

# Neopatrimonialism: The Immense Power of Appointment of the Liberian Presidency

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## Abstract

This study examines important factors of disenfranchisement of political subdivisions in Liberia, especially counties and districts due largely to the presidential power of appointment. The study analyzes survey, empirical, and constitutional amendment data gathered by Afrobarometer (Round 7 Survey), election statistics, and public officials' appointment information. It then correlates associations between the number of county executives, presidential tenure, and referendum approvals to demonstrate a diminishment of democracy due to denying citizens' right to vote for their local leaders. This has resulted from a gradual enhancement of the Liberian president's power of appointment, which developed neopatrimonialism in Liberia and continues to foster a patronage system of governance that increases public corruption, a practice that has minimized state capacity, fostered state instability, and raised the potential for conflict.

**Keywords:** Liberia, patronage, appointive power, voter suppression, disenfranchisement, term limits

## 1. Introduction

The reduction of democratization in Liberia started with the elimination of multiple-party politics in the 1870s. After President Anthony W. Gardiner's election in 1877, the Republican Party, which had been the primary rival to the True Whig Party, declined into extinction. The True Whig Party became the dominant and single political party in Liberia from 1878 to 1980 (Global Security, 2020). This hundred and two (102) years of one-party state led to the transformation of elected officials' term of office and accrued appointment power to the president, a process accomplished through amendments to the constitution. More importantly, Liberian presidents used patronage practices, particularly their appointive power, to influence government job seekers (a large percent of the population) to change the tenure of public offices. Fukuyama (2014) stated that "A patronage relationship [neopatrimonialism] is a reciprocal exchange of favors between two individuals of different status and power, usually involving favors given by the patron [president] to the client [appointee] in exchange for the client's loyalty and political support (p. 86). The difference in term limits for presidents, senators, and representatives between Liberia's 1847 and 1986 constitutions (and encompassing referendums in 1907, 1935, 1943, and 1975) can be partly attributed to the authors' and residing presidents' self-interest in future elected positions. Johnson (1987) stated that, given the enormous stakes, "It is scarcely to be wondered at that officeholding in the republic, from cabinet to clerkship, became a matter of life and death; that every device within the reach of cleverness and even chicanery should be employed to perpetuate tenure in office and to draw from this office all that it would yield" (p. 147). This combination of corruption and high electoral stakes is recognizable in contemporary Liberian politics.

Neopatrimonialism gradually enhanced the president's authority as new political subdivisions (provinces, territories, and counties) and county executives (superintendents, assistant superintendents, county attorneys, district commissioners, cabinet department officials, etc.) were created. These county administrators, the primary governors of their jurisdictions, have not been elected by citizens of their respective political subdivisions, but appointed by the president. As the number of counties has increased from four in 1847, to five in 1857, to nine in 1964, to eleven in 1984, to thirteen in 1985, to fourteen in 2000, and to fifteen in 2001, the appointment of these county executives and cabinet officials has led to enormous power for Liberia's president. In other words, the denial of citizens' ability to elect their county executives diminishes democracy, increases neopatrimonialism, and partly fosters corruption. Johnson (1987) stated that "The House of Representatives and Senate were his by virtue of his skillful manipulation. All the offices of the government were appointive and in consequence became his by right of appointive power" (p. 153). Simply put, voting is an essential tenet of democracy that allows citizens to hold public officials accountable. Therefore, the power to vote on a range of local officials should not be denied to the electorate.

The chipping away of democratic accountability has weakened citizens' control of their government and broadened the presidential power of appointment that underpins patronage practices. Gobewole (2015) stated that "In this form of administration, presidents (heads of state) view the administration of policies as a "personal affair," give public officials authority on a need basis, and "treat officials arbitrarily," while public officials treat citizens in a similar manner....(p.2). This persistent neopatrimonialism is the crux of public corruption, including bribery, rent-seeking, and nepotism, in the Liberian government, and in turn is a large part of the reason for poverty in Liberian society. This is a situation that can be corrected by instituting progressive public policy to enhance democracy and economic development.

## 2. Literature Review

Liberia was a more democratic republic during its initial years in the late 1800s. The country had frequent elections. The electorate voted for presidents, senators, and representatives every two, four, and two years respectively (Constitution of the Republic of Liberia, 1847). These short tenures in office compelled elected leaders to be subject to citizens' assessment of their performance, which made them more accountable. Johnson (1987) stated that "The original constitutional provision limiting the Liberian president's term of office to two years permitted no period of recovery from the stress of one election before another was on" (p. 147). Even though public officials could be re-elected for unlimited times, these short terms made it essential for elected officials to comply with constitutional and ethical standards. More importantly, this gave citizens leverage to punish them for public corruption (mismanagement, abuse of power, bribery, etc.) in short intervals. These electoral standards and short terms also made it difficult for Liberia's president to accrue excessive political power from citizens of the nation.

However, this more democratic period was marked by denial of citizenship for indigenous tribal groups that resided in the region prior to Liberia's founding in 1847 (Liebenow, 1987). This means that only Americo-Liberians, most of whom arrived in the late 1800s, were citizens of Liberia, a policy largely responsible for the impoverishment and political disenfranchisement of tribal communities. Gobewole (2016b) stated that "The existing poverty experienced by Liberians is partly associated with Americo-Liberians colonizing the Grain Coast, illegitimately transferring the land of tribal communities into public property for Americo-Liberians to purchase, using the labor of tribal people for public and private projects without compensation" (p. 52). Despite a large percentage of the region's inhabitants (tribal communities) being excluded from selection of their county executives, democracy functioned efficiently among Americo-Liberians, although they were less than five percent of the region's population. Gobewole (2018a) stated that "African leaders need to understand how basic democratic values, such as due process, individual rights, self-determination, and rule of law, apply to citizens of democratic nations, which is professed to be the governmental system in most African nations" (p.105).

