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Author(s): Harris, Dennis and Lewis, Tereza.

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Liberia in 2011: Still Ploughing its own Democratic Furrow?

David Harris & Tereza Lewis

Abstract

The momentous 2005 Liberian elections followed a devastating civil war. Remarkably, the winner of the presidential race was a woman, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and the second-placed was a footballer, George Weah. In addition, in stark contrast to many African elections in particular those in neighbouring Sierra Leone, voting patterns were fragmented: voters often chose President, Senators and Representatives from different parties or independents. Much can be explained by a remarkably level playing-field delivered by an interim coalition government providing no incumbent. In 2011, the Johnson-Sirleaf incumbency stood to significantly change the dynamics. This article seeks to discern whether Liberian elections maintain their unusual patterns, whether Liberia has joined the ranks of African patron-cliental, dominant-party or two-party systems, in particular compared to that of Sierra Leone, or whether there are new twists in its democratic development.

1. Some reflections on African elections and democracy

The academic world and to some extent the policy-making world are divided on their views of the quality and functioning of African democracy. This is hardly surprising, given the Cold War era notions that democracy could only embed when certain developmental, educational and class criteria had been met and the subsequent change of heart which led to the considerable post-Cold War outside

push for democratisation (Lipset, 1960; Moore, 1966; World Bank, 1989). Hence, there are some viewpoints which consider that democracy in Africa is largely externally-derived and even in the best examples only procedural, and certainly not liberal, in quality. The military overturn of the elected regime in Mali in 2012 is cited as an example of the fragility of a particularly lauded and longer-lasting African democracy.

However, after twenty years of post-Cold War elections in Africa, patterns of what might be called an African style of democracy have established. Elections are certainly not sufficient for building a democracy but they play a crucial part. Encompassing the communal structures of African society and the neo-patrimonial historical development of the colonial, pseudo-colonial and post-colonial African state, African elections do not fit within a liberal democracy paradigm but might be described as patronage-democracy or census-democracy (Schaffer, 2000). Violence, fraud and attempted de-legitimisation of results by opposition may also play a part. Results are indeed mixed in that the system is biased towards incumbents but does allow a form of patron-cliental accountability and for variable voter motivations which sometimes derail the best efforts of ruling parties. Ghana, Kenya, Benin, Zambia and Senegal are all testament to the shifting fortunes of the ballot box. In 2007, Sierra Leone added its name to the list of post-Cold War electoral turnovers (Kandeh, 2008).

A recurring voting pattern in African elections is one of strong party loyalty. Analysis of Liberia alongside its neighbour, Sierra Leone, is particularly instructive and the trajectories of the two countries show enough similarities to be often

considered for comparison (Clapham, 1976; Hoffman, 2011; Harris 2011). In Sierra Leone, southerners and easterners most often vote en bloc for the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and northerners similarly for the All People's Congress (APC). This pattern is sometimes disturbed: by the aftermath of conflict in 2002 and by the presence of a credible third party in the turnover of 2007, but such perturbations are exactly that in an overall strongly correlating pattern. Equally, SLPP voters clearly most often choose SLPP for both president and party and APC supporters do similarly (Harris, 2011). Such a two-party system, with coordinated bloc voting alongside some anomalies, is repeated to varying extents in other countries such as Ghana, Nigeria and perhaps Zambia now. More common is the predominant party system of Botswana, Tanzania and Cameroon where the opposition might feasibly win one day but that such a day seems a long way off.¹ The bloc vote is then explained by the overriding influence of patronage and ethno-regionalism in African elections, notwithstanding some cross-cutting features.

Democratic consolidation, then, depends on how we view democracy. Looking at elections, we could utilise a simple two-turnover test, for which Sierra Leone would qualify, or better, a more considered investigation of institutional and attitudinal considerations (Huntington, 1991; Chabal, 1998). The example of the Liberian elections gives us contextual detail by which one might compare other countries and by which one might formulate more nuanced notions of democratic consolidation. Indeed, the Liberian case shows us that there is far from only one electoral experience in Africa and that African democracy has many different and sometimes unexpected tints.

2. *2005 Liberian Elections*

By 2003, Liberia had suffered long decades of neglect and two devastating civil wars. Independent in 1847 under the rule of black Americo-Liberian settlers, this pseudo-colonialism continued until 1980, when a military coup brought Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe, the first African-Liberian president, to power. However, under all Americo-Liberian governments, including in the post-WWII era those of William Tubman and William Tolbert, and under Doe, a dangerous style of power emerged and repeated itself. Despite opening up the country, Tubman and Tolbert headed autocratic regimes based firmly, politically and economically, in the Americo-Liberian community thus preserving the ‘Congo-Country’ divide.² Doe’s response was to create an ethnocentric administration and military based on his own Krahn people, returning Americo-Liberians and Mandingo trading networks alongside greater and greater levels of coercion (Liebenow, 1987). In 1989, former Doe regime civil servant, Charles Taylor, invaded into Nimba County with a few hundred men. The acumen of Taylor and his assistant, Prince Johnson, along with Doe’s furious reaction against civilians in Nimba County delivered a successful rebellion and a first civil war which saw Doe’s death at the hands of Johnson and lasted until 1996 (Ellis, 1999).

Elected in a flawed but nonetheless just about adequate poll in 1997, Taylor failed to extract himself from Liberian historical patterns (Lyons, 1999; Harris, 1999). Krahn and Mandingo forces returned from Guinea in 2000 and in another successful rebellion, forced Taylor into exile three years later. The Comprehensive Peace

Agreement (CPA) allowed for the creation of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) a coalition including the rump of Taylor's regime, the two rebel groups and assorted civilian actors. As corrupt as any Liberian government, the NTGL had one overriding redeeming feature in that it steered Liberia to the 2005 elections and provided a relatively level playing-field, mostly absent of military forces who appeared content with their achievements in dislodging Taylor and the perquisites of two years in positions of power.

