

Liberia 2005: an unusual African post-conflict election

David Harris*

ABSTRACT

The 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the ensuing two-year-long National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), which brought together two rebel forces, the former government and members of civil society, justifiably had many critics but also one positive and possibly redeeming feature. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the realpolitik nature of the CPA and the barely disguised gross corruption of the members of the coalition government, the protagonists in the second Liberian civil war (2000–03) complied with the agreement and the peace process held. The culmination of this sequence of events was the 11 October 2005 national elections, the 8 November presidential run-off and the 16 January 2006 inauguration. In several ways, this was the African post-conflict election that broke the mould, but not just in that a woman, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, won the presidential race, and a football star, George Weah, came second. The virtual absence of transformed rebel forces or an overbearing incumbent in the electoral races, partially as a result of the CPA and NTGL, gave these polls extraordinary features in an African setting.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

After fifteen years of post-Cold War post-conflict African elections, it can now be said that some patterns are emerging, except that Liberia appears to have upset one or two of these rhythms. In some ways, the 2005 Liberian polls emerged firmly against general African electoral precedents – including those of the 1997 Liberian election, which ushered in the rule of the former ‘warlord’, Charles Taylor (Harris 1999). The first remarkable aspect this time round was the almost unprecedented and virtually complete disappearance of the rebel forces from the political process. Renamo in Mozambique, UNITA in Angola, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) after the first civil war (1989–96), *Forces pour la défense de la démocratie* (FDD) in Burundi, and even the politically

* David Harris teaches and is completing Ph.D. research at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. In 2005, he worked for the Carter Center in Liberia.

inept Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, all managed some form of transformation. This time in Liberia, despite successes in militarily driving former President Taylor's forces back to the capital and subsequently sharing political power in Monrovia, neither of the rebel groups, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) or the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), survived into the electoral arena. Sekou Conneh, the former LURD leader, did resurface as a presidential candidate at the head of his own party, but the challenge was largely ineffectual and his estranged wife and effective former co-leader, Aisha, threw her support behind Johnson-Sirleaf and the Unity Party (UP). MODEL appears to belong only to history. Some ex-combatants rallied behind other candidates and parties, such as Weah and the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), and first civil war rebel leader, Alhaji Kromah, and his All-Liberia Coalition Party (ALCOP). With rather fragile structures and support potentially ethnically restricted to the Krahn for MODEL and the Mandingos for LURD, rebel generals and leaders of insurgent forces seemed to have been satisfied with unseating Taylor and finding lucrative avenues to pursue in the NTGL and in business. At the same time, the erstwhile government party, the National Patriotic Party (NPP, formerly NPFL), underwent its own transformation, in that it recovered, to some degree, from the loss of its leader, Taylor, into exile in 2003 and the further defection of some of its leading partisans to other parties. It was, however, nothing approaching the force that it had been before.

Secondly and crucially, Liberia approached these elections largely in the absence of an incumbent. Most African post-conflict polls and most elections in Africa are undertaken in the shadow of an overbearing incumbent presence. Nor was there an actor who would be able to dominate the fragile security terrain, as Taylor had done at the head of the former rebel NPFL/NPP party in Liberia's first post-conflict elections in 1997. He won 75 % of the vote, with Johnson-Sirleaf trailing in second with less than 10 %, in a poll heavily influenced by fear of the consequences of not having Taylor in power. Taylor's implicit threat to go back to the bush if he lost was matched by the electorate's fear that no other candidate could hold the country together (Harris 1999; Lyons 1999). Elections had been subsequently scheduled for 2003, when Taylor would have been the incumbent, but his government, faced with little political opposition, had further antagonised key sectors of society, particularly the Krahn and Mandingos, and exported conflict to neighbouring states, resulting in two more rebel invasions. There were important individuals within the NTGL, some of whom were disbarred in the CPA from standing for

election, who nonetheless gave considerable backing to certain parties. The re-emergence of the Liberian political elite from various eras and in a variety of guises also had a significant impact. There was not, however, the overwhelming force of government machinery behind one particular party. As a consequence, the political field remained remarkably open.

Finally, and partly as a result of the second condition, the party loyalty of the electorate and even some of the party representatives proved to be unusually fragile. In a continent where ethno-regional issues often play out strongly in party politics, and the electorate in a certain area can, to a large extent, be relied on to vote for one party across the board, Liberians showed little loyalty to any of the parties. The result was a patchwork of party victories in the Senate and House of Representatives across the 15 counties, which, further, did not even follow the nodes of popularity of the presidential candidates.

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN PERIOD

The designated campaign period commenced on 15 August 2005 with some minor skirmishes in Monrovia, which were not repeated until after the two elections. The lack of violence could be explained by the disappearance of combatant forces, if not all of the combatants, the absence of an incumbent and the reasonably open field, and the presence of 15,000 UN peacekeepers. The largely cordial atmosphere that existed between parties is more difficult to account for. It is true that there was no love lost between Johnson-Sirleaf and Varney Sherman, and that there were vitriolic verbal exchanges in word and in print (e.g. *Daily Observer* 16.9.2005). Equally, Weah felt obliged to repeatedly urge his young CDC partisans to show restraint. However, particularly outside the capital, inter-party relations flourished.¹ This could be seen as a positive sign in favour of a peaceful future, but even at this stage there were clear indications that the electorate and even party officials were not viewing political parties with the importance that is often attached to them in other African states and elsewhere.