One reason Liberia's 1847 constitution gave essential leverage to citizens can be attributed to the selflessness of the author, Professor Simon Greenleaf of Harvard Law School, an objective scholar who wrote the document strictly based on democratic principles (Gobewole, 2016b). The era of democracy exclusively for Americo-Liberians began to subside with extending citizenship to tribal people, establishing of the hinterland provinces (Western, Central, and Eastern), and instituting the interior administration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (later after the 1847 constitution). Liebenow (1987) stated that "The settlers and their descendants also hoped to maintain control over the tribal majority through the development of an efficient administrative service. To that end the Department of the Interior (restyled the Department of Internal Affairs) was created in 1868 during the presidency of James Spriggs Payne" (p. 54). Therefore, the interior administration was initially staffed by Americo-Liberians, and later by educated tribal individuals, appointed by the president. Liebenow (1987) stated that "For many decades the effectiveness of the department was blunted by the lack of qualified Americo-Liberians interested in living in the hinterland as well as by the difficulties that geography posed for the systematic departmental supervision of activities of the administrative officers themselves" (p. 54). The tribal residents with vested interest had no participation in selecting their administrative executives, known as district commissioners, although these presidential appointees were a step removed from tribal community members' daily activities. The district commissioners managed the tribal chiefs, who were in charge of every aspect of tribal people lives. The indigenous tribal groups' principles for social and political organizations were based on family relationships. Amos Sawyer discussed tribal families' lineage and political order prior to Americo-Liberians' arrival in the sub-region of West Africa in his book *The Emergence of Autocracy in Liberia*.

*As a political community, a village or town was not always without broader ties. Apart from the tendency to form confederacies, as will be discussed later, political communities were usually part of a larger real or fictive patrilineal system. These lineage systems, referred to as dako by the Kru, bloa by the Krahn, and fuwa by the Gola, may not have always had reference to territory but constituted a historic bond of solidarity and cooperation among groups of people. The imposition of the authority of the Liberian government disrupted these relationships (Sawyer, 1992, p. 53).*

In other words, these communities were governed by tribal authorities--town, clan, and paramount chiefs--who reported to the district commissioners, themselves presidential appointees. More importantly, this method of governance persists in Liberian government today, a governance structure that replicates colonial patterns. Liebenow (1987) stated that "The administrative system introduced by Arthur Barclay was patterned along the lines of the British colonial philosophy of 'indirect rule': the utilization of traditional tribal authorities as instruments of the central government in the maintenance of law and order at the local level" (p.54), a system that had little to do with democratization and more to do with extraction of resources, such as taxes, labor, land, and minerals.

The District Commissioners basically managed tribal chiefs who then administered the affairs of their communities for the benefit of the Liberian government. This regime was critical for implementing Americo-Liberians' interior policies for generating public resources, while suppressing electoral participation, democratic accountability, and self-determination for the electorate. Gobewole discussed the effects of these extractive policies on tribal people in his book *Liberia's Political Economy*.

*The requisition laws demanded the agriculture products of the tribal people, primarily rice and vegetables, and livestock, particularly goats, chickens, and sheep, be used without compensation to support public officials like district commissioners, chiefs, and the Liberia Frontier Force (Clower et. al., 1966; Johnson, 1987). A study about the rice requisition law enforcement in a single interior district conducted by Clower et. al. (1966) revealed, "A high government official requisitions 1,400 bags of rice quarterly from a chiefdom of approximately 5,000 huts. The annual quota of 560,000 pounds of rice (5,600 bags) represents an average donation of 112 pounds of rice per hut" (p. 18). This extractive institution basically destroyed the rice farming industry because no prospective farmer could justify growing a large quantity of rice if he was aware it was designated for some bureaucrat (Clower et. al., 1966). The inequities produced by this policy contributed to the indigenous people's lack of trust and confidence in Liberia's government and officials (Gobewole, 2016b, p. 44-45).*

Liberia's system of indirect government led to long-term economic stagnation and poverty.

### **3. Methodology**

Survey and empirical data validate the disenfranchisement of counties' electorates to select their executives (governors) has diminished democracy, fostered presidential power of appointment, and increased national instability. These experts, international institutions, and governmental entities' books, studies, and reports provide knowledge about the effect of Liberian president power of appointment, suppression of citizen votes, and enforcement of neopatrimonialism (Liebenow, 1987; Constitution of the Republic of Liberia, 1847 and 1986; Gobewole, 2016b and 2018a; Fund for Peace, 2010-2018; Transparency International, 2010-2018; Afrobarometer Round 7 Survey, 2016/2018; and Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, 2009). This information, in turn, has been used to measure correlations between indicators of constitutional amendments, increased numbers of county executives, and presidential power of appointment to determine trends regarding presidential term limits, while documenting the state of Liberia's governance. Furthermore, this analysis allows the study to reveal the level of instability in Liberia's state capacity. As a suggested remedy, the extension of self-determination (votes) to county electorates is necessary to reduce presidential power of appointment, which will decrease public corruption in the Liberian government. The data collected has been used to create charts and tables to assist readers to better understand the constitutional amendments, increased number of county executives, and presidential power of appointment phenomena discussed in the study.

