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CONTENTS

Editorial

- Linking Democracy, Development and the Diaspora 3
Tanya Lyons, Jay Marlowe and Anne Harris

Articles

- Examining Transparency in Liberia's Pre- and Post-Civil War 10
Electoral Process
Zotawon D. Titus

- Contextualising Aid Effectiveness: 40
Australia's Scholarship Program in Africa
Marianne Turner and Samuel M. Makinda

- Negotiating Diasporic Black African Existence in Australia: 61
A Reflexive Analysis
Virginia Mapedzahama and Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo

- Towards a culturally-appropriate model of collecting 82
demographic data from ethnic minority communities: A case
study of the Burundian community census in Queensland
Wendy Harte

- Witchcraft Accusations Amongst The Muslim Amacinga Yawo of 103
Malawi and Modes of Dealing With Them
Ian D. Dicks

- Child Witchcraft Accusations in Southern Malawi 129
Erwin Van Der Meer

Book Reviews

| | |
|--|------------|
| Chinua Achebe, There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra. Melissa Phillips | 145 |
| Brian Hesse, ed. Somalia: State Collapse, Terrorism and Piracy Nikola Pijovic | 147 |
| Mary Harper, Getting Somalia Wrong? Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State Donovan C. Chau | 150 |
| Johnson W. Makoba, Rethinking Development Strategies in Africa Peter Mbago Wakholi | 152 |
| ARAS Guidelines for Contributors | 155 |
| About AFSAAP – Call for papers AFSAAP 2013 | 156 |

ARTICLES

Examining Transparency in Liberia's Pre- and Post-Civil War Electoral Process

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Abstract

Electoral governance in Liberia since 1997 has been described as transparent. While there have been some improvements in the conduct of presidential and legislative elections in recent times, compared to widespread electoral fraud over previous years, no comprehensive study has been conducted to address other kind of challenges capable of undermining recent gains, such as threats by the losing party to revert to war or their actions to incite electoral violence. This article attempts to explore Liberia's electoral process using a comparative analysis of the conduct of elections before and after the Liberian civil war. The objective is to enable policy makers to understand that electoral governance remains at risk amidst concerns of electoral violence, the threat of war and the spreading of hate messages. These vices not only undermine the integrity of the electoral system, they also contribute to national instability.

Introduction

Electoral transparency is a cardinal element of democracy.¹ It enhances electoral governance and adds value to the credibility of institutions steering the process of democratisation. It also encourages confidence on the part of the electorate.² Arguably, there can be no credible democracy devoid of transparency. Electoral governance in Liberia since 1997 has been widely described as transparent. While there have been some improvements in the conduct of presidential and legislative elections in recent times, compared to widespread electoral fraud over previous years, no comprehensive study has been conducted to address other kind of challenges capable of undermining recent gains, such as threats by the losing party to revert to war or undertake actions to incite

¹ Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, *Free and Fair Elections*, New Expanded Edition (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2006).

² Anne M. Kjaer, *Governance: Key Concepts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

electoral violence. This article attempts to explore Liberia's electoral process using a comparative analysis of the conduct of elections before and after the Liberian civil war. The objective is to enable policy makers to understand that electoral governance remains at risk amidst concerns of electoral violence, the threat of war and the spreading of hate messages. These vices not only undermine the integrity of the electoral system, they also contribute to national instability.

The process of democratisation in Liberia has been beleaguered by challenges.³ While the True Whig Party (TWP) that ruled the country in favour of its minority members for over 100 years was opposed to opening up governance for democratic participation, the subsequent violent intervention of the military into politics further worsened the situation.⁴ These historical conditions have undermined the process of democratisation in Liberia. This article will discuss Liberia's electoral reform process, using transparency as a marker. First, it will analyse the essence of transparency in the electoral process. Second, it will present a brief history of Liberia and show how its history influenced its pre-1980 electoral system. Third, this article will discuss whether the 1985 presidential and legislative elections were transparent, as well as examine the Special Elections of 1997 and 2005 with regard to their transparency. It will also assess the transparency of the 2011 presidential and legislative elections using a number of indicators such as voter education, accessibility, participation and effective monitoring.

This article will argue that it was a lack of transparency that led to the fraudulent presidential and legislative elections of 1985 and consequently contributed to other problems, including the country's civil war. It will conclude that subsequent, incremental improvements in the electoral process following each phase of the civil war popularised the special elections of 1997 and 2005 and also legitimised the constitutional elections of 2011, notwithstanding other challenges.

The Essence of Electoral Transparency

Transparency is crucial to electoral governance as elections are the basis of the authority of any representative government and, as such, it

³ Amos Sawyer, "Emerging Patterns in Liberia's Post-Conflict Politics: Observations from the 2005 Elections," *African Affairs* 107:427 (2008):77-199.

⁴ Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (London: The Free Press, 2005).

constitutes a key element of democratisation.⁵ Electoral transparency is an essential part of any democratic system because it allows the electoral governing body and political parties to take part equally in formulating the rules, guidelines and procedures that govern the election process.⁶ Transparency also enables the electorate to participate in the electoral process by exercising its right to select the leaders of its choice, while also legitimising those choices.⁷

Primarily, transparency is a policy tool that makes the electoral process understood regarding what information is available, how that information becomes available thereby enabling citizens to discern their role.⁸ Both liberal and social democracies view transparency as an indispensable instrument in fostering their respective principles.⁹ While liberal democratic philosophy relies on transparency in empowering the public to access information about individual freedom and citizens' rights, the social democratic tradition makes use of transparency in the provision of services such as health, education and housing as parts of citizens' basic economic and social rights.¹⁰ Transparency plays a crucial role in fighting corruption and other forms of unethical behaviour within the public sphere.¹¹

Inculcating transparency in electoral governance is central to democracy.¹² Not only does it open up the conduct of elections for effective media and public scrutiny and participation, it also

⁵ Goodwin-Gill, *Free and Fair Elections*.

⁶ Beetham, "Liberal Democracy and the Limits of Democratization."

⁷ Kjaer, *Governance: Key Concepts*.

⁸ Michael Hunt and Richard Chapman, "Open Government and Freedom of Information," in *Open Government in a Theoretical and Practical Context*, eds. Richard Chapman and Michael Hunt (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), 1.