The lack of an incumbent did not stop the flow of government resources into the hands of aspirants. Importantly, though, there appeared to be a multiplicity of recipients. The Coalition for the Transformation of Liberia (COTOL), whose mainstay, the Liberian Action Party (LAP), enjoyed the NTGL chair as a member, and whose standard bearer, Sherman, was instrumental as the leading lawyer in the hasty and lucrative signing of important NTGL deals, was suspected of benefiting the most. There were, at the same time, many other parties and independent candidates who

were able to use government funds and resources at a national and local level.² The abuse of government vehicles for campaigning was conspicuous, as was the distribution of money and rice at rallies.

Little separated the parties in terms of their political platforms. Poorly articulated desires for good governance, development and reconciliation were standard fare. This did not, however, indicate a complete absence of difference, as candidates appealed to diverse constituencies, which are detailed below. The standard bearers of all the major parties were able to tour much of the country, although some parties, such as CDC, UP and COTOL, were clearly better resourced than others, and origins of funding were opaque. It remains to be seen whether the innovative Asset and Campaign Finance declarations will have any effect. Party efforts were also focused on the central corridor of Montserrado, Margibi, Grand Bassa, Bong and Nimba Counties where 75% of the electorate was registered, and party machinery was heavily centralised in Monrovia.

As in most African elections, it was the radio, not the multitude of newspapers of variable quality that barely made it out of Monrovia, which was most important. There were many radio stations in Monrovia and most of the provincial capitals, whose coverage ranged from the very local to almost nationwide. UNMIL (UN Mission in Liberia), Star and Veritas were internationally sponsored and seen as reasonably objective, whereas some, like Weah's Kings FM, were clearly partisan. Interestingly, sizeable polls were conducted in four counties by the newspaper, *Poll Watch*. International election observers included long-term missions by the Carter Center and EU, and short-term delegations by the African Union, ECOWAS and the institutes of the two main US political parties. Some long-term and then much larger-scale election-days observation was conducted by the domestic coalition, the National Committee for Elections Monitoring (NACEM).

THE 11 OCTOBER ELECTIONS

Without doubt, this was by far the freest and fairest election that Liberia has ever seen. Despite some claims, such as an alleged familial relationship between Johnson-Sirleaf and the chair of the National Elections Commission (NEC), Frances Johnson-Morris, NEC demonstrated an impartiality that would be the envy of most African states. A reasonable timeframe of two years was allowed for election preparation, although some such as Amos Sawyer (2004), the former Liberian head of state, suggested that this was not nearly long enough. There were certainly considerable climatic and administrative problems, and there were also



MAP 1.

some difficulties in the relationship with UNMIL's better-resourced electoral division. The timing of the elections at the end of the rainy season, when bad roads are rendered considerably worse and often impassable, was dictated by tradition rather than practicalities. It is also a concern that in the future NEC will be on its own, and there may be those who are more eager to jump through the gaps in the administration. Few, however, accused NEC of partisanship, with the notable exceptions of the Liberty Party (LP) in the first round and CDC in the run-off.

The complaint lodged by LP concerned assistance given by presiding officers to illiterate voters, the counting of the votes, and the reporting of the counts, particularly in Grand Bassa, and suggested that 'serious irregularities, bordering fraud' had taken place.³ Although the tallying process in Grand Bassa was indeed slow and confused, and some of their

specific allegations held some truth, indications of fraud are not readily available. LP's assertion that NEC held the Grand Bassa results for days before reporting to the public is certainly untrue. CDC contested the run-off results, alleging wholesale fraud and presenting a host of small discrepancies at various polling stations.⁴ Despite both complaints, neither of which could justify claims of systematic abuse, all international and domestic observers saw the processes as fair, and it can safely be assumed that the declared results are a reasonable reflection of the votes cast.

NEC's handling of the Supreme Court cases concerning disqualified candidates and Senate voting, however, left much to be desired. Contingency plans in case of a ruling against NEC were not in place. The change from voting for one to two Senators was in the end handled relatively well in a short space of time. A costly delay to the elections, though, was only narrowly avoided when the guarantors of the CPA, the International Contact Group (ICG), persuaded independent candidates who had won their cases to withdraw from the race. The suspicion that the ICG would have attempted to overturn the Supreme Court ruling if the independent candidates had not withdrawn raised concerns over sovereignty and the future credibility of the Supreme Court, particularly when other electoral complaints arose.

Other issues point to a certain level of disenfranchisement. The 1.35 million registered to vote did not include perhaps 150,000 eligible voters from the estimated 300,000–400,000 refugees. Further, more than 25,000 internally displaced people (IDP) lost their votes for the Senate and House of Representatives, due to registering in their home counties and not subsequently being repatriated in time. IDPs in this situation only benefited from a late decision to allow them to vote in the camps for only the president and vice president. Nationwide turnout for the first round was not unimpressive but comparatively low for an African post-conflict election. At 74.8%, it compares unfavourably with approximately 91% in Angola in 1992, 88% in Mozambique in 1994, 88% in Guinea-Bissau in 2005, and 93% and 77% in Burundi in 2005.⁵ The range of turnouts from 62% in Lofa and 67% in Gbarpolu and River Cess to 79% in Montserrado suggests that accessibility in the rainy season was one factor. It is also conceivable that after two years of relative peace and with no candidate perceived to be in a better position than any other to ensure a peaceful outcome, or indeed offering much difference in their vision of the future, the importance of the election slipped. Turnout fell further to 61% for the run-off.