### **4. Data Analysis and Finding**

The decay of democracy continued with amendments to Liberia's 1847 Constitution during the respective administrations of presidents Arthur Barclay, Edwin J. Barclay, William V. S. Tubman, and William R. Tolbert.

Table 1. Amendments to Liberia's 1847 Constitution Presidential Term Limits

Referendum Year	Office Tenure	Residing President
1847	Originally, the length of term was two years with no term limits	Joseph J. Roberts
1907	The term was extended to four years with no term limits	Arthur Barclay
1935	The term was extended to eight years without re-election possibility	Edwin J. Barclay
1943	The re-election of a president to a second eight-year term was prohibited, however he/she could be re-elected with no term limits for four years	Edwin J. Barclay and William V. S. Tubman transition
1975	The term was reduced to two four years term with no possibility for re-election	William R. Tolbert
1986	The new constitution extended term limits to two six-year terms with no possibility for re-election	Samuel K. Doe

Source: Ginsburg, T., Melton, J., & Elkin, Z. (2010). Constitution of the Republic of Liberia. (1847/1986)

Table 1 reveals that in 1907 the length of a presidential term of office was amended to four years with no re-election limits and in 1935 it was extended to eight years without re-election possibility. The 1943 amendment was approved for a term of eight years with four years unlimited re-election possibility in a referendum held on May 4, 1943. This was the same day President William V. S. Tubman was elected for his first eight-year term with no possibility of re-election. However, the presidential term limits conveniently were amended in 1943 to include unlimited re-election for four years. This constitutional amendment revealed President Tubman's effectiveness in manipulating the system to create a lifetime position and increase his own power. Ginsburg, Melton, and Elkins (2010) stated that "Liberia's 1847 Constitution, as amended to 1943, is a very interesting case in which a second eight-year term is prohibited but a shortened second term is allowed" (p. 18). However, in 1975 an amendment reduced the presidential tenure to only two four-year terms. This was a positive measure for improving democratization. Nevertheless, this minimal progress was revised with the 1986 constitution, which instituted the presidential tenure to two six-years term.

Table 1 also shows that the administrations under which referendums were approved for extension of presidential term limits had some commonality, even though they existed at different times in history. This makes it plausible to attribute presidential tenure extension in the Barclays and Tubman administrations to a consolidated effort for their personal gain. This point is underscored by their families' relationship with and monopolization of Liberian government. Liebenow discussed how President Arthur Barclay's family influenced state governance in his book *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy*.

*Perhaps the family with the greatest resilience on the national scene in this century was that of Arthur Barclay, who emigrated to Liberia from the West Indies in 1865 and became, in 1904, the Republic's fifteenth president. His heirs have included two presidents, several justices of the Supreme Court, and a host of diplomats, legislators, and cabinet members. Mrs. Tubman and other important cabinet ministers and ambassadors were members of the Barclay clan (Liebenow, 1987, p. 110).*

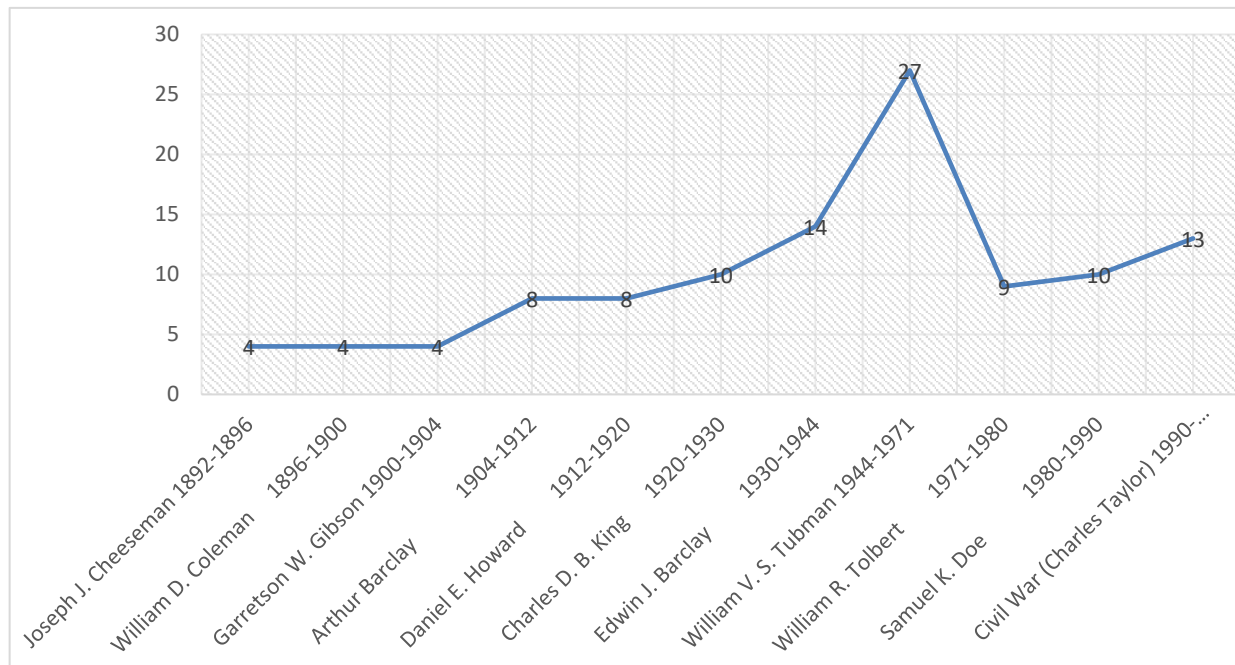


Figure 1. Referendums that Amended Liberia's Presidents Term Limits Between 1892 and 2003

