Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Liberia: Background and U.S. Relations

February 14, 2020

Congressional Research Service
https://crsreports.congress.gov
R46226

CRS REPORT
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

SUMMARY

R46226

February 14, 2020

Tomas F. Husted
Analyst in African Affairs

Liberia: Background and U.S. Relations

Introduction. Congress has shown enduring interest in Liberia, a small coastal West African country of about 4.8 million people. The United States played a key role in the country's founding, and bilateral ties generally have remained close despite significant strains during Liberia's two civil wars (1989-1997 and 1999-2003). Congress has appropriated considerable foreign assistance for Liberia, and has held hearings on the country's postwar trajectory and development. In recent years, congressional interest partly has centered on the immigration status of over 80,000 Liberian nationals resident in the United States. Liberia participates in the House Democracy Partnership, a U.S. House of Representatives legislative-strengthening initiative that revolves around peer-to-peer engagement.

Background. Liberia's conflicts caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, spurred massive displacement, and devastated the country's economy and infrastructure, aggravating existing development challenges. Postwar foreign assistance supported a recovery characterized by high economic growth and modest improvements across various sectors. An Ebola outbreak from 2014-2016 cut short this progress; nearly 5,000 Liberians died from the virus, which overwhelmed the health system and spurred an economic recession. The outbreak also exposed enduring governance challenges, including weak state institutions, poor service delivery, official corruption, and public distrust of government.

Politics. Optimism surrounding the 2018 inauguration of President George Weah—which marked Liberia's first electoral transfer of power since 1944—arguably has waned as his administration has become embroiled in a series of corruption scandals and the country has encountered new economic headwinds. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the economy contracted by 1.4% in 2019, down from 1.2% growth in 2018, as rising inflation has undermined household purchasing power. Weah's government has struggled to deliver on ambitious pro-poor campaign pledges, as diminishing foreign aid flows, poor tax administration, and low global prices for Liberia's top export commodities have strained state finances. Public discontent with alleged mismanagement and corruption has given way to large anti-government protests in the capital city of Monrovia.

The Economy and Development Issues. Liberia faces substantial obstacles to broad-based, sustainable development. Infrastructure gaps, poor electricity provision, corruption, and an uncompetitive business climate impede growth. Exports of raw rubber, gold, iron ore, diamonds, and palm oil are key sources of government revenues and foreign exchange, but these industries provide few high-paying jobs to local Liberians, and much of the population relies on subsistence agriculture. Nearly one-third of Liberians face moderate to severe chronic food insecurity despite the country's fertile land, extensive coastline, and abundant rainfall.

Human Rights. Human rights conditions have improved considerably since the early 2000s, though corruption, episodic security force abuses against civilians and discrimination against women and marginalized communities persist. Press freedoms have come under threat during Weah's presidency; reporters have faced harassment and occasional violence from government officials, including legislators, and some journalists reportedly self-censor to evade persecution. Accountability for wartime abuses remains a highly sensitive issue, and several individuals who played key roles in Liberia's conflicts retain influence and/or serve in elected office. Several perpetrators of wartime abuses have faced trial in the U.S. court system, most on immigration-related fraud or perjury charges related to nondisclosure of involvement in such abuses in applications for U.S. asylum, residency, or citizenship.

U.S. Assistance. Since the end of Liberia's second conflict in 2003, the United States has provided more than $2.4 billion in State Department- and USAID-administered assistance to support Liberia's post-war stabilization and development. This does not include nearly $600 million in emergency assistance for Liberia's Ebola response, aid channeled through other U.S. agencies, or U.S. funding for a long-running U.N. peacekeeping mission that completed its mandate in 2018. Current U.S. assistance, which totaled $96.5 million in FY2019, centers on supporting agriculture-led development and strengthening the health system, public service delivery, civil society capacity, and justice and security sectors. An ongoing $256.7 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact seeks to enhance Liberia's power sector and roads infrastructure.