The subsequent fracturing of the 2005 Liberian vote and thus the legislative houses and the relative dearth of party loyalty were in an African context remarkable (Harris, 2006). Johnson-Sirleaf polled 20 per cent of the national vote in the first presidential round, won much of the west of the country, and came a respectable second in Montserrado. Her Unity Party (UP), though, gained little from these counties, taking just three seats in the four counties in which she won. UP representation was spread all around the country. Weah emerged ahead with 28 per cent of the first round presidential vote, taking almost the entire eastern half of the country. He also captured Montserrado, containing heavily populated Monrovia. However, in all but Montserrado, the vote went for Weah but hardly at all for his party, CDC. Although CDC gained two-thirds of the available seats in Montserrado, its other seats were scattered. The Liberty Party (LP) of third placed Charles Brumskine and Taylor's old party, the National Patriotic Party (NPP) took a few seats in Grand Bassa and Bong respectively, but other gains were far flung. Indeed, there were no clean sweeps of presidential, Senate and House elections or even just the two legislative houses by any party in any county. House and Senate seats only occasionally followed county presidential victories. Further, two counties, Grand

Gedeh and Margibi, had members of a different party or an independent for each of their legislative seats.

The patterns can be explained at two different levels. The presidential first round victory of Weah and the run-off win for Johnson-Sirleaf contain considerable regional factors but across a swathe of non-western and non-eastern Liberia, in particular the two most populous counties of Montserrado and Nimba, we would need to look elsewhere. It could be concluded that floating voters in the run-off were presented with Johnson-Sirleaf's educated, politically experienced and globally connected persona and Weah's almost apolitical, uneducated, 'man of the people' image and bought into the Johnson-Sirleaf line. She reversed the first round order and won with 60 per cent of the votes cast, becoming the first woman to be elected president in Africa.

However, voting for the legislative bodies appeared to be dictated by somewhat different motivations. Extremely localised patterns produced the curious spread of party seats as above and seven independent candidates in the House and three in the Senate. Locally renowned independent aspirants, such as Edwin Snowe in the Monrovia suburb of Paynesville and Zoe Pennue in Grand Gedeh for the House, and Prince Johnson in Nimba for the Senate, achieved significant victories. While most of these candidates were undoubtedly local patrons, in particular Snowe, but Pennue was also prominent in Krahn rebel forces; and Johnson was a military leader in the NPFL invasion into Nimba against the Doe regime, and subsequently tortured and killed Doe.

Small parties, who performed poorly in other polls, won in often isolated House and Senate elections, suggesting similar highly local factors. For instance, the New Deal Movement (NDM) collected just 0.5per cent in the presidential poll nationwide but won a House seat in three counties. The All Liberian Coalition Party (ALCOP) and the Alliance for Peace and Democracy (APD) re-emerged from the 1997 polls as regional players. ALCOP, with its roots in first and second civil war rebel groups, gained three seats all in Lofa with its sizeable Mandingo population. The APD won eight seats in the south-east. In all, small parties (those which achieved less than 3per cent nationwide in the presidential poll) claimed twelve seats in the House and five in the Senate.

The national and the local polls had some but certainly not all elements in common. Importantly, for the legislature, local factors, in many cases related to patronage or events during the wars, often overrode any party considerations. Political parties in Liberia have a chequered history. For many years, there was a de facto one-party state led by the predominantly Americo-Liberian True Whig Party (TWP) which is now largely moribund. Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL), 'victorious' in the 1986 elections after a gross example of rigging, still exists but struggles to collect seats. Another still competitive party dating from the 1980s is the UP, but it was harassed out of the political picture after 1986 for a decade and then from 1997 until 2003. Any continuity has only happened since 2003. The NPP was founded in 1996 and would be the only other party that could be considered as relatively consolidated. Most parties are new and often small. In contrast in Sierra Leone, the SLPP and APC were founded in 1951 and 1960 respectively. Party consolidation is clearly important, but it is not the only factor here. We must also

return to the environment where the NTGL provided the incumbent regime. The abuse of state resources for campaigning and patronage was widespread, but being a coalition, such resources were distributed relatively evenly, giving almost all parties and local aspirants with NTGL connections some sort of chance. Hence, the voting fractured in a peculiarly non-African fashion. Again the contrast with the SLPP landslide in the post-conflict Sierra Leonean elections in 2002 is stark.

3. 2011 Liberian Elections

It is exactly this highly unusual state of affairs which was tested in the 2011 elections. Clearly, and despite the return of the main players, including Johnson-Sirleaf, Weah, Brumskine, the fourth-placed Winston Tubman and the fifth-placed Varney Sherman, Kromah, Prince Johnson, Pennue and Snowe, in various guises, there were still two very significant changes. First, the distance in time since the war was greater and security and war-related issues might be seen to have diminished. Arguably, however, the 2005 post-conflict elections were not greatly affected by lack of security. The obvious comparison is the 1997 elections where the victory of Taylor was heavily influenced by security: voters most likely thought either that Taylor would return to the bush if he lost or that no-one else on the roster appeared credible enough to hold the country together. Equally in Sierra Leone in 2002, the SLPP benefited from the perception that they brought peace through their international connections. The 2005 Liberian polls were an almost entirely civilian affair with few security considerations. On the other hand, many of those with popularity built on war records returned in 2011. In summary, the extra time since the war does not appear to have altered the environment.