⁹ Glen Newey, *After Politics: The Rejection of Politics in Contemporary Liberal Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

¹⁰ Kjaer, *Governance: Key Concepts*.

¹¹ Howard Davis, "Ethics and Standards of Conduct" in *Public Management and Governance*, eds. Tony Bouvaird and Elke Löffler (New York: Routledge, 2009), 311.

¹² Christina Drew, "Transparency: Considerations for Public Participation Geographic Information Science (PPGIS) Research and Development," *Journal of the Urban and Regional Information System Association (URISA Journal)* 15:1 (2003): 73-78.

consolidates the process of democratisation.¹³ While democratisation is apolitical transition that sometimes begins with the gradual collapse of an authoritarian regime,¹⁴ in Liberia it followed a violent civil war, which resulted in the creation of a “political space” that included “improvements regarding contestation, participation and human rights” as core national objectives.¹⁵

Transparency in a competitive electoral process, qualified by a robust legal framework,¹⁶ can prevent electoral fraud and manipulation. It disrobes electoral bodies of discretionary power that can be used to subvert the will of the people by putting the electoral process within the public domain for scrutiny.¹⁷

In articulating how public consultation and participation strengthen democracy, Kjaer,¹⁸ reporting Elkit and Reynolds’ study of 2002, advanced some elements that are central to transparent elections. These elements, she argues, include a legal framework, constituency and polling demarcation, and voter education. Others are voter registration, campaign regulation, ballot counting and vote tabulation. The study demonstrated that these activities cannot be compromised under a transparent and a credible legal framework.¹⁹

The legal framework strengthens transparency by offering clear and unambiguous laws which parties, candidates and voters can rely on for redress following alleged infractions.²⁰ It can be argued that transparency is a catalyst that strengthens democratisation. As such, in

¹³ George M. Carew, *Democratic Transition in Postcolonial Africa: A Deliberative Approach* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Richard Sandbrook, *Closing the Circle: Democratization and Development in Africa* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2000).

¹⁵ Anna K.Jarstad, “Dilemmas of War-to-Democracy Transitions, Theories and Concepts,” in *From War to Democracy: dilemmas in Peacebuilding*, eds. Anna K.Jarstad and Timothy D. Sisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁶ Sandbrook, *Closing the Circle: Democratization and Development in Africa*.

¹⁷ Anna Florini, “The End of Secrecy,” *Foreign Policy* 111 (1998): 50-63.

¹⁸ Kjaer, *Governance: Key Concepts*.

¹⁹ Agnes Callamard, “Accountability, Transparency, and Freedom of Expression in Africa,” *Social Research* 77:4 (2010): 1211-1241.

²⁰ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, “Electoral Reform Green Paper – Strengthening Australia’s Democracy,” Australian Government, September 2009, http://www.dpmpc.gov.au/consultation/elect_reform/strengthening_democracy/index.cfm#second (accessed 2 April 2012).

assessing transparency this article will consider the following factors which arguably contribute to a lack of electoral transparency and thus the conditions that can lead to the manipulation of electoral results:

- the exclusion of a majority of eligible citizens;
- the lack of voter choice of candidates;
- vote rigging;
- a non-transparent legal regime;
- a non-independent election commission;
- lack of electoral monitoring;
- lack of access to real-time election results;
- inadequate voter education;
- lack of free movement for candidates;
- lack of access to the state's media facilities;
- vote buying;
- lack of campaign fund auditing; and
- election violence.

All of these factors will be analysed in the context of how they undermine electoral transparency and retard the process of democratisation. An examination of these factors is also key to understanding the issues that underpinned electoral practices prior to and after the Liberian civil war. To pursue this line of enquiry it is necessary to provide a brief history of the country and offer some insight into its pre-1980 electoral system.

A Brief History of Liberia and its pre-1980 Electoral System

Liberia has had a chequered history spanning 164 years.²¹ Underpinning its historical trajectory have been policies that discriminated against the indigenous population, promulgated by an intolerant ruling minority that abused its political authority to sustain its hegemony. The struggle to democratise the nation also produced some unintended consequences resulting in a military takeover and then a civil war that led to the intervention of the international community.²²

²¹ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

²² Sawyer, "Emerging Patterns in Liberia's Post-Conflict Politics."

Liberia is a unitary state with a republican form of government and a population of 3.4 million people.²³ It was not colonised but was rather founded in 1822 by the American Colonization Society, an American non-government organisation, as a safe haven for freed slaves.²⁴ Known as Americo-Liberians, the former slaves and their descendants constituted only about one per cent of the population yet callously ruled the nation at the expense of the indigenous people through the politics of exclusion.²⁵

In spite of their insignificant numerical strength, and contrary to the claim that Liberia was a beacon of hope for all people of colour, the Americo-Liberians enslaved their indigenous counterparts without compunction, treating them as sub-humans.²⁶ Dolo captures the problem thus: “the reprehensible absence of proposals [policy] to include the rural and urban poor into the public square, the rising illiteracy, and the deteriorating health conditions among the majority – all set the nation on a course toward complete breakdown.”²⁷ Its century-long repressive political culture was complemented by an exploitative macro-economic policy.²⁸ The policy extracted resources such as iron ore on a large scale but failed to invest in infrastructure and human capacity.²⁹

In the 1970s firebrand reform-based organisations such as the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) and the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), with predominantly indigenous memberships, challenged the status quo and urgently demanded reform.³⁰ The dynamics that followed led to a rapid decline in the government’s

²³ Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, *2008 National Population and Housing Census*, Republic of Liberia, Monrovia.

²⁴ Christopher Clapham, *Third World Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

²⁵ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

²⁶ George K. Kieh, “The Human Development Crisis in Liberia,” *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 9:1 (2007): 78-94.

²⁷ Emmanuel T. Dolo, *Ethnic Tensions in Liberia’s National Identity Crisis: Problems and Possibilities* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers, 2007), 80.

²⁸ Kieh, “The Human Development Crisis.”

²⁹ Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *Address by Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia at Harvard University’s 360th Commencement Ceremony*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 26 May 2011.