Contents

Introduction 1
Historical Background 1
The Sirleaf Administration (2006-2018) 3
The Weah Administration (2018-Present) 5
The Economy and Development Issues 7
Human Rights 8
Postwar Transitional Justice Efforts 9
U.S. Judicial Responses 10
U.S. Relations and Assistance 11
Current U.S. Assistance 12
Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Engagement 12
Outlook 13

Figures

Figure 1. Liberia at a Glance 2

Contacts

Author Information 14

Introduction

The United States and Liberia have maintained diplomatic relations for more than 150 years. Close ties endured in the 20th century—underpinned by U.S. investment in the rubber sector and robust political, development, and defense cooperation during the Cold War—but they came under strain during Liberia's two civil wars (1989-1997 and 1999-2003). The United States provided substantial humanitarian assistance in response to those conflicts and helped mediate an end to each war, and the U.S. military briefly deployed a task force to assist peacekeepers and support aid delivery after the conflict.[1] U.S.-Liberia ties improved considerably during the tenure of former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (in office 2006-2018) and have remained close under current President George Weah (inaugurated in 2018).

Congress has shown enduring interest in Liberia and has held periodic hearings on the country.[2] Since the end of the second civil war, Congress has appropriated over $2.4 billion in State Department- and USAID-administered assistance to support Liberia's stabilization, recovery, and development. Such aid has centered on promoting good governance, strengthening the rule of law, reforming the security sector, improving service delivery, and spurring inclusive economic development. Congress provided roughly $600 million in additional State Department- and USAID-administered assistance to help combat the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak in Liberia, where the U.S. government—in collaboration with Liberian authorities and U.N. agencies—played a lead role in the response. In recent years, several Members of Congress have sought to adjust the immigration status of over 80,000 Liberian nationals resident in the United States, some of whom originally came to the United States as refugees. Members regularly travel to Liberia, including under a House Democracy Partnership legislative engagement program initiated in 2006.

Historical Background

The United States and Liberia established diplomatic relations in 1864, nearly two decades after Liberia declared independence from the American Colonization Society, a U.S. organization that resettled freed slaves and freeborn African-Americans in Liberia. A small elite dominated by "Americo-Liberians," descendants of this settler population, held a monopoly on state power until a 1980 military coup d'état. Under President Samuel Doe, economic mismanagement, corruption, and repression along ethnic lines characterized much of the ensuing decade. In 1989, Charles Taylor, a Liberian former civil servant who had fled to the United States after falling out with Doe, launched a rebellion from neighboring Côte d'Ivoire.[3] Factional violence soon engulfed the country.[4] Hundreds of thousands died and "virtually all" Liberians fled their homes at some point during Liberia's first civil war.[5]

After a series of abortive ceasefires, the war ended in a peace accord and general elections in 1997, which Taylor won by a wide margin. In 1999, an incursion by Liberian rebels based in

[1] U.S. Department of State, "200 U.S. troops to support African peacekeepers in Liberia," August 13, 2003.

[2] Most recently, House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, *The Future of Democracy and Governance in Liberia*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., September 13, 2017.

[3] Taylor fled Liberia for the United States in 1983 to escape embezzlement charges. In response to a Liberian request for his extradition, U.S. authorities arrested Taylor in May 1984. In 1985, while his deportation proceedings were pending, Taylor escaped from prison in Massachusetts and returned to West Africa.

[4] On the history of Liberia through 1997, see archived CRS Report RL30933, *Liberia: 1989-1997 Civil War, Post-War Developments, and U.S. Relations*, by Nicolas Cook.

[5] U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey 2002—Liberia*, June 10, 2002.

neighboring Guinea grew into a second nationwide conflict that pitted Taylor's army against two insurgent factions. After years of fighting, a rebel assault on the capital, Monrovia, and mounting international pressure—including U.N. sanctions and a public demand from President George W. Bush that Taylor resign—ultimately forced Taylor to step down in 2003. Days later, a peace agreement officially ended the conflict and laid the foundations for a transitional government.[6] The U.N. Security Council established a peacekeeping mission, the U.N. Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), in September 2003 to help stabilize the country.[7]