In contrast, the incumbency issue is utterly altered. Despite UP holding no majority or even leadership in either legislative body in 2005, the overbearing power of the executive in Liberia meant that Johnson-Sirleaf and the UP were the effective incumbents. The question can then be posed as to how far and to what effect the UP used their inbuilt resource advantage and whether the electorate responded with a shift of thinking or still adhered to the patterns of 2005. Equally, we might observe new factors and patterns arising perhaps due to a consideration of the record of the Johnson-Sirleaf administration in terms of performance in office.

3.1. Pre-election period

The first round campaign period was commenced on 15 July 2011. The overall atmosphere of campaigning was praised by the National Elections Commission (NEC) and the international observation organisations as being vibrant and generally peaceful; however, one could also observe an aggressive tone, which was mainly evident in inflammatory rhetoric. New CDC standard bearer Tubman stated that ‘Liberians were ready to take back their country from “the criminals”’.³ As for UP, their poster campaign was based on the slogan ‘Monkey still working, baboon can wait’ - a rather sarcastic message from ‘monkey’ Ellen to the ‘baboons’ of the opposition. In return, presidential candidate Prince Johnson accused the incumbent of sponsoring the defunct rebel group Liberia United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) during the second civil war,⁴ an accusation which clearly tried to build on Johnson-Sirleaf’s admission that for a short period of time she supported the Taylor rebellion. Violence, however, was limited to a few incidents.

This relatively serene pre-election period was supported by 8000 UN peacekeepers, who had been deployed across the country, and the retrained Liberian security forces. However, political parties also appeared to understand the importance of mutual respect during their rallies and tension in the first round was scarce.

One of the first signs of political shifts, apparent prior to the 2011 campaign period, was political mergers and alliances. President Sirleaf's UP had merged with the Liberian Action Party (LAP), whose leader, Sherman, came fifth in the 2005 election running for Coalition for the Transformation of Liberia (COTOL). The 2005 CDC first-round winner and football legend Weah was out-polled by the newcomer to CDC, Tubman, during the party presidential nomination, and thus ran this time as Tubman's vice-president, a choice painted by the party as a dream ticket but in the end one was to prove rather more complicated. Perhaps the most controversial character and a newcomer in the presidential election in 2011 was Senator Prince Johnson, a feared ex-warlord, briefly Taylor's supporter and very popular in Nimba County, running for a new party, National Union for Democratic Progress (NUDP). As in 2005, small parties allied with older and larger ones. APD and ALCOP aligned with UP and so entered no presidential candidates, and NPP entered into a rather unclear alliance with CDC but again entering no presidential candidate. However, shifting allegiances are not uncommon in a Liberian, or indeed African, electoral setting. Equally, the shifts did not end with the first round.

One significant difference from the 2005 campaigning period was the presence of the incumbent, which made the political field and campaigning space more challenging for the political opposition. The UP campaign stretched far and wide,

with ubiquitous posters displaying such slogans as ‘Da their areas’, ‘When the plane e’en land yet, don’t change the pilots’ and ‘Six years and look how far we come’, all playing on the idea of experience. The latter poster, however, often featured tarmac roads and new houses and sometimes appeared in incongruous locations such as next to a dilapidated residence on the Lofa highway and adjacent to a dirt main road in Fishtown in River Gee. The most discussed was ‘Proud winner of the Nobel Peace Prize’, which appeared on walls 24 hours after the announcement of Johnson-Sirleaf’s award and just days before the election. Overall, the desires and promises of all political parties didn’t change much from 2005. It was a competition of personalities rather than rhetoric, shrunk sometimes to a mere ‘UP vs. others’ campaign battle. UP again ran the most policy-based campaign, pointing out that only they could continue stabilising the country by focusing on unemployment, investment, women’s rights, and corruption; other parties then reproached UP for the latter, a lack of innovation and the advanced age of the president. CDC based their campaigns on the Tubman-Weah power duo, and Prince Johnson, bearing in mind his negative image, emphasised that NUDP had no plans for conflict and apologised for his role in the civil war.

The campaign period was marked by several complaints and allegations, of which the largest came from CDC. A NEC vehicle was intercepted in Lofa and claims were made that it contained stuffed ballot boxes. Investigations found that the boxes contained only non-sensitive material,⁵ but this did not stop further allegations emerging, for example particularly in Lofa. One CDC Senatorial candidate reported that he had information concerning UP attempts to fill 10-15 ballot boxes with already marked ballot papers. A small party House candidate alleged that UP had

US\$10,000 to give to polling workers in Lofa, and would for example give US\$500 to presiding officers to 'assist' illiterate voters.⁶ LP went further and filed an official complaint with the NEC, the main accusation regarding 20 party affiliated NEC workers, two of whom were subsequently dismissed.⁷ Overall, all parties, including the incumbent, drew attention to the potential problem of under-aged voting in Lofa, a problem that was also present during the August referendum according to domestic observers.⁸

Right across the country, there were many complaints concerning the misuse of state resources, especially by the incumbent party, CDC, LP, and NUDP. In particular, UP were reported to have used government vehicles for their rallies and campaigning.⁹ The sharpest criticism fell on UP, particularly Johnson-Sirleaf, who has been seen as a darling of the international community. Moreover, her Nobel Peace Prize two days before the elections was viewed in a dim light by all opposition parties.

The media tools consisted of radio, TV, internet and newspapers with radio being for many people the only accessible means for getting the news. While some journalists maintained their objectivity, there were several allegations of biased media reports in favour of the incumbent government. The most discussed case regarded the Managing Director of the Liberian Broadcasting Service (LBS), Ambruss Mneh, who was suspended from his position and replaced by Chairman of the Board and former ALCOP presidential candidate, Alhaji Kromah. According to several political parties the reason for Mneh's dismissal was a live press conference with George Weah, during which he criticised the incumbent.