³⁰ Amos Sawyer, *Beyond Plunder: Toward Democratic Governance in Liberia* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).

authority. For example, in 1979 a mass demonstration against price increases for a bag of rice temporarily shut down the government.³¹ With no practical steps in place for reform, 17 non-commissioned officers from the military, mostly made up of indigenous Liberians, took over the government in a military coup and formed the People's Redemption Council (PRC) with Master Sergeant Samuel Doe becoming Head of State.³² This group killed the incumbent President Tolbert and summarily executed 13 of his cabinet officials.³³

Ironically, the military also failed to ensure equity and accountability. Their intervention into politics merely shifted the roles of the 'slave masters' from the Americo-Liberians to the PRC. Consequently, the country disintegrated into civil war, first from 1989 to 1997 and subsequently from 1999 to 2003.³⁴ Each round of fighting introduced other factions that waged war purportedly to liberate the country but ended up looting the country's resources.³⁵

Some Liberians assumed that the United States would have intervened to bring the war to an early end. The assumption for the US to intervene in the Liberian Civil War was influenced by what Meredith³⁶ and Kromah³⁷ have described as substantial US interest in Liberia. Meredith revealed how the US had access to Liberia's territory at will— ranging from its use of Robertsfield as a support base for its military during the Second World War, to using Liberia as a satellite state during the Cold War.³⁸ Kromah's account also details how the Firestone Rubber Company (one example among several US-based companies) was able to lease one million acres of land from the Liberian government at the annual rate of six cents per acre for 99 years, an arrangement that clearly

³¹ Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

³² Amos Sawyer, "Violent Conflicts and Governance Challenges in West Africa: The Case of the Mano River Basin Area," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 42:3 (2004): 437-463.

³³ Sawyer, "Violent Conflicts and Governance Challenges."

³⁴ Kieh, "The Human Development Crisis."

³⁵ Sawyer, "Violent Conflicts and Governance Challenges."

³⁶ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

³⁷ Alahaji G. V. Kromah, "Capital Inflow and Sovereignty Performance of Firestone in Liberia 1926–1977," 4 July 2008, <http://alhajikromahpage.org/alhajifirestone.htm> (accessed 8 April 2012).

³⁸ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

benefitted Firestone more than Liberians. Nonetheless, despite its political and trade interests in Liberia, the US made no reasonable effort to end the war.³⁹ Instead, the respective interventions by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) were relied upon to end the civil war that claimed over 300,000 lives⁴⁰ and traumatised millions of people.⁴¹ Liberia had become a regional problem, exporting wars to neighbouring countries such as Sierra Leone, and as such required a regional and global response. This response eventually succeeded, despite the lack of direct intervention from the US (even though Charles Taylor, the rebel leader who initiated the civil war, had ‘escaped’ from prison in the US).⁴²

Liberia is now a post-conflict success story, reforming its governance system with a focus on equity, the rule of law, the equitable distribution of resources and security sector reform.⁴³ Its external debt of US\$4.9 billion has been waived and it has an annual economic growth rate of seven percent.⁴⁴ It should be noted that UNMIL has remained deployed in the country since 2003.

Examining Transparency in pre-1980 Electoral Practices in Liberia

Liberia’s electoral system from 1847 to 1980 was one characterised by fraud.⁴⁵ Its major beneficiary, the True Whig Party (TWP), could not tolerate a transparent process and neither could it allow opposition politicking.⁴⁶ Mostly, voters did not have a choice among any other

³⁹ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

⁴⁰ Jacqui Bauer, “Women and the 2005 Election in Liberia,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47:2 (2009):193-211.

⁴¹ Lansana Gberie, “Liberia: The 2011 Elections and Building Peace in the Fragile State,” Situation Report, Institute for Security Studies, 5 October 2010, www.issafrica.org/uploads/5October2010Liberia.pdf (accessed 3 March 2012).

⁴² Gberie, “Liberia: The 2011 Elections”; Bryan Bender “Will Charles Taylor Detail His Infamous Plymouth Prison Break?,” Political Intelligence, *The Boston Globe*, 9 July 2009, http://www.boston.com/news/politics/politicalintelligence/2009/07/will_exliberian.html (accessed 3 April 2012).

⁴³ Sirleaf, *Address by Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*.

⁴⁴ Barney Jopson, Matthew Green, and Tom Bargis, “Liberia is fastest-improving African Nation,” *Financial Times*, 6 October 2008, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5b7972cc-93a6-11dd-9a63-0000779fd18c.html#axzz1r1w42aFo> (accessed 20 March 2012).

⁴⁵ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

⁴⁶ Bauer, “Women and the 2005 Election in Liberia.”

candidates other than those showcased by the TWP. This condition undermined Liberia's democratisation process, making the TWP a political instrument that the settlers' oligarchy used to perpetuate its hegemony. Ignoring the direct effects of their abuse of power, they went on conscripting resources—even from non-partisans—for their party's up-keep.⁴⁷ Consequently, they monopolised Liberian politics and made the TWP the official party of the state.⁴⁸ Electoral integrity was non-existent as the TWP machinery made a mockery of democracy by becoming the “longest continuously governing political party in history.”⁴⁹

The Elections Commission, a body that was supposed to be impartial in conducting elections, was rather a vehicle for their manipulation.⁵⁰ In this climate, where the monitoring of vote casting and ballot tallying did not matter, the TWP used ‘ludicrous strategies to win elections. For example, in the 1927 presidential elections, the incumbent Charles D. B. King won against his challenger by mysteriously garnering 240,000 votes, even though there were only 15,000 registered voters.⁵¹

While the 1927 elections were one of the few cases where an incumbent president was actually challenged at the polls, the results of the said election defied rationality and exposed a deficit in Liberia's electoral system. Furthermore, the state's resources could not be differentiated from the party's resources during elections. Since the TWP's resources and the resources of the state were deemed to be one and the same, there was little imperative to have any audit of campaign funding. These institutionalised flaws made elections during the period of Americo-Liberian hegemony an extension of bad governance. Yet the political elites pretended to have in place a genuine and transparent electoral

⁴⁷ Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy*.

⁴⁸ Robin Dunn-Marcos, Konia T. Kolehlon, Bernard Ngovo, and Emily Russ, *Liberians: An Introduction to their History and Culture*, Culture Profile No. 19, (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2005).

⁴⁹ Clapham, *Third World Politics*, 84.