In contrast, the revitalised House and Senate electoral system was a dramatic improvement on the combined nationwide proportional

representation employed in 1997. The opportunity to choose local representatives and senators, an option denied in 1997, enabled voters to select candidates from three different parties for the three available positions, a chance that many must in all probability have taken. Finally, and remarkably, almost exactly 50% of registered voters were female.

Much was made of the lack of voter awareness. Despite considerable radio coverage and determined efforts by some organisations to reach into the furthest corners of Liberia, there were clearly a number of people who received their complicated ballot papers and did not know how to vote or who to vote for, or indeed why to vote at all. Ballot papers with 22 small images and logos of presidential candidates, and similar papers for senator and representatives, would be taxing for a literate electorate. It is possible, however, that despite very high levels of illiteracy, this problem is overstated. Difficulty in knowing how to vote, and allegedly in some cases who to vote for, was often handled in the first round by Presiding Officers at the polling stations, even though this compromised, to some extent, the secrecy of the ballot. Probably because of this assistance, the number of invalid votes amounting to 3.8% of the total cast, portrayed by some as very high, was in fact relatively low. In other post-conflict African elections, invalid votes totalled 10.4% in Angola in 1992; 8.5% for presidential and 11.7% for assembly in Mozambique in 1994; and 5.4% in Guinea-Bissau in 2005. Ghana, which has a relatively well-educated electorate and has conducted four consecutive nationwide multiparty elections, still recorded 2.1% invalid votes in 2004.⁶ In spite of a directive to Presiding Officers forbidding them to assist voters in the run-off, the number of invalid votes fell to 2.4%, largely because of the simplicity of the new ballot, which contained just two candidates.

Importantly, many first round results show definite patterns that indicate an electorate that was voting with a purpose as opposed to randomly. A case could be made that voter awareness was greatest for the presidential vote, then for the local Representative candidates and finally for the Senatorial aspirants, although this is only based on the author's personal and limited observations. Invalid votes were mostly higher for House, then presidential, then Senate elections. Many voters may have cast their ballots without a comprehensive knowledge of the candidates, but this is hardly unique in electoral politics.

THE FIRST ROUND PRESIDENTIAL AND LEGISLATIVE RESULTS⁷

There are, indeed, discernable patterns in the 2005 first round voting, which suggest that a range of rationales was applied when marking the

various ballots. In the first presidential poll, Weah emerged ahead with 28% of the vote, achieving first or second place in all counties except Margibi, where he came third by just 277 votes, and Lofa. Weah also took almost the entire eastern half of the country, including Grand Gedeh with 88% of the votes cast, Grand Kru and River Gee with around 50%, and Sinoe and Nimba, and came second to Winston Tubman in Maryland by just 542 votes. 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. Johnson-Sirleaf polled 20% of the national vote and enhanced the regional aspect by winning in much of the west of the country, including her home county Bomi, Gbarpolu, Margibi and Lofa, the home of her running mate, and coming a respectable second in Montserrado. Her UP, though, emerged with little from these counties, taking just two House seats and a single Senate seat in the four counties in which she won. Brumskine also took the smaller regional block of the central seaboard counties of Grand Bassa with 58% of the vote and River Cess with 46%, and came second in Margibi. LP did manage to perform reasonably well as a party in this region. Brumskine came third nationwide with 14% of the vote. Tubman took 9% of the presidential vote and emerged ahead in Maryland, his home county, and Bong, his running mate's home county, by over 31,000 votes. Sherman secured Grand Cape Mount and came fifth with 8% nationwide.

A number of inter-connected issues worked to produce these results. The political and commercial records of the presidential aspirants were often raised during the campaign period. While Johnson-Sirleaf emphasised her reputation, memorably in one poster of superimposed images from the election years 1985 and 2005, as one who has stood up to successive repressive regimes, she also served in a government with a questionable record in the 1970s, and was set back by public accusations of a much greater involvement in the first civil war than she has admitted.⁸ Sherman had represented wealthy corporates, politicians and the NTGL as a lawyer, and Brumskine acted as the NPFL's lawyer and served as president pro tempore of the Senate for two years after 1997, although he claimed to have fallen out with Taylor on a matter of principle. Tubman could point to his UN credentials, most recently in Somalia. In contrast, Weah is an international football legend with no experience of any sort in politics and comparatively little education, 'qualities' which were painted as an advantage or a disadvantage depending on the commentator. He could justifiably claim that he had played no part in the discredited governments of the past, even if many of those who surrounded him could not. His use of the slogan, *Amandla*, was a clear attempt to incorporate the