Figure 1. Liberia at a Glance

Comparative size: slightly larger than Virginia **Population, growth rate:** 4.8 million, 2.6% **Languages:** English 20% (official), some 20 local languages **Religions**: Christian 86%, Muslim 12%, traditional / other / none 2% (2008) **Median age, life expectancy**: 17.8 years, 64 years **Infant mortality rate:** 50.6 deaths/1,000 live births **HIV/AIDS prevalence**: 1.3%	**Adult literacy:** 47.6% (male 62.4% / female 32.8%) (2015) **GDP per capita / growth rate:** $728 / 1.2% **Public debt-to-GDP ratio:** 30.8% **Key exports / partners**: rubber, timber, iron, diamonds, cocoa, coffee / Germany 36%, Switzerland 14%, UAE 9%, United States 7%, Indonesia 5% (2017) **Key imports / partners**: fuels, chemicals, machinery, transportation equipment, manufactured goods, foodstuffs / Singapore 30%, China 24%, S. Korea 18%, Japan 9% (2017)

Sources: CRS. Data from CIA World Factbook, UNAIDS, and the IMF. 2018 data unless otherwise specified.

Liberia's wars impeded social service provision, devastated the economy, and destabilized the broader region. Notably, Taylor provided material support to rebels in neighboring Sierra Leone during that country's civil war (1991-2002). In 2006, Taylor was arrested in Nigeria (where he

[6] On Liberia's second civil war and U.S. engagement, see archived CRS Report RL32243, *Liberia: Transition to Peace*, by Nicolas Cook.

[7] In establishing UNMIL, with an authorized troop strength of 15,000, the Security Council tasked the new mission to absorb the mandate of an existing regional military intervention force known as ECOMIL.

had been granted asylum upon stepping down in 2003) on a warrant issued by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), a U.N.-mandated judicial body created to prosecute crimes perpetrated during the Sierra Leonean civil war. In 2012, the SCSL convicted Taylor of war crimes in relation to his support for Sierra Leonean rebels; he is now serving a 50-year sentence in a prison in the United Kingdom. To date, a similar tribunal to prosecute atrocities committed during Liberia's wars has not been established, spurring perceptions of impunity and mounting calls by civil society and some legislators for the creation of a war crimes court for Liberia (see "Postwar Transitional Justice Efforts"). Taylor's ex-wife and several former associates remain active in Liberian politics, as do figures formerly associated with various armed factions.

The Sirleaf Administration (2006-2018)

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Harvard-educated former Finance Minister and U.N. official, won election in 2006, putting an end to a three-year transitional government led by Taylor's vice president. During her two terms in office, Sirleaf won praise for overseeing a postwar transition marked by political stability and, until the Ebola outbreak in 2014, rapid economic growth. Africa's first elected female head of state, Sirleaf bolstered confidence among donors, drawing large inflows of U.S., Chinese, and multilateral assistance. Such aid financed the rehabilitation of infrastructure and a range of other development and stabilization efforts. Sirleaf also secured almost $5 billion in external debt relief and oversaw an expansion in state revenues.[8] The United States—long the largest bilateral donor to Liberia—provided significant assistance to Sirleaf's administration, funding programs to spur economic growth and development, reform the security sector, promote good governance, and build state capacity (see "U.S. Relations and Assistance").[9]

The Sirleaf administration took steps to rehabilitate Liberia's global standing. The U.N. Security Council had imposed various sanctions in response to Liberia's civil wars, including embargoes on imports of arms into the country and on exports of rough diamonds and timber of Liberian origin. As Liberia stabilized and the Sirleaf government enacted sectoral reforms, these sanctions were gradually lifted. The Security Council lifted the last arms embargo, on non-state actors, in 2016, ending the U.N. sanctions regime. (The Obama Administration lifted U.S. targeted sanctions on Taylor and key associates in late 2015.) Also in 2016, UNMIL officially transferred national security duties to Liberian authorities in anticipation of full withdrawal in 2018.

Sirleaf's international standing arguably surpassed her popularity among Liberians. Despite rapid economic growth, her administration struggled to meet high expectations for Liberia's postwar trajectory. Extreme poverty remained widespread throughout her tenure, and her government failed to implement key recommendations of Liberia's postwar Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), such as the creation of a war crimes court. Several corruption scandals arose during her tenure, and she drew criticism for appointing her sons to state posts. Her administration's response to the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak reportedly featured financial irregularities and a heavy-handed approach by security forces.[10] Some of these shortcomings reasonably could be attributed to structural challenges, such as corruption, low institutional capacity, deficiencies in education and health service provision, and infrastructure gaps.