International observation missions were carried out by the joint mission of The Carter Center and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) as well as ECOWAS and the African Union. Domestic observations were accomplished by dozens of domestic organisations, such as the Election Coordinating Committee (ECC), a coalition of Liberian civic organisations. Altogether there were an estimated 4800 observers present during the election process throughout the country.

Finally, prior to 11 October, Liberia held a National Referendum, where voters could choose whether to ratify four amendments to the 1986 Constitution, including a reduction in the residency requirement of presidential and vice-presidential candidates from 10 years prior to the elections to 5 years; and a proposition that, except for the presidency, both legislative elections should be won by simple majority. A very low turnout of 34.2per cent alongside a high number of invalid votes showed a lack of enthusiasm and understanding. This may be explained by the 75per cent illiteracy level but is in sharp contrast to national elections. Further, despite NEC's initial announcement that none of the four amendments were passed, the results of the final amendment were eventually taken to the Supreme Court which decided that the simple majority rule would be used, considerably lessening the financial strain.¹⁰ In a final muddying of this already confused process, the Supreme Court also had to rule on the interpretation of the outcome of the first proposition, in that the 10-year rule would only apply after 2011 as parts of the constitution had been suspended for the 2005 elections. All the presidential candidates could thus stand. All proposed amendments by the

government administration were criticised by the opposition, although it was far from a united response. In a sign of things to come, CDC did call for a boycott of the whole process and other parties argued that the referendum wasted much needed state resources.

3.2. Presidential and legislative first round elections

Although it was the second time Liberians cast their votes since the end of the civil war, it was the first election primarily organised by the NEC, headed by the 2005 co-chair James Fromayan, as the previous poll was largely run by the UN. The 11 October polls were praised by all present observers as free and fair on the day, barring some minor issues. At the same time many questions were raised and brought about a number of official complaints by opposition parties (see later).

The national turnout reached 71.6per cent (1,288,716 voters), slightly less than in 2005 (74.9per cent). The turnout in individual counties ranged from the highest, 75.9per cent in Nimba, to the lowest, 63.3per cent in Grand Gedeh (see Table 1). These figures show differences from 2005 and suggest that apart from the usual factor - accessibility in the rainy season - successful campaigning might have played an important role (e.g. Nimba), as well.

Voter education was carried out by NEC along with international partners. During the elections voters' awareness seemed to lack some strength especially in rural areas (in south-eastern counties voter education was practically non-existent),¹¹ which was demonstrated by a number of invalid votes (in Rivercess 10.2per cent, followed by Bong with 9.3per cent). Nevertheless, political awareness remains high

and it may have been the assistance to mostly elderly voters that caused problems. Whereas in 2005 it was the Presiding Officers at polling places who could assist voters, thus compromising the secrecy of ballots, 2011 rules allowed only a different voter who had already cast his/her ballot to handle the issue. Perhaps because of this innovation the total number of invalid votes reached 6.4per cent, much more than in 2005 (3.8per cent).

Whereas Johnson-Sirleaf's overall victory in 2005 was astonishing to most, her lead in 2011's first round probably did not surprise many people. Johnson-Sirleaf won in 10 out of 15 counties, reaching 43.9per cent of all votes (see Table 2). She took Lofa with 71per cent, aided by her vice-president Boakai who hails from Lofa and the endorsement of Kromah. This triumph continued with 65per cent in Bomi, her home county, 67per cent in Gbarpolu, 61per cent in Grand Cape Mount, home to Sherman, and remarkably 55per cent and 48per cent in River Gee and Grand Kru. Not only did the incumbent win a resounding victory in the presidential poll, but UP now hold nine seats in the Senate (30per cent of all seats), and 24 seats in the House (33per cent).¹² Her competitor, Tubman, polled 32.7per cent and won in three counties: Grand Gedeh with 73per cent, his home county Maryland with 47per cent, and Montserrado with 46per cent. Although CDC maintained three seats in the Senate they came first in just 11 House seats, down from 15 in 2005. Prince Johnson, on the other hand, scored heavily in Nimba County, his home region, and gained 11.6per cent nationwide, displacing Brumskine from his 2005 third place. Brumskine came fourth, winning Grand Bassa, but with just 5.5per cent across the country. Johnson's party, NUDP, took six out of nine House seats and the one Senate seat on offer in Nimba while Brumskine's LP totalled seven House seats and holds two Senate seats.

Increasing their share from 2005 to 2011 from four to nine seats in the Senate and from eight to 24 seats in the House (although there were nine more seats available) suggests a significant UP victory and an upward shift in party cohesion. However, bearing in mind there are a total of 30 seats in the former and 73 seats in the latter, outstanding results begin to look less impressive (see Table 3). UP wrested power in Bomi, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh (traditionally a strong CDC county), Lofa, River Gee and Sinoe in the House; CDC took seats in Maryland and Montserrado. As far as Senate seats go, UP won in a majority of counties, losing out in Grand Kru, Montserrado and Rivercess to CDC. There are some almost clean sweeps across all three polls - UP in Lofa and Bomi and NUDP in Nimba - and CDC legislative wins are concentrated in Montserrado, but there remain many peculiarities. In Grand Gedeh only 15per cent went to Johnson-Sirleaf, but UP won Senate and House seats; both UP and Johnson-Sirleaf performed well in River Gee and Sinoe, traditionally Weah territory; Johnson-Sirleaf won Grand Kru (Weah's familial county), but CDC took the Senate seat; and NPP (CDC's ally) won the Bomi Senate seat, but UP took the rest plus 65per cent of votes in the presidential poll. UP has House seats in every county bar three, but oddly one of these three is Sherman's Grand Cape Mount. The NPP has four Senate seats in four counties but none in its former heartland, Bong, where conversely it holds two thirds of its total House seats.