Source: Liebenow, J. G. (1987). Ginsburg, T., Melton, J., & Elkin, Z. (2010)

Figure 1 reveals that constitutional amendments have transformed Liberia's presidential term of office. Presidents Cheeseman, Coleman, and Gibson served 4 years; Presidents Arthur Barclay and Howard served 8 years; President King served 10 years; President Edwin J. Barclay served 14 years; President Tubman served 27 years; President Tolbert (19 years Tubman Vice President) served 9 years; President Doe served 10 years; and President Taylor 6 years, many of these during a Civil War. The increasing trend shows that President Arthur Barclay served twice his predecessors' time in office, President Edwin J. Barclay (a relative of Arthur) served a quarter more than his predecessors' time in office, and President William V. S. Tubman, an in-law of the Barclays, served twice his predecessor's time in office. These measurements also reveal a correlation between referendum approvals in 1907, 1935, and 1943, with subsequent increases in the maximum presidential time in office from 4 to 8 years (ending in 1912), from 8 to 14 years (ending in 1944), and from 14 to 27 years (ending in 1971) respectively. This consistent disenfranchisement of Liberia's electorate eventually led to President Samuel K. Doe's coup de'tat in 1980 and finally President Charles G. Taylor's civil war in 1989.

The conclusion of increased democracy in Liberia came with the Tubman administration. This regime instituted legislation (referendum approval) that repealed presidential term limits, moving from eight years to unlimited tenure, and transformed the three hinterland provinces into four countries (Lofa, Bong, Nimba, and Grand Gedeh) in 1964, while immensely augmenting the presidential power of appointment. These acts allowed the president to now appoint new county executives, known as superintendents, assistant superintendents, county attorneys, district commissioners, and cabinet department officials in political subdivisions. The important dynamic to understand is that, as Liberia gave more people citizenship and suffrage rights, its oligarchy manipulated the electoral process to acquire more political power. Gobewole (2016a) stated that "[T]he three hinterland provinces that are predominately indigenous people (95% of the population) had no representative in the legislature prior to 1944. The constitution was amended in 1944 to give those provinces only 6 out of 39 members of the House but no senators" (p. 17). Liberia's ruling class ensured that fair allocation of self-determination was not awarded to new electorates, a strategy most autocratic leaders use to retain political authority. Gobewole discussed how Liberia's public officials implemented this practice in his dissertation, *Public Corruption in Liberian Government*.

*[T]he three hinterland provinces with predominately indigenous people continued to have disparities in political representation after they were transformed into four interior counties in 1964. The provinces were later transformed into counties; four of those counties (54% of the population) were given 8 senators while the coastal counties (Americo-Liberians residents) were given 10 senators (Liebenow, 1987). In addition, the Tubman administration repealed the law imposing one term on Presidential incumbents, banned opposition parties, and instituted a police state to maintain single party rule (Liebenow, 1987; Pham, 2004). This strategy of doctoring election rules to disqualify principal rivals is still implemented by most African regimes (Bratton,*

1998). (Gobewole, 2015, p. 35).

A lopsided representation, in combination with the ability of leading officials, and particularly the president, to stay on indefinitely ensconced the power of elites.

These new positions and other changes enhanced the influence of Liberia's president in local government operation, increased his/her ability to manipulate political activities, and fostered patronage practices in national government, a marginalization of voters supported by a mandate in Liberia's 1986 Constitution. Specifically, Chapter VI, Article 54, Section C, of Liberia's Constitution (1986) stated that "The President shall nominate and, with the consent of the Senate, appoint and commission-Superintendents, other county officials and officials of other political sub-divisions" (p. 39). Liebenow discussed the effect of this increased bureaucracy on governance.

In a country where few offices were elective, where the civil service system existed largely on paper, and where the government was one of the largest employers of personnel, the power of appointment provided the president with a powerful political weapon. The expansion of governmental operations meant not only more jobs to distribute but also more perquisites of office that could be dispensed to reward the faithful, seduce the doubtful, and entrap the powerful opponents of the regime (Liebenow, 1987, p. 117-118).

The power of appointment has given Liberia's presidents awesome power over economic aspects of life down to the local level.