[8] IMF, "Liberia Wins $4.6 Billion in Debt Relief from IMF, World Bank," June 29, 2010.

[9] Efforts to build state capacity included the multilateral Governance and Economic Management Program (GEMAP, 2005-2010), which embedded foreign advisors within Liberian state institutions in an effort to improve state fiscal management, counter corruption, and build the capacity of government entities and state-owned enterprises. A follow-on effort, the USAID-led Governance and Economic Management Support (GEMS) program, ended in 2016.

[10] Reuters, "Liberia watchdog says some Ebola funds unaccounted for," April 9, 2015.

Ebola in Liberia: Outbreak, Response, and U.S. Assistance

West Africa's Ebola epidemic (2014-2016) originated in Guinea and spread to Liberia in March 2014. Liberia's outbreak was largely controlled by early 2015. The country suffered 10,666 cases and nearly 5,000 deaths before the World Health Organization declared it Ebola-free in mid-2016. The epidemic curtailed travel, commerce, and economic output; annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth fell from 8.8% in 2013 to -1.6% by 2016.[11] The outbreak also impeded access to education, healthcare, and other public services, and taxed Liberia's weak state capacities. More broadly, it damaged already-fragile state-society relations and generated social tensions, in part due to controversial state-imposed quarantines of affected communities. U.N. sanctions monitors observed that the state's "initially slow, and subsequently militarized, response to the spread of Ebola reveals the country's fragility and persistent governance challenges, together with its citizens' deep distrust of State authority."[12]

The U.S. response was a multi-agency effort involving USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, Office of Food for Peace, Bureau for Global Health, and bilateral mission, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the State Department.[13] The Department of Defense (DOD) provided extensive logistical support and technical expertise under a military deployment known as Operation United Assistance (OUA). U.S. response programs centered on controlling the outbreak, mitigating second-order impacts (e.g., food security and economic dislocation), providing operational support, and strengthening the capacity of Liberia's health system.

According to USAID, the State Department and USAID together obligated $595 million to support the Ebola response in Liberia as of April 2019.[14] Liberia also benefitted from portions of at least $656 million in DOD-administered assistance—which included funding for OUA as well as capacity building and research assistance—and portions of at least $876 million in technical assistance from the Department of Health and Human Services.[15]

The October 2017 presidential and legislative polls were Liberia's third set of postwar general elections. Constitutional term limits barred Sirleaf from seeking reelection. Approaching the polls, the opposition Congress for Democratic Change party, led by professional soccer star-turned-politician George Weah, allied with the National Patriotic Party of Jewel Howard-Taylor (an ex-wife of Charles Taylor) to form the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC).[16] Weah won the presidency with 62% of votes in a runoff against incumbent Vice President Joseph Boakai of Sirleaf's Unity Party (UP). Despite some violence and a short-lived legal challenge over alleged fraud in the first round of polls, election observers from the U.S. National Democratic Institute (NDI) lauded the election as a "historic achievement for the country."[17] Concurrent House of Representatives elections resulted in a slim plurality for Weah's party, which took 21 out of 73 seats, ahead of the UP, which took 20.[18] Ten parties and thirteen independents claimed the rest.

The United States, the European Union (EU), and other donors provided substantial support for the 2017 elections. U.S. support included the $17 million, USAID-funded Liberia Elections and Political Transition (LEPT) project, under which the U.S. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and NDI provided technical assistance to the National Elections Commission

[11] IMF, World Economic Outlook database, October 2019 update, accessed December 5, 2019.

[12] *Final report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia submitted pursuant to paragraph 5(b) of Security Council Resolution 2128 (2013)*, U.N. doc. S/2014/831, November 14, 2014.

[13] For more, see CRS Report R44507, *Status of the Ebola Outbreak in West Africa: Overview and Issues for Congress*, by Tiaji Salaam-Blyther, Susan B. Epstein, and Bolko J. Skorupski.