Notably, while the 2005 successes of the withdrawn parties ALCOP and COTOL were substituted mostly by that of UP and CDC, these latter two parties combined did not get even half of the seats in either the Senate or the House. Hence, the small political parties (those with less than 3per cent of the vote or no

representation in the presidential race) and independent candidates are still prevalent, now holding over a third of House seats (25 of which six are independents) and half of all Senate seats (15 of which again six are independents). For example, the presidential candidate for the new Movement for Progressive Change (MPC) took just 0.5per cent of the vote but the party took House seats in Grand Gedeh and Grand Kru. Equally, the presidential candidate for the National Democratic Coalition (NDC) again took just 0.5per cent of the vote, but the party now holds a total of six seats. The NPP won seven seats similar to 2005, and the APD five seats down from eight in 2005. While several small parties lost all their seats, including the NDM and NDPL, the party of former President Doe and former party of Tubman, others such as the Liberia Destiny Party (LDP), which fielded no presidential candidate, won its first seats in the House and Senate in Rivercess. Independents like Pennue and Snowe, with his proliferation of posters in the Monrovia suburb of Paynesville making such incongruous declarations as ‘Let it Snowe development’, convincingly held their House seats in Grand Gedeh and Montserrado.

3.3. The presidential run-off

Having no absolute winner in the presidential first round, NEC announced a run-off which would take place on 8 November 2011. Notwithstanding the 54 official complaints after the first round, of which 42 were adjudicated by the time of the run-off, the Commission was praised for its smooth conduct of the first part of the election not only by the observer organisations but also by some of the political parties. It was therefore somewhat of a surprise when CDC embarked on its path to boycott the second round. Despite no supporting evidence to their accusations,

CDC called the first round results fraudulent and made a key demand in the replacement of NEC Chairman Fromayan. Alleged irregularities included ballot box stuffing, harassment of party observers and the NEC letter sent to CDC erroneously pronouncing Tubman as leading after the first round.¹³ Although Fromayan eventually stepped down on 30 October (a measure welcomed by Tubman, but insufficient for others within the party), CDC decided to boycott the second round of elections. Not even a trip to Nigeria for Tubman and a warning call from Abuja changed their decision.¹⁴ A series of meetings with NEC and civil society groups were called but attended by just UP and the arbitrators. Finally, in an official letter to NEC, CDC stated that their ‘complaints of voting irregularities that marred the 11 October ballot remain unaddressed’ ... thus they ‘officially inform the Liberian people and the world that CDC cannot participate in the run-off ballot.’¹⁵ Since there is no provision in the electoral law for withdrawing during the elections, CDC resolved to boycott the elections. This decision had a tremendous impact on the whole run-off process.

The eve of the run-off was marred by violence in the streets of Monrovia when CDC supporters calling for postponement of the election clashed with police and UN troops. Between one and four persons were killed, the police were heavily criticised for the use of excessive force and three media stations were controversially temporarily closed down. Fortunately, the tension did not spread to other towns and cities throughout the country, and voters peacefully came to the polls the very next day. Although Tubman’s name was still present on the ballot papers and Liberians could give him their votes, CDC’s boycott did have an effect on voter turnout, which dropped by more than 30per cent, thus reaching a national

total of 38.6per cent (see Table 1 for variations). Reasons for not turning out, however, go beyond a direct support for the boycott. Run-offs often suffer from drops in turnout due to decline in voter interest when long distances are involved and when candidates have been eliminated: in 2005 a fall from 74per cent to 61per cent was recorded. Equally, there was really nothing to vote for and so indirect reasons emerging from the boycott most likely played a significant part. While Tubman's vote fell 24 percentage points and the turnout dropped 34 percentage points, and numbers were greatest in UP territory and yet still only 47per cent in Bomi, it remains unclear how much of the drop was direct support for the boycott.

Since Johnson-Sirleaf had no real opponent due to the boycott, her overall victory amounted to 90.6per cent, leaving Tubman with only 9.4per cent of the votes (see Table 4). She scored heavily in Nimba with 96.5per cent - a result mostly caused by Prince Johnson's about-turn to back her in the second round - and reached 80per cent and more in the rest of the counties. These results, as opposed to the turnout, were surely affected by CDC's 'strike', but there are other elements addressed below.

Much to CDC's fury and despite the party being awarded five hearing adjournments mostly in order to gather witnesses, NEC and then the Supreme Court of Liberia ruled that not enough evidence of fraud had been found as alleged by the opposition party, and therefore the election results were legally binding. In spite of the party's acceptance of the Court's decision, the issue lingered on with CDC repeatedly bringing up the allegations.

3.4. *How to explain the results*

Clearly there are those who believed that the first round elections were not credible. The CDC boycott of the second round was far from a unanimous viewpoint within the party but enough party unity was achieved to cast some doubt on the first round. However, given that all observers noted fairness and transparency on election days and that evidence of overt fraud was in the end very thin on the ground, one must most likely look elsewhere for answers as to why the results emerged as they did. In essence there are three sets of elections, legislature, first round presidential, and presidential run-off, to explain. All came with their particular peculiarities.