Table 2. Liberia's Political Subdivisions, Population, County Executive Positions, and Their Increases between 1839 and 2001

Year	County	Population	Superintendent	District Commissioner	County Attorney
1839	Grand Bassa		1	8	1
	Montserrado		1	4	1
1843	Sinoe		1	17	1
1844	Grand Cape Mount		1	5	1
1857	Maryland	23,005	1	2	1
1964	Bong		1	6	1
	Grand Gedeh		1	3	1
	Lofa		1	6	1
1984	Nimba	1,218,000	1	6	1
	Bomi		1	4	1
1985	Grand Kru	2,102,000	1	18	1
	Margibi		1	4	1
1985	Rivercess	2,146,000	1	7	1
2000	River Gee		1	6	1
2001	Gbarpolu	3,239,000	1	6	1

Source: Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services. (2009). Liebenow, J. G. (1987). The World Bank. (2020)

Table 2 reveals that in 1857, 1984, and 2001, 33%, 67%, and 100% of Liberia's fifteen counties were established, respectively. A measurement of the county executive positions (district commissioner, superintendent and assistants, and county attorney) over those years reflects a gradual increase in presidential power of appointment as new counties were adopted, a process that continues. At a minimum, President Stephen A. Benson (1856-1864) appointed 10 county executives (the Interior Administration did not exist), President Samuel K. Doe (1980-1990) appointed 101 county executives, and President George M. Weah (2018-now) appointed 132 county executives. These appointments were made while disenfranchising approximately 23,005 (only repatriated Americo-Liberians were citizens); 2,102,000; and 4,819,000 citizens in the Benson, Doe, and Weah administrations respectively (Liebenow, 1987; The World Bank Data, 2020).

It is understood that presidents Benson, Doe, and Weah appointed far more county officials than shown in Table 2, including executive and judicial branch bureaucrats. However, this calculation will give readers an idea of the potency

of the presidential power of appointment in the Liberian government. In other words, the creation of new counties, and their executive positions, has enhanced the presidential power of appointment, suppressed the vote of political subdivision electorates, and minimized democratization in Liberia.

Table 3. Liberia's Elected Officials Term Limits in the 1847 vs the 1986 Constitution

Position	Constitution	Office Tenure	Term Limits
President	1847	2	Unlimited
	1986	6	Reelect Once
Senator	1847	4	Unlimited
	1986	9	Reelect Once
Representative	1847	2	unlimited
	1986	6	Reelect Once

Source: Constitution of the Republic of Liberia. (1847/1986)

Table 3 reveals that term lengths for important national elected officials doubled or tripled between the 1847 and 1986 constitutions. These changes in term limits partly concentrate power in the hand of elected officials and make them less accountable to their constituencies. Simply put, Liberia's 1986 Constitution further diminished citizens' self-determination. This constitution increased the tenure for president to six years, senator to nine years, and representative to six years respectively.

These long tenures in office give elected leaders an opportunity to homogenize, manipulate, and consolidate political and economic authority through the means of public corruption, including bribery, rent-seeking, and nepotism. This moral and political decay has usually occurred when an individual retained power for a lengthy period, a situation captured in one of Lord Acton's letters to Bishop Creighton: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Acton, 1887).

## 5. Theoretical Framework

The United States Constitution is primarily focused on equality of its citizens, because the nation was founded during the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the class system in Western societies was the norm. In a monocratic society like 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, from which America was founded, subjects (commoners) had lower status, while aristocrats (gentry) had higher status. This situation closely resembles Liberia's caste system during the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the country was founded (Johnson, 1987). Systematic inequality made it essential for the United States' founders to pay close attention to liberty, rights, and fairness for citizens, a strategy that would enable them to gradually develop into a "more perfect union." As a result, equality is inscribed in the United States Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights. Liberia's founders attempted to implement a democracy with similar principle, but gradually backslid due to patronage practices and voter suppression, which enormously increase the appointive power of Liberia's president.

Multiple factors that protect widespread citizen interests, notably equality of property ownership, educational acquisition, healthcare attainment, and fair housing standards, are critical to democracy's smooth functioning. In other words, these factors ensure the principle that "all men are created equal." However, if interest groups or factions are based on tribes (nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, kinship, etc.) or elites, then the standard of equality will be diminished, because privilege, opportunity, and preference will be awarded to individuals based on those measures. This phenomenon undermines the fairness or meritocracy that sustain a modern state, while it fosters a patronage system that develops a patrimonial state. Gobewole (2016b) stated that "Amid an infusion of patrimonial practices, including rewarding family, friends, and supporters, Liberian leaders have created the deceptive appearance of the democratic tenets of election, bureaucracy, and an impartial legal system to create the appearance of a modern state" (p. 41).

In the executive and legislative branches of Liberian government, officials' tenure of service should be restructured to minimize abuse of power, recruit and retain competent bureaucrats, and encourage the inflow of new ideas. An exemplary example of such a public tenure system has long existed in the United States' government. The president, senators, and representatives have terms of four, six, and two years respectively, with unlimited re-election possible, except for the president, who is limited to two terms. The frequent changes of United States elected officials, particularly of the president—the position most prone to abuse—allows the infusion of accountability, innovation, knowledge, and new ideas to improve government functions, while minimizing monopoly of power and public corruption. Gobewole (2015) stated that "elections ensure orderly change in leadership, supply new methods of governance, and foster accountability of public officials. The frequent changes in leadership produced by elections make it possible to undermine nondemocratic systems before they take root (one-party rule, racial oligarchy,

dictatorship)” (p. 44). This is a term-limit system the Liberian electorate should adopt through a referendum and amendment of the Constitution.