⁵⁰ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

⁵¹ B.S. Minteh, and O. Asante, “Academic Report on the Grassroots of Conflicts in Liberia,” *Senegambia News*, 2008, http://www.senegambianews.com/article/Education/Education/Academic_Report_on_The_Grassroots_of_Conflict_in_Liberia/2151 (accessed 7 March 2012).

mechanism in spite of election results being predetermined, thereby making a mockery of the process.⁵²

Liberia, founded as a beacon of hope, deviated from its mission under the TWP and became a decaying republic in need of a renaissance, but this was ignored by its rulers who were perhaps living in ‘denial’ and who appeared unconscious or uncaring of the consequences of their actions.⁵³ Eventually, the TWP’s hegemony was toppled on 12 April 1980 by the PRC, which ruled the country by decree until 1985. We now turn to an assessment of the 1985 elections.

Transparency as a Missing Factor in the 1985 Elections

The 15 October 1985 presidential and legislative elections were the first multi-party elections to be held in Liberia following its independence in 1847.⁵⁴ They primarily provided both candidates and voters with the space to exercise their franchise. This shift in practice led to the establishment of the Liberia Action Party (LAP), the Unity Party (UP), and the Liberia Unification Party (LUP) as opposition parties. While space was provided for other political parties to participate in the contest for state power, equity was lacking in that opposition parties did not have access to state media. The facilities funded with taxpayer monies and other shared resources served only to promote the programs of the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) at the expense of opposition political parties that contested it.

Doe, the incumbent Head of State and standard-bearer of the NDPL, rigged the election.⁵⁵ He hijacked the vote-counting process to avoid defeat when it became clear that the LAP had won⁵⁶ and in a fraudulent process convened a bogus recount committee that declared him the winner.⁵⁷ Arguably, the law was mostly applied to protect the status quo, leaving little or no redress regarding election disputes. Ironically, Doe’s action undermined the will of the people even though he had

⁵² Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

⁵³ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

⁵⁴ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

⁵⁵ Terrence Lyons, “Peace and Elections in Liberia,” in *Post-Conflict Elections, Democratisation and International Assistance*, ed. Krishna Kumar (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 177.

⁵⁶ Bauer, “Women and the 2005 Election in Liberia.”

⁵⁷ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

overthrown the previous regime for its abuse of power.⁵⁸ Doe's 'victory' frightened the country.⁵⁹ Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Liberia's current president, who had then won a senatorial seat on the LAP's ticket, declined her seat so as not to legitimise the fraudulent process.⁶⁰

Doe's manipulation of the process began when he violated Article 52a of the (then new) Constitution which required a presidential candidate to be a Liberian citizen of not less than 35-years of age. Falling short of this requirement, he altered his year of birth from 6 May 1951 to 6 May 1950. This change contradicted the recorded fact that he was 28-years old when he led the 1980 coup.⁶¹ The later charging of Sirleaf for treason for refusing to accept her seat and the imprisonment of other opposition politicians for denouncing the election results were part of Doe's 'game plan' for holding onto power.⁶² The lack of popular support for Doe's regime, coupled with these post-fraud victory dynamics, led to the violations of human rights that contributed to the civil war. The next section will discuss the 1997 and 2005 elections.

Liberia's Special Elections of 1997 and 2005 and Electoral Transparency

Liberia has held two special elections, each coming after a civil war. During these elections, the constitution was suspended to allow some 'warlords' and exiled politicians who did not meet some of the constitutional requirements, such as the '10-year residential clause,' to participate. Prior to both elections the national census, which was supposed to be conducted at 10-year intervals, had not taken place due to the civil war. Consequently, the threshold for constituency representation that should have been established by the legislature was rather arbitrarily drawn.

⁵⁸ Sawyer, "Violent Conflicts and Governance Challenges."

⁵⁹ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

⁶⁰ Stephanie Hanson, "Corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa," Council on Foreign Relations, 6 August 2009, www.cfr.org/publication/19984/ (accessed 2 March 2012).

⁶¹ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

⁶² Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

The 1997 election was Liberia's first post-war election. ECOWAS had enforced peace among belligerent warring factions⁶³ and organised the elections in order to establish civil authority in line with the Abuja Accord (the result of negotiations to end the first civil war). Unfortunately, these efforts to return the country to civilian rule ignored the role to be played by civil society organisations and political parties.⁶⁴ Indeed, the body designated to conduct the election under ECOWAS' supervision did not even know how the rules had been formulated.⁶⁵ Superficially, ECOWAS was seen to be in charge but, given how it yielded to Taylor's demand to trivialise voter education⁶⁶ and denied political parties running against him any reasonable time to campaign,⁶⁷ its actions suggested otherwise. Furthermore, the militia structures that threatened civilian candidates remained in place, undermining the 'level playing field' crucial to electoral transparency.⁶⁸

Against these conditions, Kofi Annan, the then-UN Secretary General advised against the election schedule,⁶⁹ reinforcing the concerns raised earlier by the political parties competing against Taylor; but ECOWAS remained inflexible. Amidst these challenges, 13 candidates including Charles Taylor—one of the warlords and the standard-bearer of the National Patriotic Party (NPP)—and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf—an international civil servant and the standard-bearer of the UP—went into the race.⁷⁰ Taylor threatened to launch another war if he lost the

⁶³ Peter Dennis, "A Brief History of Liberia," Briefing Paper, The International Center for Transitional Justice, 1 May 2006, www.ictj.org/publication/brief-history-liberia (accessed 1 March 2012).

⁶⁴ Krishna Kumar, "Post-Conflict Elections and International Assistance," in *Post-Conflict Elections, Democratisation and International Assistance*, ed. Krishna Kumar (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 5.

⁶⁵ Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann and Andreas Mehler, eds., *Votes, Money and Violence: Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa* (South Africa, Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007).

⁶⁶ Dennis Gallagher and Anna Schowengerdt, "Participation of Refugees in Post-Conflict Elections," in *Post-Conflict Elections, Democratisation and International Assistance*, ed. Krishna Kumar (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 195.

⁶⁷ Matthew T. Bradley, "Civil Society, Emigrants and Democracy in Africa: An Alternative Proposition," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 29:2 (2005): 540-552.

⁶⁸ Tom Kamara, "Elections and Erosion of Stability in Africa," 16 November 2000, www.theperspective.org/election.html (accessed 2 March 2012).

⁶⁹ Lyons, "Peace and Elections in Liberia."