TABLE 1
 Presidential election: first round results

Presidential/vice-presidential candidate	Political party	Votes	%
Weah, George Manneh; Johnson, J. Rudolph	Congress for Democratic Change (CDC)	275,265	28.3
Johnson-Sirleaf, Ellen; Boakai, Joseph Nyuma	Unity Party (UP)	192,326	19.8
Brumskine, Charles Walker; Ward, Amelia Angeline	Liberty Party (LP)	135,093	13.9
Tubman, Winston A.; Sulunteh, Jeremiah Congbeh	National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL)	89,623	9.2
Sherman, Harry Varney Gboto-Nambi; Fania, John Kolllehlon	Coalition for Transformation of Liberia (COTOL)	76,403	7.8
Massaquoi, Roland Chris Yarkpah; Paygai, Sr. Q. Somah	National Patriotic Party (NPP)	40,361	4.1
Korto, Joseph D. Z.; Barclay, Jr, James Kollie	Liberia Equal Rights Party (LERP)	31,814	3.3
Kromah, Alhaji G. V.; Russell, Sr, Emmanuel Mac	All Liberian Coalition Party (ALCOP)	27,141	2.8
Tipoteh, Togba-Nah; Dahn, Marcus S. G.	Alliance for Peace and Democracy (APD)	22,766	2.3
Tubman, William Vacanarat Shadrach; Williams, Garlo Isaac	Reformed United Liberia Party (RULP)	15,115	1.6
Morlu, John Sembe; Demen, Joseph Omaxline	United Democratic Alliance (UDA)	12,068	1.2
Barnes, Milton Nathaniel; Harris, Parleh Dargbeh	Liberia Destiny Party (LDP)	9,325	1.0
Tor-Thompson, Margaret J.; Marsh, Sr, J. Rudolph	Freedom Alliance Party of Liberia (FAPL)	8,418	0.9
Woah-Tee, Joseph Mamadee; Broh, I, Samuel Washington	Labor Party of Liberia (LPL)	5,948	0.6
Conneh, Sekou Damate; Sali, Edward Yarkpawolo	Progressive Democratic Party (PRODEM)	5,499	0.6
Farhat, David M.; Gbolle, Saah Ciapha	Free Democratic Party (FDP)	4,497	0.5
Kieh, Jr., George Klay; Tokpa, Alaric Kormu	New Deal Movement (NDM)	4,476	0.5
Jallah, Armah Zolu; Sammy, Sr, Isaac G.	National Party of Liberia (NPL)	3,837	0.4
Kpoto, Robert Momo; Singbe, Sylvester Bondo	Union of Liberian Democrats (ULD)	3,825	0.4
Kiadii, George Momodu; McGill, Washington Shadrack	National Vision Party of Liberia (NATVIPOL)	3,646	0.4
Divine, Sr, Samuel Raymond; Mamu, Sr, Jacob Gbanalagaye	Independent	3,188	0.3
Reeves, Alfred Garpee; Sherif, Martin Mohammed Njavola	National Reformation Party (NRP)	3,156	0.3
Total valid votes	(Invalid votes (38,883) account for 3.8 % of total votes)	973,790	100

emancipatory kudos of the ANC in South Africa. As a very successful footballer, Weah was also an inspiration to many youths. His financial support for the national team was seen as patriotic and public-spirited, and is similar to Taylor's albeit far more politically motivated assistance in 1997. Another slogan, '9 + 14 = 23', referred to his shirt numbers for AC Milan and the Liberian national team, and the forthcoming 23rd president of Liberia. Weah and Sherman, in particular, were often seen as having made their money and so not in need of more. The high levels of funding to which they were perceived to have access also augmented their status as grand patrons, although Sherman's apparently greater access to government resources did not translate into many votes beyond his stronghold of Grand Cape Mount. Brumskine made a determined effort to use the churches for mobilisation, while the NPP rural political party network remained reasonably intact.

Regional patterns stand out, but overwhelming home county victories by Brumskine in Grand Bassa and Sherman in Grand Cape Mount contributed only so much to a national platform. No ethnic group is larger than the Kpelle, who make up just 20% of the population. The apparent regional element to Weah's vote is also, to some extent, deceptive. It is immediately noticeable that Weah won both Grand Gedeh and Nimba, where the animosity from the 1980s and 1990s between the Krahns in the former and the Gio and Mano in the latter still runs high. Former President Samuel Doe's regime (1980–90) and MODEL were predominantly Krahn, whereas the Gio and Mano had suffered most under Doe and supported the NPFL and Taylor, particularly in ousting Doe. If Weah's visit to Doe's home village and Tubman's rather incongruous leadership of Doe's party, the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL), swung the vote towards Weah in Grand Gedeh, and Weah's Kru ethnicity augmented his popularity in Grand Kru, these factors would certainly not have influenced the vote in Nimba, although Weah's lead in the latter was much slimmer.

Another significant ethnic cleavage is the 'Congo-country' divide. Americo-Liberians or 'Congos', mostly descendants of freed slaves from America,⁹ make up a tiny percentage of the country's population but controlled and exploited the government and economy from independence in 1847 until the Doe coup in 1980 (Gershoni 1985; Liebenow 1987), and are still a mainstay in the small elite. While Weah probably benefited, despite his wealth and long-term residence outside the country, from his image as an indigenous man of the people, Tubman is a member of the Americo-Liberian elite, Johnson-Sirleaf was brought up within it, and Brumskine and Sherman are to varying degrees associated with it. At the

same time, the considerable vote for Johnson-Sirleaf and Tubman suggests that this factor, while important, was just one of many.

In contrast, patterns in the Senate and House results suggest that local factors played a much more significant role. The success of seven independent candidates in the House and three in the Senate is remarkable. Locally renowned independent aspirants, such as Edwin Snowe in the Monrovia suburb of Paynesville, Zoe Pennue in Grand Gedeh and Ronald Mitchell in River Cess for the House, and Prince Yormie Johnson in Nimba and Franklin Siakor in Bong for the Senate, achieved significant victories.¹⁰ While most of these candidates were undoubtedly local patrons, in particular Snowe who headed the state-owned Liberia Petroleum Refining Company, Pennue and his father were also prominent in Doe's military; Johnson was a military leader in the NPFL invasion into Nimba against the Doe regime, and subsequently tortured and killed Doe; Siakor was well respected for his many years of community development with DEN-L; and Mitchell, despite years in the USA, enjoys his position as the latest in the River Cess Mitchell dynasty. It is, of course, not viewed as incompatible by many to want a president, senator or representative who is a good governor and a good patron at the same time (Yoder 2003).