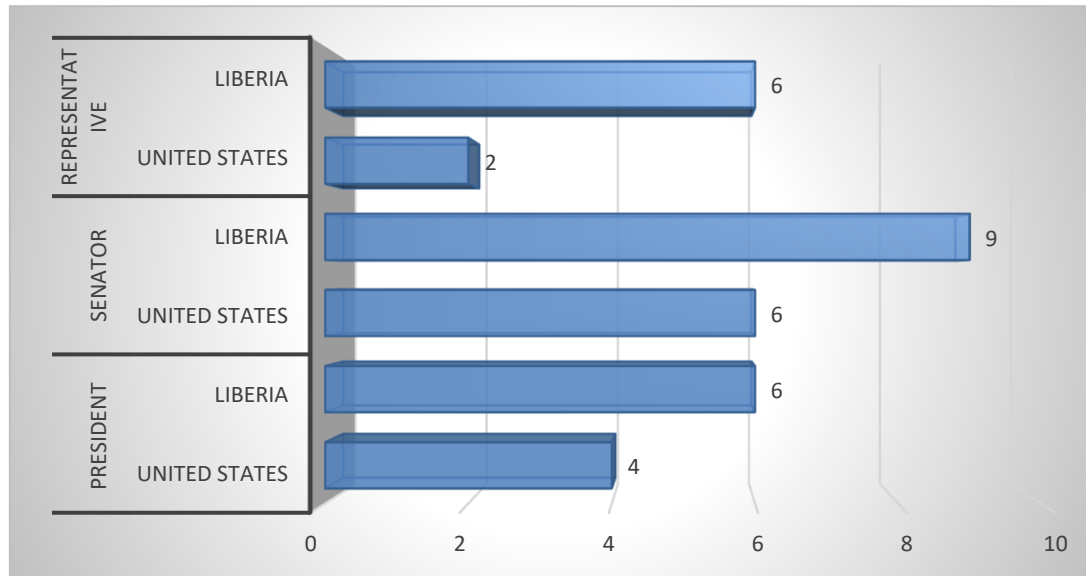


Figure 2. Liberia vs United State Representative, Senator, and President Tenure in 2020

Source: Constitution of the Republic of Liberia. (1986). The Constitution of the United States. (1789)

Figure 2 reveals different United States and Liberia term limits for presidents, senators, and representatives, with longer terms and fewer limits on Liberian officials. In the aggregate, Liberia elected officials' long hold on power facilitates a high level of corruption in its government, compared to the United States government. According to the Transparency International 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index, Liberia scored 28% and ranked 137th, while the United States scored 69% and ranked 23<sup>rd</sup>, of the 180 participating nations.

Liberia thus needs reform in both the length of public service and in representation at the local level, rather than presidential appointment. The population in counties deserve and prefer a chance to have voice in selecting or hiring their executives. This is a basic right, self-determination, in a functioning democracy. In other words, citizens in all political subdivisions should have a constitutional right to fully participate in choosing their leaders. The right to vote is sacred because it allows citizens to make their voices heard. Democracy is not a transactional endeavor to satisfy patronage practices like votes for bribes. In addition, democracy is a system of self-government, not patriarchy with one or a few individuals in control of power. Gobewole (2016a) stated that “The economic inequality among political elites and rural, aboriginal citizens, is exacerbated by patrimonialism implemented by Liberia’s political elites” (p. 55). The damage caused by patrimony and by inequality needs to be understood and acted on by Liberian leaders for democracy to function effectively if the Constitution does not award such a right, as is currently the case in Liberia. An Afrobarometer survey conducted between 2016 and 2018 revealed that 69.7% of Liberians preferred democracy, but 61.2% are “not at all satisfied” and “not very satisfied” with its current form, while 68.4% of Liberians perceived “a democracy, with major problems” and “a democracy, but with minor problems” in the nation (Afrobarometer Round 7, 2016/2018). This situation needs to be corrected to prevent a fragile democracy from degenerating into anarchy, such as the civil war that ravaged Liberia between 1989 and 2003. Therefore, the electorate should demand a constitutional referendum to eradicate the suppression of their votes and silencing of their voices. This is a critical step in advancing Liberia’s democratization.

## 6. Egocentricity

These long-term limits become understandable when the interests of some authors of the constitutions (1847 and 1986), Constitutional Advisory Assembly members, and presiding presidents are taken into context. In other words, it can be argued that the self-interest of those individuals involved, like the Barclays and Tubman, was at play. E. Philip Morgan discussed presidential interference in the constitutional drafting process in 1984 to achieve self-interest agenda in his article “Liberia and the Fate of Interim Government in the Regional Vortex of West Africa.”

*After extensive consultation with the Liberian people, the document drafted by the constitution commission provided checks on executive authority and limited power sharing with other bodies, e.g., county governments. However, Doe’s government radically revised the text under a second stage Advisory Assembly. By the time the*



*constitutional referendum occurred in 1984 the public was confused, having taken seriously the three years of consultations and assurances that their views were important. Thus it came to be that the 1985 election was not only tainted procedurally, but it conveniently restored Doe to a very autocratic presidency (Morgan, 2006, p. 4).*

Some of the authors and advisors of the 1984 constitution were ambitious (evidenced by their participation) and aspired to, and achieved, future political positions. For example, Dr. Amos Sawyer, Chairman of the National Constitution Commission, became Interim President of Liberia in 1990; Mr. David Kpormakpor, Member of the National Constitution Commission, became First Chairman of the Council of State of Liberia in 1994; and Dr. Edward B. Kesselly, Chairman of the Constitutional Advisory Assembly, became First Standard Bearer of the Unity Party in 1985. In addition, a number of former commission and assembly members become officials of the Interim National Assembly, the legislative body that replaced the People's Redemption Council (PRC) and that performed legislative functions for President Samuel K. Doe's military government.