⁷⁰ Kumar, "Post-Conflict Elections."

election⁷¹ without being reprimanded.⁷² Arguably, the circumstances surrounding the elections constrained many voters to sacrifice other candidates in favour of Taylor.⁷³ Their reaction—“he kill my father but I will vote for him”⁷⁴—was a result of the terror he inspired, and he won 75 percent of the total vote.⁷⁵ Given these conditions, while there was a massive turnout with no evidence of vote rigging, the elections were not transparent.⁷⁶

The political parties were excluded from the decision-making process.⁷⁷ Transparency was limited to vote casting and the vote count. Access to information and the freedom to choose without being intimidated were compromised, with ECOWAS’ complicity. Government accountability to citizens was largely missing during Taylor’s first few months in office, which were characterised by human rights violations.⁷⁸ This state of affairs contributed to a second round of civil war that led to the Special Elections of 2005.

The 2005 elections were the “first time in more than a hundred years that Liberia’s electoral processes were free” of intimidation, abuse and threats.⁷⁹ The ECOWAS-led Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Accra, which ended Liberia’s second civil war, also negotiated Taylor’s

⁷¹ Benjamin Reilly, “Post-Conflict Elections: Uncertain Turning Points of Transition,” in *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding*, eds. Anna K. Jarstad and Timothy D. Sisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 157.

⁷² Davis, “Ethics and Standards of Conduct.”

⁷³ International Crisis Group, “Liberia and Sierra Leone: Rebuilding Failed States,” *Africa Report* 87, 8 December 2004, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/sierra-leone/087-liberia-and-sierra-leone-rebuilding-failed-states.aspx> (accessed 30 January 2013).

⁷⁴ Lyons, “Peace and Elections in Liberia”; United Nations Development Program, *UNDP Elections and Conflict Prevention: A Guide to Analysis, Planning and Programming*, Democratic Governance Group, Bureau for Development Policy, 30 October 2009, http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral_systemsandprocesses/elections-and-conflict-prevention-guide.html (accessed 21 March 2012).

⁷⁵ The Carter Center, “Observing the 1997 Special Elections Process in Liberia,” 1 October, 1997, www.cartercenter.org/.../electronicreports/.../FinalReportLiberia1997.pdf (accessed 1 March 2012); Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

⁷⁶ Bauer, “Women and the 2005 Election in Liberia.”

⁷⁷ Basedau, Erdmann, and Mehler, *Votes, Money and Violence*.

⁷⁸ Sawyer, “Violent Conflicts and Governance Challenges.”

⁷⁹ Sawyer, “Emerging Patterns in Liberia’s Post-conflict Politics,” 178.

asylum to Nigeria in August 2003 and was preceded by the intervention of a UN peacekeeping force.⁸⁰ These efforts led to the 2005 elections. Unlike the 1997 elections, the militia and other fighting forces were disarmed and demobilised leaving no ex-rebel groups with de facto command structures in place.⁸¹

Essentially, civil society organisations and political parties, with technical support from partners,⁸² designed the conduct of the elections.⁸³ Not only did they make the participation of both national and foreign election observers paramount, they also ensured that they were present at all voting centres to monitor vote casting and ballot tallying.⁸⁴

Of the 3.5 million people of Liberia,⁸⁵ 1.4 million were registered voters of which 79.4 percent turned out to vote.⁸⁶ The massive turnout was induced by the transparent activities supported by the US-based National Democratic Institute, UNDP-Liberia, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and other partners.⁸⁷ These organisations supported

⁸⁰ The Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute, “Liberia Election Watch, Liberia 2005 Elections,” Joint Press Release No. 5 (2005), http://www.cartercenter.org/news/publications/election_reports.html#liberia (accessed 18 March 2013)

⁸¹ Sawyer, “Violent Conflicts and Governance Challenges.”

⁸² Catherine Barnes, Franca Brilliant, Benjamin Crosby, Nicole Dannenberg, Terrence Lyons, and Stephen B. Nix, *Technical Assistance for Election Administration: Approaches and Lessons Learned*, July 1999, Management Systems International, submitted to USAID, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNACF794.pdf (accessed 13 March 2013).

⁸³ National Elections Commission, *2005 Voter Registration Statistics, National Tally Center Report*, 10 September 2005, Monrovia.

⁸⁴ The Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute, “Liberia Election Watch.”

⁸⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization, *Liberia’s Geography, Climate and Population*, 2005 version, http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/countries_regions/liberia/index.stm (accessed 6 April 2012).

⁸⁶ National Elections Commission, *2005 Voter Registration Statistics*.

⁸⁷ United Nations Development Program, *Democratic Governance: Elections, Liberia 2007*, <http://www.lr.undp.org/governances5.htm>, (accessed 5 April 2012); The Carter Center, *Carter Center Reports Open and Transparent Voting Process; Encourages Liberians to Await Final Results: Carter Center Election Observation Mission To Liberia’s National Elections October 2011 Preliminary Statement, Monrovia*. Press Release, 13 October 2011, <http://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/liberia-prelim-101311.html> (accessed 30 January 2013).

dozens of civil society and community-based organisations that provided information about the role of voters and how they should engage candidates. According to the UNDP, about 500,000 people directly received education regarding the electoral process. Over 3,865 observers were accredited, 89 percent of which were national observers and 11 percent internationals. Approximately 246 media organisations were also accredited. Together, their activities kept the electoral process under public scrutiny,⁸⁸ such that Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's victory over the candidate of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) did not take the electorate by surprise. As a result, the CDC's subsequent claims of foul play on the part of 17 other political parties could not be substantiated.

The 2011 Elections and the Transparency Regime

The 2011 presidential and legislative elections were the first post-conflict elections to be conducted by the National Election Commission (NEC).⁸⁹ In addition to publishing clear and concise information about the elections and providing voter education,⁹⁰ the NEC consulted a wide range of stakeholders and encouraged the monitoring and parallel reporting of results.⁹¹ It accredited a total of 4,383 national observers from 80 national organisations, as well as 921 observers from 45 international organisations who were present at more than 75 percent of polling places.⁹² Party agents were present at all of the 4,457 polling places. These measures, among others, enhanced the integrity and transparency of the electoral process and sustained the collaboration between the NEC and other stakeholders.⁹³

⁸⁸ Sawyer, "Emerging Patterns in Liberia's Post-conflict Politics."