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 collected just 0.5% in the presidential poll nationwide but won a House seat in three counties; and the National Reformation Party, whose candidate came last in the presidential race with 0.3% of the vote, won a seat in both Senate and House in Gbarpolu. ALCOP and the Alliance for Peace and Democracy (APD) re-emerged as regional players. ALCOP, the political incarnation of the predominantly Mandingo branch of the first civil war anti-Taylor rebels, United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO), which then became the backbone of the LURD force, took potential votes from Conneh's party and gained one seat in the Senate and two in the House, all in Lofa with its sizeable Mandingo population. The APD, whose foremost member, the Liberian People's Party (LPP), and standard bearer, Togba Nah Tipoteh, had performed relatively well in Sinoe and Grand Kru Counties in 1997, won 5 House seats and 3 Senate seats, all in the south-east. In all, small parties (those which achieved less than 3% nationwide in the presidential poll) claimed 12 seats in the House and 5 in the Senate.

The relative dearth of party loyalty, however, is remarkable, if not entirely unpredicted, and another aspect of the extreme localisation of politics. There were no clean sweeps of presidential, Senate and House

TABLE 2
Senate seats by county

	Bomi	Bong	Gbarpolu	Grand Bassa	Grand Cape Mount	Grand Gedeh	Grand Kru	Lofa	Margibi	Maryland	Mont-serrado	Nimba	River Cess	River Gee	Sinoe	Total (30)
COTOL	1					1	1	1				1		2		7 (23%)
UP			1							2			1			4 (13%)
APD							1								2	3 (10%)
CDC									1		2					3 (10%)
LP				1					1				1			3 (10%)
NPP		1			2											3 (10%)
Other	1 (NDPL)	1 (Ind)	1 (NRP)	1 (Ind)		1 (NDPL)		1 (ALCOP)				1 (Ind)				7 (23%)

House seats by county

	Bomi	Bong	Gbarpolu	Grand Bassa	Grand Cape Mount	Grand Gedeh	Grand Kru	Lofa	Margibi	Maryland	Mont-serrado	Nimba	River Cess	River Gee	Sinoe	Total (64)
CDC	1	1				1					10	1		1		15 (23%)
LP		1	1	4	3			1			1			1		9 (14%)
COTOL	1						1	1				2				8 (12%)
UP		1	1						1		1	2	1			8 (12%)
APD							1			1				1	2	5 (8%)
NPP		2							1	1						4 (6%)
Other	1 (NDPL)	1 (NDM)	1 (NRP)			2 (Ind, NDM)		2 (ALCOP)	2 (Ind)		2 (Ind)	2 (Ind, NDM)	1 (Ind)		1 (UDA)	15 (23%)

elections by any party in any county. As noted above, House and Senate seats only occasionally followed county presidential victories. Neither was there a clean sweep of just the two legislative houses in any county by any one party. Further, two counties, Grand Gedeh and Margibi, have members of a different party or an independent for each of their legislative seats. In Grand Cape Mount, COTOL swept the House but NPP took both of the Senate seats. Of the larger parties, COTOL and UP representation is spread all around the country. Although CDC gained 12 of the 18 available seats in Montserrado, its other 6 seats are scattered. LP took 5 of its total of 12 seats in Grand Bassa, but its other seats are thinly spread. The NPP won 3 of its total of 7 seats in Bong, but the other seats are far flung.

Surprisingly, the NPP took no seats in Nimba, where the NPFL invaded in 1989. The party was beaten in the Senate race by two of its former military commanders, S. Adolphus Dolo, also known as General Peanut Butter and standing for COTOL, and Prince Johnson. Although seats were won for the NPP by former first lady Jewel Howard-Taylor in the Senate in Bong, and by former deputy police director Saah Gbollie in the House in Margibi, there were more former NPP/NPFL stalwarts gaining seats outside the party. While Sando Johnson and Julius Parker failed to return to government for the NPP in Bomi and Montserrado, former Chief Justice Gloria Musu-Scott and Blamoh Nelson won Senate seats for UP in Maryland and APD in Grand Kru respectively, and Snowe won his seat in the House as an independent. Taylor's residual influence appears, at the least, to have been dispersed.¹¹ Also interesting was the demise of Doe's party, the NDPL, which took only one of its three seats in its heartland, Grand Gedeh. The selection of Tubman, a nephew of former president William Tubman (1944–71), as standard-bearer almost certainly exacerbated or even created this crisis. Finally, a position in the NTGL did not guarantee a seat in the new administration, as Sando Johnson, Conmany Wesseh and many others discovered.

The result is a Senate and House with different leaders and main opposition parties. In the 30-member Senate, COTOL leads with 7 seats, followed by UP with 4 seats and NPP, CDC, LP and APD with 3 seats. There are a total of 9 parties and 3 independents in the Senate. In contrast, the 64-member House is led by CDC with 15 seats, followed by LP with 9 seats, COTOL and UP with 8 seats and APD with 5 seats. The House comprises 11 parties and potentially 7 independents.¹² Further, following the legislative poll, whoever was to win the presidential run-off would not enjoy a majority in either body. If Weah were to triumph, his party would lead only in the House but would not even be the main

opposition party in the Senate; and if Johnson-Sirleaf were to emerge victorious, her party would lead in neither body and be the main opposition party only in the Senate.