In terms of the legislature, these were poor but not disastrous results for CDC and good but not excellent results for UP. In many ways the patterns of local support which appear to trump party loyalty continue from 2005 to 2011. The number of independent and small party (those with less than 3per cent of the vote or no representation in the presidential race) representatives actually increased significantly from eleven seats in the House and five in the Senate in 2005 to 25 and 15 respectively in 2011. One might observe that there is a consolidation of one or two parties, UP certainly and CDC possibly, if it manages to overcome its difficulties, the picture remains otherwise fractured into local concerns over patronage and legacies of the conflict.¹⁶

The reason for CDC's weaker results can be seen partly in the Tubman-Weah dynamics, which fragmented the party. Many voters were confused with the roles of Tubman and Weah and expressed their dissatisfaction with this alliance, noting

that Weah should have been the CDC standard bearer.¹⁷ There was a clear notion that Tubman might impress educated voters - an idea not lost on Weah who may well have seen his 2005 defeat emerging partly from his education deficit with respect to Johnson-Sirleaf leading to his acquisition of a degree in the interim - and that Weah would maintain his popular appeal particularly with the youth. The schisms within the party, however, aligned along this divide and were instrumental in the actions of CDC after the first round. In comparison, UP revealed itself to be a well-oiled machine, capable of using resources, whether from the state or elsewhere, to fund a serious campaign. Legitimate campaigning could be seen everywhere, but it was the more covert campaigning which was also in evidence, from use of state vehicles through to targeted patronage. Evidence of anomalous voting patterns in favour of UP and a much needed increase in turnout in the Weah heartland of Grand Gedeh were unearthed in the second round which point towards electoral bribery whether of NEC officials or local chiefs.¹⁸ That said, it is then all the more remarkable that the leading opposition parties and a plethora of smaller parties and independents were still able to compete on this playing field, suggesting that UP are far from having it all their own way.

The presidential first round is clearly influenced by many of the factors mentioned in relation to the legislature. However, if we accept that local issues are important in the legislature elections, judging by the fractured nature of county-level voting these do not obviously translate on to the national picture. So, as in 2005, patronage may be crucial at the local level, but there is more to the presidential poll. Indeed, ethno-regional cleavages were clearer in the 2005 than the 2011 presidential elections. The opposition tried to emphasise certain controversial

aspects of Johnson-Sirleaf's personality and her unfulfilled presidential promises. Critics accused her of doing too little to tackle unemployment and corruption. One might see some of the dismissals and resignations of cabinet ministers and the exposés of the now-dismissed Liberian Auditor General John Morlu as proof of the anti-corruption checks beginning to work or conversely of the continued grand scale of corruption. They also condemned her decision to stand for the second term despite stating she would not.

Female participation and gender issues in general need some attention, since they are seen by many as a crucial tool for a democratic consolidation. Although Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's role in African politics as the first female president is remarkable, and her influence on some women undoubted, one has to be careful in giving this issue an excessive degree of significance. Whereas in the presidential election there were more female candidates (three presidential, one vice-presidential) than in 2005 (one each), overall female participation dropped to 13per cent for the Senate and 9.5per cent for the House from 16.7per cent and 12.5per cent respectively in 2005. This shift might lead to the conclusion that even though there has been progress regarding gender issues, it is not necessarily as powerful a tool in Liberian politics as one might think (even though many posters around the country demanding women's empowerment and more women in the government might lead one to think differently). Gender issues certainly play an important role in the country's society, but other factors seem to bear greater importance in the electoral process itself.

A significant problem involved the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process (Lappin & Harris, 2010). The TRC was established in 2006 by Johnson-Sirleaf's government in order to 'promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation' by investigating 20 years of conflict.¹⁹ The 2009 TRC final report included controversial recommendations, such as calling for many, including Johnson-Sirleaf, to be banned from holding political office for 30 years, and others, such as Prince Johnson, to be brought before a war crimes court. The Commission especially pointed out Johnson-Sirleaf's role in financially supporting Taylor's rebellion. However, she publicly apologised and in January 2011 the Supreme Court of Liberia ruled that TRC recommendations were unconstitutional and that 'banning several individuals, including Johnson-Sirleaf, without their right to due process in keeping with law, is a clear violation of the Liberian Constitution'.²⁰ It was indicated that one of the reasons for Johnson's backing of Johnson-Sirleaf in the run-off might be his similar appearance in the TRC recommendations, although rumours of cash payments were more common currency.

CDC's decision to boycott the run-off could be looked upon as a desperate attempt to avoid embarrassing results or to use the situation in their favour. It is easier to look popular by boycott than in a run-off that is most likely to be lost. Non-recognition of results, whether justified or not, is a familiar if sometimes temporary feature of African elections including those in Sierra Leone. At the same time, some reasons behind this behaviour and tactic can be found in the party's dynamics and factionalisation. At various points, it seemed that Tubman was prepared to play a conciliatory game and secure government positions for either

CDC or himself, but was held back by a more hardline Weah faction. Weah has indeed showed political naivety, or in another interpretation an unwillingness to play the elite political game, before. The party split on the issue, with several of the Executive Committee dismissed for maintaining a conciliatory line, while CDC Secretary-General and House Representative Acarous Grey threatened a 'bitter' and 'ungovernable' Liberia and was arrested for inciting violence during student pay-related riots in December.²¹ Indeed, generally greater levels of violence, particularly as witnessed on the eve of the run-off, are worrisome. Ultimately, though, a deal was struck just two days before the inauguration on 16 January with Johnson-Sirleaf, Weah and Tubman all present. After rumours of demonstrations to coincide with the inauguration, the about-turn saw Tubman recognise the Johnson-Sirleaf presidency and both CDC leaders attend the ceremony, although it was still clear that many partisans were not entirely on board.²²

In the end, we would note that incumbency and the UP/Johnson-Sirleaf party machine were highly influential in determining some of the results, particularly in marginal and non-UP territory like Lofa, where a large effort was exerted in the first round, and seemingly Grand Kru, Sinoe and Grand Gedeh, but that there is more to the results than that.²³ At the Senate and House level, it would still appear to be based on local patrons and patronage, often de-linked from the party in power, and on some occasions notably in Prince Johnson's case, a war record. There is quite a high turnover in seats indicating some dissatisfaction with patrons elected in 2005 but this does not necessarily detract from the idea of patronage as a motivator. Local brokers, whether the candidates or chiefs, still hold much influence. Remarkably, political parties, although stronger in the case of UP, still

struggle to maintain a power base anywhere in the country. They are not the serious proposition seen elsewhere in Africa and even just across the border in Sierra Leone.