⁸⁹ The Carter Center, *Carter Center Reports Open and Transparent Voting Process*.

⁹⁰ James Fromayan, *Statement by the Chairman of the National Elections Commission, Hon. James M. Fromayan on the Occasion of the Official Announcement of the results of the October 11, 2011 Legislative and Presidential Elections*, 25 October 2011, <http://www.necliberia.org/other.php?&7d5f44532cbfc489b8db9e12e44eb820=NDA1> (accessed 5 February 2012).

⁹¹ Michael Edwards and David Hulme, "NGO and Accountability: Introduction and Overview," in *The Earthscan Reader on NGO Management*, eds. Michael Edwards and Alan Fowler (London: Earthscan, 2002), 187.

⁹² The Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute, "Liberia Election Watch."

⁹³ Fromayan *Statement by the Chairman of the National Elections Commission*.

While the NEC was updating the public with successive provisional election results in real time,⁹⁴ the Liberia Media Center (LMC), using a similar platform, was also performing parallel reporting relying on journalists providing reports from various polling centres across the country. LMC statistics—which did not conflict with the NEC’s⁹⁵—reinforced the integrity of the process. Transparency in post-2005 Liberia’s electoral process was also enhanced by the demonstrated independence of the NEC. From mid-2006 to late 2011, the NEC had conducted nine by-elections to fill legislative seats left vacant by the deaths of members of parliament, including one in which a winner had forged his personal information. The ruling party lost four of the seats to opposition political parties. The NEC also conducted the 2011 referendum which put forth four propositions that the ruling party had supported, and all of them were rejected confirming the lack of manipulation on the part of the NEC.⁹⁶ However, a complaint was filed by one of the parties against the NEC in the Supreme Court, alleging that invalid ballots were included. The court ruled that including invalid ballots to determine an outcome of a proposition was unconstitutional and compelled the NEC to re-publish the result of the referendum. The court’s decision had a significant impact on the process that led to the reversal of one of the outcomes.⁹⁷ The role of the court in adjudicating the matter proved its essence in safeguarding Liberia’s democracy despite the fact that the NEC’s interpretation of the election law did not support the ruling party’s interest, nor provide the basis of being a partisan institution..

Ushahidi-Liberia, another innovative election monitoring system that relied on both experts and ordinary citizens to provide election-related

⁹⁴ Justin Prud’homme, “Technology Drives Liberia’s First Post-Conflict Elections,” *Frontlines*, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), January/February 2012, http://transition.usaid.gov/press/frontlines/fl_jan12/FL_jan12_DRG_LIBERIA.html (accessed 7 April 2012).

⁹⁵ Klonnious Blamo, “NEC’s Initial Polls Results Support LMC’s Unofficial Reports,” Liberia Media Center, 13 October 2011, <http://www.lmcliberia.com/news/necs%20Initial%20Polls%20Results.htm> (accessed 6 April 2012).

⁹⁶ Joe H. Pemagbi, “Passions Running High in Liberia’s Crucial Elections,” *Voices*, Open Society Foundations, 9 October 2011, <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/passions-running-high-liberia-s-crucial-elections> (accessed 17 March 2012).

⁹⁷ P. Oxford Brown, “The Supreme Court of Liberia Ratified Simple Majority,” *The Probe*, 23 September 2011, <http://probeliberia.com/index.php/news/elections/203-the-supreme-court-liberia-ratified-simple-majority-.html> (accessed 20 April 2012).

information for public viewing during the elections also enhanced their transparency.⁹⁸ This formed part of a systematic election monitoring mechanism introduced by at least ten civil society organisations, which provided the public with an opportunity to effectively follow the election trends. Based on their collective findings, election observers applauded the process as transparent and in line with international standards, and dismissed as unsubstantiated the CDC's claims that it was seriously flawed.⁹⁹

It can be argued that a reporting system based on candidate-by-candidate performance and attested to by party agents in the presence of election observers prevents manipulation of results. It was therefore not surprising that observers, including the NDI, ECOWAS, the Carter Center and all national civil society organisations that monitored the elections, confirmed them as transparent and credible.¹⁰⁰ There were 17 presidential candidates engaging over 1.2 million voters in a population of 3.54 million people, in an electoral system that requires a successful candidate to secure 50 percent of the entire vote plus one. Failure to meet this condition led the first two contenders—Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the incumbent of the UP, and Winston Tubman of the CDC—to enter the second round.¹⁰¹ Sirleaf's lead from the first round buttressed by parties in the 3rd, 4th and 5th positions endorsing her for the second round caused Tubman to decline the race.¹⁰²

Analysis of Transparency in Liberia's Electoral Reform

Transparency is arguably a difficult concept to measure, but Drew has advanced some useful indicators.¹⁰³ Drew argues that when clarity, comprehensiveness, accessibility, truthfulness, rationality and accountability are present in a process in which the public participates, such a process becomes transparent. His indicators will be applied in analysing electoral transparency in Liberia from 1985 to 2011 since they also address the rationale for making transparency a policy tool.

⁹⁸ Ushahidi-Liberia, *Monitoring the 2011 Elections in Liberia*, <http://www.liberia2011.ushahidi.com/> (accessed 21 March 2012).

⁹⁹ Voice of America, "Monitor: Liberia Elections Democratic," 10 November 2011, <http://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2011/11/10/monitor-liberia-elections-democratic/> (accessed 23 March 2012).

¹⁰⁰ Prud'homme, "Technology Drives Liberia's First Post-Conflict Elections."

¹⁰¹ Fromayan, *Statement by the Chairman of the National Elections Commission*.

¹⁰² Prud'homme, "Technology Drives Liberia's First Post-Conflict Elections."

¹⁰³ Drew, "Transparency: Considerations for Public Participation."