THE 8 NOVEMBER PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF

If one were to make the risky assumption that supporters of defeated candidates would heed their leader's advice, Johnson-Sirleaf needed more backing than Weah in the run-off vote to make up over eight percentage points difference between them in the first round. This did not emerge in the interim campaign period from losing presidential runners, Tubman, Sherman, Kromah, Tipoteh and Conneh, or winning independent legislators such as Pennue and Prince Johnson, all of whom backed Weah. The best public declarations for Johnson-Sirleaf came from seventh placed presidential candidate, Joseph Korto, Howard-Taylor, Dolo, and Tubman's running mate, Jeremiah Sulunteh. In the cases of Dolo and Sulunteh, who defied their leaders, the fragility of party loyalty was once again placed in stark relief. The biggest target, Brumskine, refused to publicly support either candidate.

As noted above, the turnout was a disappointing 61%, ranging from 73% in Montserrado and 72% in Grand Gedeh to 45% in Grand Bassa, 43% in River Cess and 42% in River Gee. Given that the next lowest turnouts were 51% in both Grand Cape Mount and Bong counties, one might conclude that it was the counties in which the first choice in the first round had been eliminated where the electorate most often showed least interest in voting for a second time. Again, accessibility was certainly a factor and compounded other issues in the rural areas. Seven counties, all with large rural areas, showed a drop of over 20 percentage points. Interestingly, the two smallest drops in turnout were, more predictably, in Montserrado by 6 percentage points, and, far less predictably, in Grand Gedeh, by just 2 percentage points.

The turn around in fortunes was, in the end, dramatic, Johnson-Sirleaf taking 59.4% and Weah 40.6% of the vote. Johnson-Sirleaf held on to the counties in the west, increasing her vote to 76% and 60% in the more populous counties of Margibi and Lofa respectively. Importantly, she took Sherman's Grand Cape Mount with 62%, Tubman's Maryland and Bong counties with 55% and 70% respectively, and Brumskine's Grand Bassa with 67%. Even more so, she overturned Weah's first round lead in the two most populous counties of Montserrado with 54.5%, and Nimba with a massive 77%. Weah held the south-eastern counties he won in the first round, taking Grand Gedeh with 96% of the vote, but gained only one

TABLE 3
 Presidential election: run-off results by county (%)

	Bomi	Bong	Gbarpolu	Grand Bassa	Grand Cape Mount	Grand Gedeh	Grand Kru	Lofa
Johnson-Sirleaf	72·8	70·2	78·7	67·0	61·6	3·6	21·7	60·2
Weah	27·2	29·8	21·3	33·0	38·4	96·4	78·3	39·8
	Margibi	Maryland	Mont- serrado	Nimba	River Cess	River Gee	Sinoe	Total
Johnson-Sirleaf	75·7	55·1	54·5	77·1	49·2	31·0	13·6	59·4
Weah	24·3	44·9	45·5	22·9	50·8	69·0	86·4	40·6

new county nationwide when he emerged ahead in tiny River Cess by the narrowest of margins.

The endorsements proved to be a fickle indicator, with Korto and Sulunteh seemingly able to deliver for Johnson-Sirleaf, and Sherman, Tubman and Prince Johnson apparently unable to do so for Weah. More importantly, the contracted field narrowed the number of issues involved in influencing voter choice. Firstly, there were still considerable regional factors. Weah's second round victories were confined to five sparsely populated south-eastern counties. The about-turn in Nimba, where Johnson-Sirleaf progressed from sixth place with less than 6% of the first round vote to a huge 77% second round majority, has been attributed to the support of Korto and Dolo, but a full explanation must also include a strong reference to Grand Gedeh. On arriving in Grand Gedeh just before the first round, Weah first visited Doe's home village of Tuzon for a ceremony before making his appearance at the City Hall in the county seat, Zwedru. In his speech he announced he was a son of Doe, emphasised his debt to Doe for starting him on his career, and said he would do his best for Grand Gedeh.¹³ These remarks sparked a belated backlash in Nimba, the county that caught the worst of Doe's repression in the late 1980s. Newspapers alleged that Weah had promised cabinet positions for two Grand Gedeh natives, former army commander, Charles Julu, and former LURD official and suspended speaker, George Dweh (Forum 16.10.2005; *Liberian Express* 16.10.2005), and Korto was apparently stopped in Nimba from showing a video allegedly containing Weah's Zwedru speech. Weah's actions, perhaps spurred by his man of the people image, certainly shored up the 88% first round support in Grand Gedeh and maybe the county turnout, but he clearly did not consider the effects he might have in the neighbouring county, with a population six times greater, and possibly even further afield.

Other shortcomings of Weah's campaign also began to emerge in the interim period. While Johnson-Sirleaf had enough funds for a helicopter, Weah chose or was restricted to the roads. Suggestions were that too much of Weah's campaign fund was 'eaten' at the top, whereas more of his rival's money made its way down to the voters. This may indicate a level of political naivety or disorganisation. The increasingly paranoid and potentially dangerous statements emerging from party officials could enhance either case. Weah's claim of a 62% vote for him in the first round (*New Democrat* 4.II.2005) was not only outlandish but was also subsequently downplayed. At a 'Victory March' in Monrovia on 5 November, the CDC campaign chair announced that a Weah defeat could only emerge from cheating, that in this event the US Embassy would probably be involved, and that it would not be accepted by the party.