Above and beyond the parties, the personalities are important. Johnson-Sirleaf may have failed to bring jobs or decrease corruption, but there have been some visible improvements in other sectors, such as education and health, and rather invisible achievements in areas such as debt relief and budgeting. Her education and experience were almost matched this time by Tubman, who has worked for long spells for the UN and shorter spells for the Liberian government and is the nephew of former president William Tubman, but she may still be seen as the more likely candidate to deliver on a national scale. The CDC leadership and indeed its bloc of supporters were, instead of complementary, almost schizophrenic. The Tubman-Weah divide reflects not just that between educated supporters on the one hand and under-employed, sometimes ex-combatant, youth on the other. It also falls on the line between the former Americo-Liberian elite - now expanded out of its settler ancestry and perhaps more accurately termed an 'American-Liberian' elite as many have spent war and post-war years in USA and elsewhere before returning often to take up government jobs - and the rest.²⁴ Whether this new elite behaves in the rather arrogant and paternal manner of its predecessors will be another severe test for Liberia and Liberian democracy.

4. Liberian democracy

One would probably start by noting that, despite the boycott, violence, administrative difficulties and issues of incumbency, there have now been two consecutive elections that may be a contribution to a somewhat painful yet incremental democratic transition. Rationales for voting do extend beyond patronage, ethno-regionalism and blind party loyalty. Again, despite the executive-heavy nature of Liberian government, the notion that Liberia is heading towards a UP-led predominant party state is belied by the continuation of some of the extraordinary voting patterns. UP now leads in both Senate and House but has no majority and no single strong opposition to work with. The presence of local brokers points, on the one hand to broad representation which is useful in what is still a post-conflict scenario, but on the other to a legislature that can hold the executive to ransom. That said, and despite the legitimacy problem that the run-off boycott and reduced turnout have raised, UP and Johnson-Sirleaf are now in a stronger position even if they do not have it all their own way. Patronage and personalities are incredibly important and so incumbency has become a key factor.

Liberia does indeed continue to plough its own democratic furrow, but it is now ploughing in a field which is more recognisably African. The elections display many characteristics of other African polls including weak institutions, patronage, ethno-regionalism, violence and the de-legitimisation of results, although the Liberian case shows that anywhere in Africa the exact mixture of these and yet more idiosyncratic factors influences the results and the quality of the ensuing democracy. Liberia has also moved on from the pre-war non-elections and the war itself and one might talk of incremental if very unsteady steps in the consolidation of a Liberian style of democracy. Liberia certainly shows that there is no one

African democracy, particularly in comparison to the two-party ethno-regional bloc system of its neighbour, Sierra Leone, and is to some extent still a unique variation on a theme.

TABLE 1: Voter turnout 2005 and 2011

County	2005 (%)	Turnout 1 st round 2011 (%)	Turnout run-off 2011 (%)
Bomi	73.4	75.4	47.1
Bong	72.2	72.5	38.2
Grand Bassa	68.3	65.5	24.4
Grand Cape Mount	72.1	71.4	39.7
Grand Gedeh	73.8	63.3	19.4
Grand Kru	77.1	69.5	64.0
Lofa	62.0	64.0	48.8
Margibi	71.2	71.0	33.0
Maryland	71.7	66.5	32.7
Montserrado	78.8	75.0	34.1
Nimba	74.4	75.9	51.1
Rivercess	66.9	67.1	26.1
Sinoe	71.8	65.3	33.5
River Gee	72.3	65.2	35.4
Gbarpolu	66.9	69.4	44.8
National	74.9	71.6	38.0 (668,320)

TABLE 2: Presidential Election first round results (first six candidates)

Presidential/Vice-presidential candidate	Political Party	Number of counties scored	Votes	%
Johnson-Sirleaf, Ellen; Boakai, Joseph Nyema	Unity Party (UP)	10	530,020	43.9
Tubman, Winston A.; Weah, George Manneh	Congress for Democratic Change (CDC)	3	394,370	32.7
Johnson, Prince Yormie; Supuwood, James Laveli	National Union for Democratic Progress (NUDP)	1	139,786	11.6
Brumskine, Charles Walker; Siakor, Franklin O.	Liberty Party (LP)	1	65,800	5.5
Sandy, Kennedy Gbleyah; Wolloh, Alloycious Dennis	Liberia Transformation Party (LTP)	-	13,612	1.1
Beyan, Gladys G.Y.; Deshield, Edward G.	Grassroot Democratic Party of Liberia (GDPL)	-	12,740	1.1
Total Valid Votes	(Invalid votes 6.4% of total)		1,206,642	100