[14] Data provided to CRS by USAID, December 2019. For more on U.S. aid to the Ebola response, see Government Accountability Office, *Emergency Funding For Ebola Response: Some USAID Reimbursements Did Not Comply with Legislative Requirements and Need to Be Reversed Report to Congressional Committees*, November 2016.

[15] USAID Office of Inspector General, *Quarterly Progress Report on U.S. Government International Ebola Response and Preparedness Activities: Third Quarter*, June 30, 2016.

[16] The Liberia People's Democratic Party, whose leader Alex Tyler faced a series of corruption scandals during his tenure as Speaker of the House (2007-2016), also joined the CDC.

[17] NDI, *Final Report: Liberia 2017 Presidential and Legislative Elections*, op. cit.

[18] Election results from Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), PARLINE database, accessed September 16, 2019.

(NEC), supported voter education initiatives targeting women and people with disabilities, and enhanced civil society oversight of voting and other electoral processes.[19]

The Weah Administration (2018-Present)

President Weah, who took office in January 2018, gained prominence as a European league soccer star prior to his foray into politics. His lack of formal education was a point of criticism during an unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 2005; he went on to earn a high school diploma and, later, an undergraduate business degree in the United States. In 2014, he won a Senate seat representing Montserrado County, which surrounds Monrovia. His choice of then-Senator Jewel Howard-Taylor as his running mate in the 2017 election hinted at the enduring influence of Charles Taylor and his associates in Liberia's politics. As a legislator, Howard-Taylor sparked controversy by attempting to make homosexuality a felony punishable by death and to amend the constitution to declare Liberia a Christian state, despite its sizable Muslim minority.[20]

Goodwill surrounding Weah's inauguration—which marked Liberia's first electoral transfer of power since 1944 and paved the way for UNMIL's withdrawal—has dissipated as several high-profile corruption scandals have undermined his political standing. Weah initially drew criticism for failing to disclose his assets prior to taking office, as required of all senior public officials.[21] He ultimately declared his assets in 2018, though the disclosure has remained confidential. Since Weah's inauguration, a number of his associates reportedly have been awarded public contracts, including for large infrastructure projects.[22] Meanwhile, Weah's attempt to nominate a political ally, former Speaker of the House Alex Tyler, to the board of ArcelorMittal, Liberia's largest iron ore producer, prompted significant pushback in local media, given an open inquiry into bribery allegations against Tyler. Weah ultimately withdrew the nomination. (Tyler was later acquitted.)

Among the highest-profile scandals that have arisen under Weah was the reported disappearance, in late 2018, of a shipping container holding 15.5 billion Liberian dollars ($104 million). Officials issued contradictory statements about the "missing millions," which the Sirleaf government had procured but whose delivery to Liberia extended into the Weah administration. A U.S. Embassy-contracted inquiry by Kroll Associates, a corporate investigations firm, found no evidence that banknotes had disappeared but documented "discrepancies at every stage" of the procurement and delivery processes.[23] The review also raised concerns regarding the "potential misappropriation of banknotes" and "opportunities for money laundering" in the course of the Weah government's mid-2018 infusion of $25 million U.S. dollars into the monetary system to replace Liberian

[19] IFES, "Liberia Elections and Political Transitions," January 28, 2015; NDI, "Liberia Elections and Political Transitions Project," n.d.

[20] On Howard-Taylor's legislative proposals concerning homosexuality, see Human Rights Watch, *"It's Nature, Not a Crime": Discriminatory Laws and LGBT People in Liberia,* December 2013. On her support for declaring Liberia a Christian state, see the Lansana Gberie, "Liberia," in *Africa Yearbook Volume 12: Politics, Economy and Society South of the Sahara in 2015,* ed. Abbink et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 113-114.

[21] Failure to declare assets is rampant in Liberia's political system; the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC), a state agency, reports that 80% of executive branch officials and 100% of legislators failed to declare assets in 2018. See Daniel Boakai, "LACC Host Press Conference on Status of Cases and Asset Declaration," December 4, 2018.

[22] See, e.g., Lennart Dodoo, "Liberian Construction Companies Snubbed As Lebanese Firms Win Big on Contracts," *Front Page Africa,* October 29, 2018; *Africa Confidential,* "Weah awash in scandal," November 9, 2018; and Joël Té-Léssia Assoko and Marjorie Cessac, "Liberia: President Weah on a yellow as economic woes mount," *The Africa Report,* November 19, 2019.

