remains between Johnson-Sirleaf and opposition leaders, several of whom are known to have taken active and murderous roles in the country's recent history. Whether political participation will normalize in the future remains to be seen.