TABLE 3: House of Representatives and Senate comparison 2005-2011

	Bomi	Bong	Gbarpolu	Grand Bassa	Grand Cape Mount	Grand Gedeh	Grand Kru	Lofa	Margibi	Maryland	Montserratado	Nimba	River Gee	River ccess	Sinoe
2011															
House	UP 3	UP 2, CDC 1 (+4)	UP 1, CDC 1 (+1)	UP 1 (+4)	0 (+3)	UP 1 (+2)	UP 1 (+1)	UP 4 (+1)	UP 3 (+2)	CDC 1 (+2)	CDC 8, UP 4 (+5)	UP 1 (+8)	UP 2 (+1)	0 (+2)	UP 1 (+2)
Senate	UP (NPP)	UP (NDC)	UP (NPP)	(NPP, Ind)	UP (Ind)	UP (LTP)	CDC (APD)	UP (LP)	UP (Ind)	UP (NPP)	CDC (Ind)	(NUDP, Ind)	UP (Ind)	CDC (LDP)	LP (APD)
	Bomi	Bong	Gbarpolu	Grand Bassa	Grand Cape Mount	Grand Gedeh	Grand Kru	Lofa	Margibi	Maryland	Montserratado	Nimba	River Gee	River ccess	Sinoe
2005															
House	CDC 1 (+2)	CDC 1, UP 1 (+4)	UP 1 (+2)	0 (+4)	0 (+3)	CDC 1 (+2)	0 (+2)	0 (+4)	UP 1 (+3)	UP 1 (+2)	CDC 10, UP 1 (+3)	UP 2, CDC 1 (+4)	CDC 1 (+2)	UP 1 (+1)	0 (+3)
Senate	(COTOL, NDPL)	(NPP, Ind)	UP (NRP)	(LP, Ind)	(NPP 2)	(COTOL, NDPL)	(COTOL, APD)	(COTOL, ALCOP)	CDC (LP)	UP 2	CDC 2	(COTOL, Ind)	(COTOL 2)	UP (LP)	(APD 2)

Note: UP and CDC seats are indicated in each case. Other parties appear in brackets, but are only specified in the Senate.

TABLE 4: Presidential Elections run-off results

County	Johnson-Sirleaf Ellen (UP) (%)	Winston Tubman (CDC) (%)
Bomi	92.4	7.6
Bong	83.4	16.6
Grand Bassa	87.4	12.6
Grand Cape Mount	90.0	10.0
Grand Gedeh	79.8	20.2
Grand Kru	92.3	7.7
Lofa	93.2	6.8
Margibi	85.8	14.2
Maryland	80.9	19.1
Montserrado	92.9	7.1
Nimba	96.5	3.5
Rivercess	84.3	15.7
Sinoe	81.0	19.0
River Gee	83.6	16.4
Gbarpolu	91.1	8.9
National	90.6	9.4

NOTES

¹ Zambia is a pertinent case study of a predominant party system that then experienced a turnover in 2012 (Burnell, 2001). Benin would be one of the few examples of a more fractured party system.

² ‘Congos’ were originally ‘recaptives’, or slaves recaptured at sea who were released in Liberia. In current parlance, all descendents of settlers or those assimilated into Americo-Liberian society are called Congos.

³ ‘Time to take our country back’ - Winston tells CDC welcome rally, *The Analyst* (Monrovia), 18 July 2011.

⁴ War is not our portion: NUDP Prince Johnson Sends Warning to Ellen, *Front Page Africa*, 3 October 2011.

http://frontpageafricaonline.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1440:war-is-not-our-portion-nudp-prince-johnson-sends-warning-to-ellen&catid=41:liberia-2011&Itemid=117 (accessed 2 December 2011)

⁵ There were no pre-marked ballots here, *The News* (Monrovia), 13 October 2011.

⁶ Authors’ interviews, 9-10 October 2011 and 7 November 2011.

⁷ Authors’ interviews, 10 October 2011.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Carter Center reports vibrant and generally peaceful campaigning in Liberia; urges steps to level playing field, *Carter Center Liberia Pre-Election Statement*, 3 October 2011.

¹⁰ Simple majority will hold - Supreme Court rules, *The Informer* (Monrovia), 21 October 2011.

¹¹ Carter Center, 3 October 2011.

¹² There was voting for only half of the Senate seats. Each County has two Senators and in 2005, the leading candidate earned a 9-year term and the second place candidate a 6-year term, so that staggered Senate elections could be created. Unless indicated, totals in this article are the sum of 2005 and 2011 Senate results.

¹³ Carter Center Statement on Liberia’s Tally Process and Post-Electoral Environment, 21 November 2011

¹⁴ *Ecowas preempts CDC - Reads the ‘Riot Acts’ to Tubman*, *The Analyst* (Monrovia), 4 November 2011; *Tubman ‘lied’*, *New Democrat* (Monrovia), 7 November 2011.

¹⁵ *CDC Letter to NEC*, CDC Headquarters Office of the Standard Bearer, 8 November 2011.

¹⁶ *Tubman left CDC in March 2012*

¹⁷ Authors’ interviews with voters, 8-11 November 2011.

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- ¹⁸ Carter Center, 21 November 2011.
- ¹⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia Mandate, 12 May 2005.
- ²⁰ Liberian Supreme Court squashes Truth and Reconciliation Commission on ban on politicians, Net News Publisher, 24 January, 2011. <http://www.netnewspublisher.com/liberian-supreme-court-squashes-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-ban-on-politicians/> (accessed 2 December 2011)
- ²¹ Acarous Gray's trial rescheduled, Heritage (Monrovia), 5 January 2012.
- ²² Tubman Chased Out of Party Headquarter, New Dawn (Monrovia), 17 January 2012.
- ²³ The Lofa effort as witnessed by the authors, 8-10 October 2011.
- ²⁴ 'American-Liberian' is the authors' own term, not one in wide usage.

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