The rationale for conducting the 1985 elections was to put in place a government accountable to its citizens.¹⁰⁴ However, the process was devoid of accountability as evidenced by how Doe hijacked and replaced the election commission with a ‘recount committee’ that denied political parties and other observers the right to monitor the process through which they eventually declared him winner.¹⁰⁵ His interference violated the election law¹⁰⁶ that gave the electoral body the exclusive authority to conduct elections.¹⁰⁷

Using the indicators enumerated above, one can easily conclude that the 1985 elections were fraudulent. The elections of 1997, however, had a credible ballot casting and vote counting process.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, there were other conditions that undermined transparency.¹⁰⁹ Primarily, the 21-day election schedule for a nationwide process was unrealistic, as political parties could not access the countryside to campaign in this limited timeframe.¹¹⁰ Ironically, political parties did not know “the rules relating to deadlines for party registration, [and] the rules governing party lists” as the process of making rules was not open to them.¹¹¹ Taylor’s threat of waging another war if he did not win the election made him less accountable to the process.¹¹² Despite this drawback, international monitors observed the elections and over 75 percent of the electorate overwhelmingly elected him as their choice.¹¹³

The elections of 2005 and 2011 respectively made ‘transparency’ their core objective.¹¹⁴ Both were supported by comprehensive timetables and activities for stakeholder consultation, voter education and voter

¹⁰⁴ African Union, “African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance,” adopted by the African Union 30 January 2007, www.africa-union.org/root/au/.../Charter%20on%20Democracy.pdf (accessed 8 April 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

¹⁰⁶ The Carter Center, *Carter Center Reports Open and Transparent Voting Process*.

¹⁰⁷ Sawyer, “Emerging Patterns in Liberia’s Post-conflict Politics.”

¹⁰⁸ The Carter Center, “Observing the 1997 Special Elections Process in Liberia.”

¹⁰⁹ Drew, “Transparency: Considerations for Public Participation.”

¹¹⁰ The Carter Center, “Observing the 1997 Special Elections Process in Liberia.”

¹¹¹ Lyons, “Peace and Elections in Liberia,” 183.

¹¹² Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*.

¹¹³ Kumar, “Post-Conflict Elections and International Assistance.”

¹¹⁴ Sawyer, “Emerging Patterns in Liberia’s Post-conflict Politics.”

registration, and the provision of information to the public.¹¹⁵ While both elections were accountable to stakeholders, the 2011 elections in particular made a profound difference by allowing civil society organisations to engage in the parallel reporting of results.¹¹⁶ The NEC empowered civil society organisations and used a variety of media outlets including its online service to enhance its accountability to the people.¹¹⁷ One lesson that could be applied to other nations from the Liberian case is that by making the process accessible and participatory, the possibility of some politicians distorting facts as a basis to incite violence after losing the race becomes more remote.¹¹⁸ In the event of them making such a foolhardy attempt, it is possible that a citizenry with proactive civil society organisations can convincingly argue otherwise and compel losing parties to concede defeat.¹¹⁹

Challenges to Reform

The NEC's collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders and its utilisation of available technology has fundamentally enhanced the integrity of elections in Liberia. Nonetheless, issues such as the instigation of post-election violence, insecurity and vote buying still threaten the country's democratisation process. Primarily, some politicians are not prepared to accept defeat at the polls despite the integrity of the process.

This has arguably been the CDC's philosophy, as articulated by its Secretary General Acarous Gray (after other opposition political parties ranking 3rd, 4th and 5th endorsed the ruling party in the second round of voting in 2011) in his statement that "the ruling Unity Party will govern its partisans while CDC will govern CDCians. If Ellen [the incumbent] wants a bitter Liberia, we will give her a bitter Liberia."¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ The Carter Center, *Carter Center Reports Open and Transparent Voting Process*.

¹¹⁶ Ushahidi-Liberia, *Monitoring the 2011 Elections in Liberia*.

¹¹⁷ Drew, "Transparency: Considerations for Public Participation."

¹¹⁸ Paul Rexton Kan, *Assessing Free and Fair Elections in Countries of Conflict*, ACSC Quick-Look, Air Command and Staff College, 2005, http://dtlweb.au.af.mil/exlibris/dtl/d3_1/apache_media/L2V4bGlicmlzL2R0bC9kM18xL2FwYWNoZV9tZWRpYS8zMdUxMQ==.pdf (accessed 30 January 2013).

¹¹⁹ Edwards and Hulme, "NGOs and Accountability: Introduction and Overview."

¹²⁰ Special Independent Commission of Inquiry, *Official Report of the November 7, 2011 Acts of Violence and Civil Disturbances: Submitted to Her Excellency Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia 25 November 2011*, Monrovia, Liberia.

This situation, characterised by hate messages and profanities, further distressed an already traumatised post-war population.¹²¹ The government could not quarantine the insecurity engendered by the CDC on 7 November 2011 with a view to undermining the 8 November 2011 second round of voting. A major coordination gap between the Minister of Justice and the Inspector General of the Liberia National Police contributed to the government's inability to minimize voter insecurity. This was further exacerbated by a lack of human resources for crowd control. It was only the intervention of UNMIL that mitigated the crisis.¹²²

The position of US Congressmen Jesse Jackson Jr. and Christopher Smith that people who would undermine the democratic process should be held accountable brought some relief to a terrified population.¹²³ The International Criminal Court sitting in The Hague had earlier issued a similar position.¹²⁴ Arguably, the CDC's tactics to terrorise the public were illegal, but the Liberian Government did not have the capacity to address it. Nonetheless, UNMIL's presence helped to stabilise the situation and safeguard the democratic process.

Vote buying is another problem that could undermine Liberia's electoral system.¹²⁵ This practice occurred to varying degrees during both the 2005 and 2011 elections. Most legislative candidates temporarily shifted populations from one area to another during these elections by transporting eligible voters to their own constituencies.¹²⁶ In return, the

¹²¹ Richard Valdmanis and Alphonso Toweh, "Early Voting Slow in Liberia's Troubled Run-off," Reuters News, 8 November 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/08/us-liberia-election-idUSTRE7A642R20111108> (accessed 10 June 2012).

¹²² Special Independent Commission of Inquiry, *Official Report*.

¹²³ All Africa, "Liberia: 'Beware, Troublemakers' - US Congressmen," *allAfrica*, 21 November 2011, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201111210546.html> (accessed 12 April 2012).

¹²⁴ West African Democracy Radio, "ICC warns trouble makers in Liberia, amid row over polls," West African Democracy Radio, 17 October 2011, http://wadr.org/en/site/news_en/2218/ICC-warns-trouble-makers-in-Liberia--amid-row-over-polls.htm (accessed 11 May 2012).

¹²⁵ Sandbrook, *Closing the Circle: Democratization and Development in Africa*.