The 1986 Constitution made the president's power of appointment absolute because he/she is mandated to appoint all administrative officers in local, county, and national government. In other words, county citizens have had no input, up to today, in selecting or voting for their county executives. In a sense, this is voter suppression. The population who is vested in county executives with the authority to govern them are denied voting rights to select (hire and fire) those leaders. They simply acquire appointees of the president as their leaders. This phenomenon of a gradual increase in the number of political subdivisions (newly created counties) and the addition of more appointed county executives (newly created positions) results in disenfranchisement of citizens in those counties. This increased "presidential power of appointment" fosters patronage practices in government. To describe and explain this, the quantitative theory of diminished democracy in Liberia is:

*Increased County Executive + Suppressed Citizens Vote = Increased Presidential Power of Appointment (1)*

## 7. Fragile State

The increase in presidential power of appointment through constitutional amendments has enhanced patronage practices and fostered public corruption in the Liberian government. This culture of corruption underpins every initiative administered by the Liberian government that improves citizens' standard of living, such as the selection of bureaucrats (cabinet officers, county executives, civil servants, etc.), the provision of public services (education programs, healthcare services, etc.), and the allocation of public projects (all-weather roads, water supplies, rural electrification, communication network, etc.). The administration of these public services to communities based on a patronage standard has long enhanced inequality among Liberian citizens. Gobewole (2016b) stated that "This economic suppression of indigenous communities over a century and a half has developed into persistent economic inequality between Liberia's rural citizens, primarily tribal communities, and its urban citizens, largely Americo-Liberians (p. 32), a situation that has created a high level of economic inequality and political instability in the country. Stated differently, perpetual corruption due to patronage practices is the primary source of national instability in Liberia.

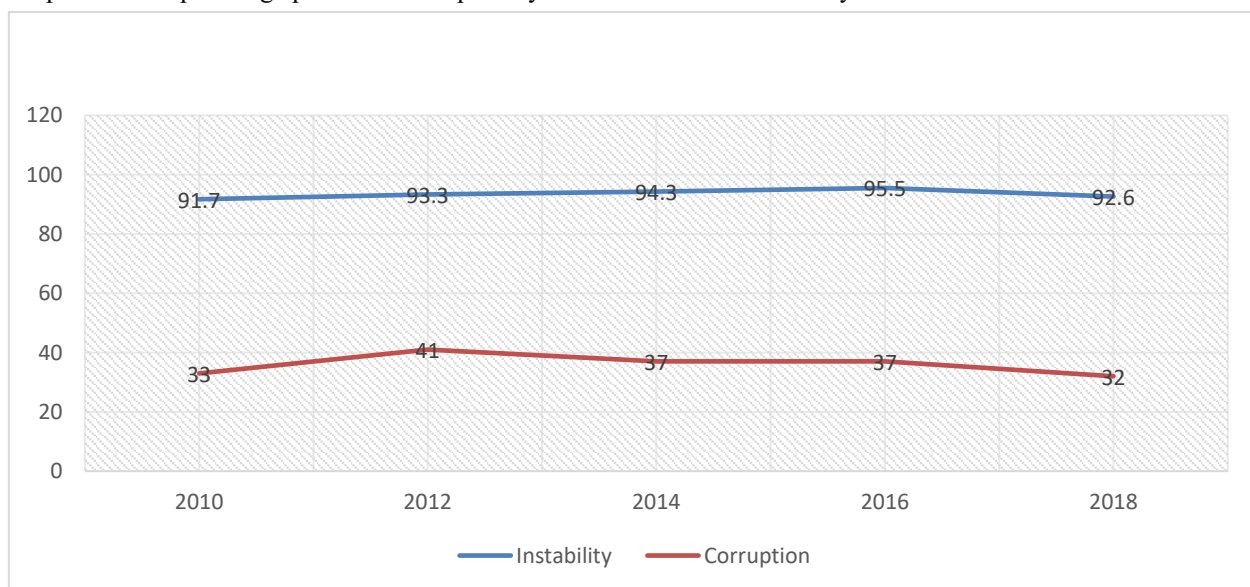


Figure 3. Liberia's Level of Instability vs Corruption Between 2010 and 2018

Source: Fund for Peace. (2019). Transparency International. (2019)

Figure 3 reveals that in 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018 Liberia maintained instability scores with high ratings of 91.7, 93.3, 94.3, 95.5, and 92.6, respectively, while its corruption level--with 0 highly corrupt and 100 very clean--remains high at 33, 41, 37, 37, and 32 respectively. These figures illustration that as public corruption increased national instability persisted at a high level, enhancing the potential for disorder.

Public corruption means that Liberia is at an alert state (high possibility) for conflict mostly due to high levels of bribery, rent-seeking, and nepotism (Fragile States Index, 2019), a state fragility with high potential for conflict that persisted through the President Johnson-Sirleaf administration (2005-2016) and continues into the President Weah administration (2017-today). This is true even though these two administrations applied different anti-corruption regimes, indicating that public corruption and instability are not unique to individual administration. Instead, they are systemic problems that derive from public institutional dysfunction associated with neopatrimonialism. Gobewole identified and discussed the implications of extreme presidential control of public institutions in Liberia.