[23] Kroll, *Independent Review regarding allegations of the disappearance of new Liberian Dollar banknotes,* February 2019.

dollars in an effort to control inflation. (Liberia has two official currencies, the Liberian dollar and the U.S. dollar.) Several former central bank officials, including former President Sirleaf's son, have been charged in the scandal. A USAID technical assistance program, to be implemented by Kroll Associates, aims to enhance the Central Bank's currency management processes.[24]

Concerns also have centered on the Weah administration's management of donor assistance, a key source of financing for development efforts. In mid-2019, the U.S. ambassador to Liberia and several foreign counterparts sent a joint letter to the government signaling discontent with the Weah administration's use of aid funds for unintended purposes.[25] The Weah administration publicly acknowledged that it had used aid funds to pay state salaries, but claimed that it had later restored donor accounts. Separately, press reports emerged that the U.N. Resident Coordinator in Liberia had sent a letter to the government over concerns about delayed and inaccurate financial reporting on U.N.-funded activities.[26] In late 2019, the World Bank reportedly demanded that the government refund certain ineligible expenses identified during a project review.[27] According to the State Department's congressionally mandated fiscal transparency report, "foreign assistance receipts, largely project-based, were neither adequately captured in the budget nor subject to the same audit and domestic oversight as other budget items" in 2018, the latest reporting year.[28]

In June 2019, simmering discontent over alleged corruption and mismanagement by the Weah administration gave way to large-scale anti-government protests in Monrovia. Headed by the Council of Patriots (COP), a coalition of opposition politicians and activists, the demonstrators called for an audit of all state ministries and petitioned Weah to publicly disclose his assets. The government drew criticism for its response to the protests, during which it blocked social media access. In January 2020, thousands of protesters joined COP-led demonstrations in Monrovia, which police dispersed with tear gas. The Independent National Commission on Human Rights, a state body, has called for an inquiry into allegations of excessive force by security forces. In a joint statement, the ambassadors of the United States, EU, and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) lauded the security forces' management of the demonstrations but noted "with regret" the government's decision to disperse peaceful protesters without warning.[29] Human rights groups and press freedom advocates have condemned what they have described as a crackdown on COP leader Henry Costa, a radio host who currently lives in the United States.[30]

Legislative Structure, Composition, and Key Issues

Liberia's bicameral legislature comprises a 73-member House of Representatives (who serve 6-year terms) and a 30-member Senate (who serve 9-year terms). Few parties hold a decisive number of seats, and political party discipline is low. An opposition coalition known as the Collaborating Political Parties (CPP) has emerged between the UP and three smaller parties. In August 2019, a House by-election featured violence between ruling CDC and

[24] U.S. Embassy in Liberia, "United States Announces Technical Assistance Program For the Central Bank of Liberia," December 26, 2019.

[25] CRS communication with the State Department, January 29, 2020.

[26] Lennart Dodoo, "Government Warned against Mismanagement of UN Funds," *Front Page Africa*, April 27, 2019.

[27] William Harmon, "World Bank Slams Gov't Over Financial Improprieties," *Liberian Observer*, December 6, 2020

[28] State Department, *2019 Fiscal Transparency Report*, August 15, 2019.

[29] U.S. Embassy in Liberia, "Joint Statement on Liberia's National Discourse in the New Year," January 10, 2020.

[30] In 2019, the government sued Costa for defamation and later closed his radio station, accusing him of inciting violence. Following the January 2020 protests, Liberian officials alleged that Costa had used a forged travel document to reenter the country and sought his extradition from neighboring Sierra Leone, where he had traveled en route back to the United States. The Sierra Leonean government ultimately refused to honor the extradition request. See, e.g., Committee to Protect Journalists, "Radio station and show hosts sued for defamation in Liberia," May 1, 2019; Reporters Without Borders, "Liberian radio station closed, another attacked by protesters," October 14, 2019.