¹²⁶ All Africa, "Traditional Leaders Want More Involvement in Electoral Process," *allAfrica*, 24 October 2011, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201110242213.html> (accessed 10 June 2012).

candidates offered an agreed amount, leading to the commodification of votes.¹²⁷ Since those who trade their votes in such a manner are not permanent residents in their bargained constituencies, this tends to distort national demographic trends in terms of constituency representation in the legislature, which is based on a population threshold. The case becomes more ridiculous if the election enters a second round of voting between the first two presidential candidates. Since legislative contenders win a simple majority in the first round, and since their contracts with their clients are only intended to serve narrow pragmatic interests, these relocated voters inevitably return to their actual constituencies and are ineligible to vote in the second round.¹²⁸ This can lead to low polling numbers.

When discussing these practices as though they are isolated incidents in spite of the fact that they are ingrained in the society, it is likely that their impact on democracy could simply be accepted. Such an approach might further lead to action or inaction capable of undermining the process of democratisation.¹²⁹ Essentially, removing these weaknesses, which are inimical to electoral governance, requires the collaboration of political parties, the legislature, the community, students, religious institutions and other stakeholders. Table 1 below identifies the progress made as well as the outstanding issues that stakeholders still need to address, while Figure 1 reflects this data and represents the variables that have been overcome and, hence, the progress made. Though short of perfection, this implies that policy makers and other stakeholders should further strive to enhance Liberia's ongoing process of democratisation.

¹²⁷ Johanna Söderström, "Ex-Combatants at the Polls: Exploring Focus Groups and Electoral Meaning," *Anthropology Matters Journal* 12:1 (2010): 1-16.

¹²⁸ All Africa, "Traditional Leaders Want More Involvement."

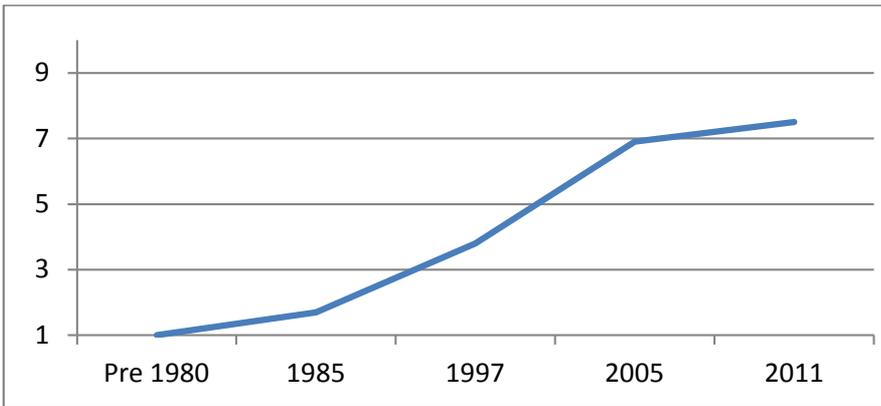
¹²⁹ Marc Cogen and Eric De Brabandere "Democratic Governance and Post-conflict Reconstruction," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 20:3 (2007): 669-693.

Table 1 - Transparency Improvements Index in Liberia's Electoral Process from pre-1980 to 2011

| Some Transparency Indicators | Pre-1980 non-transparency indicators: | 1985 non-transparency indicators | 1997 non-transparency indicators | 2005 non-transparency indicators | 2011 non-transparency indicators |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Exclusion of other eligible citizens | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| 2. Lack of choice of candidates | Yes | No | No | No | No |
| 3. Vote rigging | Yes | Yes | No | No | No |
| 4. Non-transparent legal regime | Yes | Yes | No | No | No |
| 5. Non-independent Elections Commission | Yes | Yes | No | No | No |
| 6. Lack of monitoring vote-casting and ballot-tallying | Yes | Yes | No | No | No |
| 7. Lack of access to real-time election results | Yes | Yes | No | No | No |
| 8. Inadequate voter education | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 9. Limited time for voter registration - | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 10. Lack of free movement of candidates | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 11. Lack of access to state's media | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |

| | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 12. Manipulation of electoral process and results | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 13. Lack of stakeholder participation in determining and designing activities | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| 14. Population Census conducted | Yes | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| 15. Vote buying | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 16. Lack of Campaign Funds Audit | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| 17. Election violence | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Figure 1 - Improvements in Electoral Transparency in Liberia on a Scale of 1 to 10.



Conclusion

Liberia's electoral history from 1847 to 1985 is intrinsic to its national history. As there was no transparency, equity, accountability or a genuine rule of law applicable to all citizens on an equal basis, so too was the case for its electoral systems. Liberia's ruling class, which represented the interests of the minority, stage managed the result of elections to perpetuate their hegemony. This practice explains the abuse of power that also contributed to the first and second civil wars. In ridding itself of these vices, political parties and other stakeholders subsequently determined that free and fair elections were essential to building an inclusive society in which stability matters. Consequently, incremental changes were made in the 1997 as well as in subsequent elections, to purge the electoral system of any manipulative processes. The role of civil society organisations, the media, political parties, and development partners among others, in designing the electoral system has enhanced how credible and transparent elections have been conducted in Liberia.. A critique of the electoral process before and after the 1985 election reveals that remarkable progress has indeed been made. A once perennially marginalised population now determines the leadership of the country through the ballot box.

Despite this progress, Liberia's emerging democracy faces some major threats. Primarily vote buying, influenced by the high level of unemployment in the country, could undermine the rationale for holding elections. Furthermore, the outright refusal by some politicians to concede electoral defeats—to the extent that they would incite violence—is another challenge facing governance in Liberia. The country's fragile peace did not disintegrate into anarchy during the 2011 elections due to the presence of the United Nations peacekeeping force. Since the UN has been entirely responsible for ensuring national security, its departure will have implications for national stability and, in particular, for electoral governance. The ultimate challenge is for Liberia to instigate a multi-level approach to purge violence from governance. Prosecution for violent acts, teaching ethics and banning parties that preach hate messages could help. Improving the lives of the vulnerable population, many of them jobless, who can sell their votes or are easily corrupted to engage in violence, could help remedy the problem. Failing this, the improvements seen in the transparency of the electoral system since the 1985 elections could crumble following the departure of the UN from Liberia.

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