The gender difference stands out and deserves comment, even if it is not immediately clear that large numbers of female voters voted for Johnson-Sirleaf, or that male voters did not. Johnson-Sirleaf claimed support amongst women in grassroots organisations, but a 50% female electorate delivered just 5 out of 30 women senators (17%) and 8 out of 64 representatives (12.5%). However, although Liberian women have reached positions of prominence before,¹⁴ Johnson-Sirleaf's achievement in a male-dominated political society is remarkable, and should provoke further research into possible changes in attitude towards gender. Johnson-Sirleaf was also perceived as the favourite of the West, particularly so by some CDC cadres.¹⁵ She may have benefited from the perception that she would be more in tune with Western aid officials and therefore a larger beneficiary, although this opinion was not often raised. One factor which did not emerge over the interim period was the extent to which CDC had control over its partisans. The fear of what might happen after a Weah defeat did not induce enough to vote him in. This factor may even have worked the other way, if people did not consider CDC youth to be much of a threat, but instead perceived them to be merely a nuisance whose leader should not be in government.

In the end, though, the important voter deliberations were probably either along the 'Congo-country' divide, the 'book, no book' line, or the political-apolitical choice. Although it certainly cannot be ignored and it re-emerged strongly in the run-up to the elections, too much is made of the settler-indigenous issue, especially since Johnson-Sirleaf, of mixed ancestry but often seen as part of the Americo-Liberian establishment, won the majority of the country vote. Weah probably gained from this distinction but Johnson-Sirleaf did not significantly lose by it. There is, however, a more important differentiation between Johnson-Sirleaf's

educated, politically experienced image and Weah's populist and untainted yet largely unknown persona. Many people, heard by the author in the run-up to the first and second rounds, argued that Liberia couldn't have an uneducated president, and many others that educated leaders had all let the country down badly, and that it was time for someone more of the people. Tellingly, Prince Johnson appeared at a CDC rally in Sanniquellie in Nimba between the elections and engaged the crowd in a question and response chant where he named former government officials, and the crowd was encouraged to reply disparagingly, 'Ph.D.'.¹⁶ A majority of the electorate, though, who had not chosen either of the two run-off candidates in the first round, had already voted for a 'book' person, be it Brumskine, Sherman or Tubman. Education largely remains a prized and revered commodity in Liberia. In some ways, Johnson-Sirleaf ran one of the most political of all campaigns, referring to policy and previous political experience, and Weah conducted one of the least political, in that it focused on his celebrity and his lack of a political past. However, while Weah refused to take part in political debates on the radio or in public, he was at the same time surrounded by people such as Baccus Matthews, and his running mate J. Rudolph Johnson, with lengthy and often controversial political pasts. Ultimately, the electorate appeared to buy more into the Johnson-Sirleaf educated political position.

UNUSUAL ELECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

On 23 November 2005, NEC announced the final result. Despite a clean bill of health announced by all international and domestic observers, and a not proven at the hearings and investigations into CDC's complaints, Weah maintained that systematic fraud had cheated them of the election. A march from CDC headquarters past NEC and through the city centre on the Friday after the run-off culminated in stone-throwing and police tear gas in front of the US Embassy. Further disturbances ensued on 11 December, but when Weah conceded just before Christmas, the issue of the legitimacy of the results was laid to rest. Johnson-Sirleaf's inauguration the following month as Africa's first elected female president attracted considerable international interest, including the presence of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The crucial issue for Liberians is whether this next government can 'settle the country', and at least provide a platform for reconciliation and economic recovery. Key factors will be the addressing of grievances, such as the return of property to Mandingos and the inclusion of other

marginalised communities; prospects for ex-combatants and youth in general; the return of refugees and IDPs; an even developmental hand across the country; and the success or otherwise of the heavily interventionist Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) and other international participation. All of this will be underpinned by the need to rein in the corruption and patronage to a sustainable level, an undertaking that has no precedent in Liberian history. However, provided there is not another catastrophe immediately outside Liberian borders, for instance on the death of President Conté in Guinea, the new government will probably have a honeymoon period of a few years, much as Taylor had after 1997 and President Tejan Kabbah is still enjoying in Sierra Leone, in which to make sure that some of the problems start to be addressed. Johnson-Sirleaf certainly brings with her the credentials and experience to the job. She is also a figure within the established elite and may not be disposed to rock too many boats. At the same time, she has shown some autonomy in her pronouncements. She will certainly need consummate political skills to deal with vested interests, distressed sections of society, a host of political actors, and pressure from international agendas, particularly over the issues of Taylor's extradition from Nigeria¹⁷ and GEMAP.

Some may view a political dispensation that has three different leaders for the three strands of government (Presidency, Senate and House) as a recipe for deadlock. Local power brokers may equally be able to hold the government to ransom. No party has more than CDC's total of 18 seats out of a possible 94 (19%) in both houses. COTOL, whose presidential candidate came fifth with just 8%, emerged as the second largest party with a total of 15 seats (16%). Independents and representatives of small and regional parties hold 27 seats (29%) in both houses.¹⁸ The party of the winning presidential candidate holds a total of just 12 seats (13%), leads neither house, and is the main opposition party in just the Senate. In a continent where one or two parties tend to dominate electoral democracies, it is unusual to see such comprehensively different voting patterns for president and legislatures, and such a fractured composition in the legislative bodies.

Much has been made in Liberia and all over Africa of the vast numbers of political parties standing for election, when most African polls deliver a result where one or two parties completely dominate (Bogaards 2000). In Liberia, this was not the case. In the absence of an incumbent, and with politics and power historically centred around the president, all Liberian political parties appeared to be as flimsy as the bulk of those parties that fill up ballot papers but little else in other African polls, and the

electorate reacted by choosing known local personalities regardless of party affiliation.