*The underlying cause for this problem is the institutionalization of a neopatrimonial administrative in government... This study has validated that Liberia's rule of law, state authority, and democratic accountability are moderately weak, which is partly responsible for its poor economic performance. The strengthening of these institutions will help Liberia to stabilize, legitimize, and regulate its currency, capital, and labor markets effectively (Gobewole, 2016b, p. 192).*

Table 4. Peaceful Protests and Strikes in Liberia Between 2019 and 2020

Organization	Date	Reason	Issue
<b>Council of Patriots</b>	7-Jul-19	Save the State	Public Corruption and Price Hike
<b>Council of Patriots</b>	30-Jul-19	Save the State	Public Corruption and Price Hike
<b>Liberian Scholarship Students</b>	31-Jul-19	Foreign Students Strike	Ten Month Allowances Unpaid
<b>Liberian Health Workers Association (WHA)</b>	23-Sep-19	Medical Workers' Strike	Low Wages, Unpaid Salary, and Poor Working Conditions
<b>Pregnant Women (Patients)</b>	24-Sep-19	Disruption of Medical Care	Inability to Receive Healthcare Services
<b>Sympathizers of the Costa Show, the Women Peace Building Network of Liberia, and Concerned Liberian Citizens</b>	3-Oct-19	Operation Save Justina Taylor at the St. Joseph Catholic Hospital	Release Justina Taylor to attend Travel Visa Meeting at the United States Embassy
<b>The Albino Society of Liberia</b>	8-Oct-19	Albinos are no Longer Recognized	Government Exhibits Scant Interest in Albino Citizens' Welfare
<b>Supporters of the Costa Show and the General Public</b>	8-Oct-19	Security Officers Forcibly Entered Roots FM Facility	Closure of Roots FM and Seizure of its Broadcast Equipment
<b>Council of Patriots</b>	6-Jan-20	We Stand United Against Bad Governance	Public Corruption
<b>Liberian United for Justices and Accountability</b>	3-Mar-20	Investigation of Current and Ex-Public Officials who Participated and Benefited from War Crimes	Accountability for War Crimes Based on TRC Recommendations
<b>Press Union of Liberia</b>	12-Mar-20	State Security Forces Constantly Manhandle Liberian Journalist	Perpetual Police Brutality
<b>Citizens of Liberia</b>	25-Aug-20	Anti-Rape Campaign	Rape and Domestic Violence Against Young Girls and Women

Source: Kreative Mindz Television (2019-2020). Spoon TV Live. (2019-2020)

This state fragility (potential for conflict) has been exhibited by the frequent protests around the country. Twelve of

these are chronicled in Table 4, which reveals activist organizations, dates, reasons, and issues for unrest among Liberia's population. Stated differently, reasons are a long-term systemic problem and issues are specific events symptomatic of the reasons. These protests, sponsored by civil organization, have focused on issues like unpaid salaries, high prices, public corruption, nepotism in hiring, abuse of power, war crimes, rape of women and girls, and police brutality.

These deep-seated and recurring civil liberty and political rights issues suggest that the Liberian government needs to assess and reform current policies, or even enact entirely new ones to improve public welfare.

## 8. Conclusion

The objective, at least in the beginning of the Liberian nation, of denying votes to the provinces (Western, Central, and Eastern), which later became four counties (Lofa, Bong, Nimba, and Grand Gedeh), to elect their executives was to minimize their democratic participation. Gobewole discussed Americo-Liberians' rejection of citizenship to indigenous population in his article "Naturalization: The Case for Constitutional Reform to Extend Citizenship to Immigrant in Liberia."

*Liberia has a history of denying some ethnic groups citizenship (Liebenow, 1987). This discrimination was partly responsible for Liberia losing one-third of its original land mass to France and Britain during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The freed American blacks wanted land to settle their migrating populations (consisting of former American slave, Barbados, and recaptured Africans "Congos" from slave ships), which led to them claiming tribal communities' land. However, the freed American blacks did not integrate or include indigenous tribal populations as citizen until the presidency of Arthur Barclay in 1904 (Harris, 2012) (Gobewole, 2018b, p. 391).*

This deprivation of the ballot eventually led to 95% of the population, almost all tribal groups, being silenced in political activities, such as the election process, accountability of public officials, selection of executives, and establishment of political parties. This situation resulted in indigenous population's voicelessness and the diminishment of democracy in Liberia, a system in existence today and even mandated by the constitution. Therefore, as more political subdivisions develop, it empowers the president to appoint more county executives and civil servants, a process that has occurred multiple times since 1964. Gobewole discussed the transformation of Liberia based on tribal influence.

*The nation evolved from having eight political subdivisions (three provinces and five counties) in 1904 to nine political subdivisions (counties) in 1964. Redrawing these boundaries in 1964 led to the creation of four new counties (Lofa, Bong, Nimba, and Grand Gedeh), a transformation that further divided the nation into sections with tribal influence as the dominant factor (Gobewole, 2016b, p. 132).*

This constitutional mandate of "presidential appointive" authority currently denies county electorates a voice (right to vote) in selecting their leaders. An immediate referendum should be considered to grant vested citizens of Liberia's political subdivisions (counties) a right to select their local executives. Such a legislative act would extend voters' participation, a fundamental right, while decreasing vote suppression and reducing the presidential power of appointment. The objective is to enhance civil rights and liberties in Liberian society.

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