On the other hand, although executive power in Liberia is extremely great, which paradoxically would be of assistance in the case of a developmentally minded administration, the legislative bodies do represent a very diverse range of interests that could be advantageous in the vital process of reconciliation and a check on an overbearing executive. Alongside the promised constitutional reform, this diversity could potentially nurture a culture of compromise, balancing and coalition building. Ranged against this possibility are other problems that typically threaten African democracies, including poor political capacity of often personality-driven opposition parties, and the frailty of party loyalty that often leads to the crossing of the floor to the ruling presidential party. Parties, many of which have much to plan for in the next election, could however be open for much needed capacity building and a role in opposition or coalition. A formal power-sharing government, such as that which emerged in South Africa where parties with more than a certain percentage of the vote gained cabinet positions, could have been advantageous for reconciliation, although if it had been publicly debated, the NTGL would have been regarded by some as a similar but failed experiment. At the least, some form of inclusive UP-led government would most likely be beneficial.¹⁹

Finally, there is the question of how these unusual polls fit into our understanding of post-conflict elections in Africa, and trends in international approaches to the growing number of such efforts to cap conflict resolution processes. The absence of transformed rebel forces in the political process was just as unusual a factor in the conduct and outcome of the elections as the lack of an incumbent. This was, to all intents and purposes, an election amongst civilians on a playing field, if not level, at least not dramatically tilted. The elections thus, from the perspective of insecurity and its electoral uses, resembled African peacetime polls more than other post-conflict elections. From another perspective, the Liberian polls resembled few other African elections in peace or after war, in that there was no incumbent party with vastly superior resources at its disposal. These features impacted positively on the conduct of the elections, even enabling a final scenario involving a woman and a footballer, and were, to a large extent, a product of the much-maligned CPA and NTGL. The CPA denied the possibility of any of the senior NTGL appointees standing for election, and the NTGL, by its very nature as a coalition administration, did not provide an incumbent party, even though government resources were illegally used in campaigning. Further, the inclusive CPA

and NTGL did not threaten rebel leaders with war crimes tribunals and instead, rightly or wrongly, presented them with opportunities to join the elite and take a slice of the pie without even the need for political participation in the election. They were, effectively, 'bought off'. In some ways, this has echoes in Renamo's internationally funded participation in the 1994 Mozambican elections and, after a narrow defeat, its acceptance of an oppositional role, except that in Liberia the 'payment' was unintentional and illicit, and the onus of representing the rebel constituency passed elsewhere. Clearly, the Renamo route is preferable for funded political participation or transformation, but there are certainly important lessons here for inclusive and sustainable peace building.

The last unusual feature in an African setting was the lack of party loyalty and the wide allocation of seats, which contrasts particularly starkly with the landslides in Liberia in 1997 and in Sierra Leone in 2002 (Harris 2003/4). There is certainly no room here for the victor's complacency that accompanied those landslides. Whether representation is wide or powerful enough, and government responsive and responsible enough, to attend to grievances that underpinned the civil wars and promote even-handed and relatively developmental administration, remains of course to be seen.

NOTES

1. Author's interviews with political party officials in five counties, September–November 2005.
2. Campaign Monitoring Coalition (CMC) August Brief and author's interviews, September 2005.
3. Letter from LP to NEC, October 2005.
4. Letter from CDC to NEC, 9.11.2005, and the subsequent hearings.
5. Sourced mainly from IFES and Database of African Elections websites. Figures for Liberia 1997 and Sierra Leone 2002 are not considered sufficiently accurate for comparison.
6. *Ibid.*
7. See NEC Liberia 2005 for a detailed breakdown of the first and second rounds.
8. See the letter from former NPFL official, Tom Woewiyu, and UP spokesman's response (*Inquirer* 12.9.2005).
9. 'Congos' were originally 'recaptives', or slaves recaptured at sea who were released in Liberia. In current parlance, all descendants of settlers or those assimilated into Americo-Liberian society are called Congos.
10. Mitchell's election was later annulled after a NEC investigation revealed that his father had registered to contest the election but allowed his son to run in his place (*Inquirer* 5.1.2006).
11. Snowe, Taylor's former advisor and son-in-law, was, however, subsequently elected as leader of the House of Representatives but, interestingly Isaac Nyanebo of the NDPL from Grand Gedeh was simultaneously elected to the equivalent post in the Senate.
12. The 7th is Ronald Mitchell, whose victory is subject to a re-run.
13. Author's interviews, particularly with a NACEM official in Grand Gedeh, 7.11.2005.
14. Angie Brooks-Randolph was the first female African president of the UN General Assembly, and Ruth Perry was interim Liberian head of state in the year before the 1997 elections.
15. Author's interviews with several CDC county officials, September–November 2005.
16. Related to the author by a Carter Center observer.
17. The announcement by the head of the EU Elections Observer Mission in Liberia at the 10.11.2005 press conference that Taylor's extradition would be a condition for EU aid was subsequently disavowed, but soon followed by US President George Bush's declared expectations for an

extradition. Johnson-Sirleaf later stated that Taylor was only a secondary issue for Liberia, but shortly after during a visit to the US, announced a formal request for his extradition.

18. See note 10.

19. At the time of writing, Johnson-Sirleaf's first Cabinet seemed at first sight to be partially technocratically minded, rather than entirely shaped by political rewards or inclusion. However, Korto and Sulunteh were handed ministries, while there were complaints from Kromah over the under-representation of Muslims.

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