opposition CPP supporters, including a physical attack on the CPP candidate. In response, the U.S. and European diplomatic missions issued a statement urging political leaders to "avoid using hate speech which could further enhance tensions," and called for an inquiry into the incident.[31]

In the past years, Liberia's legislature has held an increasing number of hearings, conducted other oversight activities, and passed numerous bills, but its overall capacity remains weak. Key challenges include a weak committee system, high electoral turnover and consequent inexperience on the part of lawmakers, staff capacity challenges, executive branch dominance, and limited, patronage-based constituent services. Corruption and transparency are other key concerns: the nongovernmental organization Freedom House finds that "bribery and corruption can influence policy prioritization."[32] As discussed below, Liberia participates in the House Democracy Partnership (HDP), a U.S. House of Representatives legislative strengthening initiative. USAID democracy and governance programs also have sought to build the capacity of the legislature.

The Economy and Development Issues

Annual GDP growth averaged 7.4% over the decade following the end of Liberia's second conflict, as substantial donor assistance helped power a fragile postwar recovery and modest development gains. Foreign direct investment (FDI) significantly increased under President Sirleaf, mostly concentrated in the mining, palm oil, rubber, and timber industries. The 2014 Ebola outbreak and a simultaneous slump in global commodity prices cut short this expansion: Liberia's economy contracted by 1.6% in 2016 before rebounding to 2.5% growth the following year owing to expanded gold, rubber, and palm oil exports.[33] The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects a contraction of 1.4% in 2019 due to slowing aggregate demand, followed by a recovery to 1.4% growth in 2020 due to an expected rise in consumption.[34] Since 2017, a weakening of the Liberian dollar (which depreciated by 26% in 2018) and rising inflation (which stands at around 30%) have undermined local purchasing power and living standards. The World Bank projects a rise in the household poverty rate from 42% in 2018 to 44% by 2021; the rural poverty rate, estimated at 72%, is more than double that of urban areas—a longstanding pattern.[35]

The IMF predicts average annual growth of 3.0% between 2020 and 2023, a rate likely insufficient to raise living standards adequately for a population growing at 2.6% per year.[36] Infrastructure gaps, low electricity access (estimated at 17% nationally and 3% in rural areas), poor service delivery, corruption, and an uncompetitive business climate all threaten growth prospects.[37] Liberia ranked fifth lowest globally in the World Bank's 2018 Human Capital Index (HCI), a survey of health and education indicators.[38] The government has struggled to marshal donor assistance for its ambitious *Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development* (PAPD, 2018-2023), which centers on infrastructure investments and social service improvements.[39]

[31] U.S. Embassy in Liberia, "Joint EU-US Statement on Recent Electoral Violence in Montserrado County," August 20, 2019.

[32] Freedom House, "Freedom in the World Index: Liberia," 2019.

[33] IMF, World Economic Outlook Database, October 2019 update, op. cit.

[34] IMF, *Liberia: Request for a Four-Year Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility*, November 26, 2019.

[35] The World Bank, *Macro Poverty Outlook: Liberia*, October 2019.

[36] GDP growth estimate from IMF, *Liberia: Request for a Four-Year Arrangement*, op. cit.; population growth rate estimate from CIA World Factbook, 2018 estimate.

[37] Estimated electrification rates from Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS), *Liberia Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2016*, August 2017.

[38] World Bank HCI, available at https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital.

[39] According to the IMF, the PAPD's "objectives of building roads and improving social services have largely been

The government relies heavily on exports of rubber, gold, iron ore, diamonds, and palm oil for state revenues and foreign exchange, but these sectors have created minimal local employment. The multinational firms ArcelorMittal and Firestone, which are engaged in the extraction of iron and rubber, respectively, are among Liberia's largest private sector actors, though low global commodity prices have prompted both companies to downsize operations in recent years.[40] Most working-age Liberians remain engaged in subsistence agriculture.[41] According to the World Bank, infrastructure gaps, high transport costs, limited market information, and inadequate public sector support have discouraged a shift toward more productive agricultural activity.[42]

At the same time, few households produce enough food for family consumption, and Liberia depends on imports of key staple foods, such as rice and cassava, despite ample rainfall and fertile land. Rural poverty drives high rates of food insecurity and malnutrition. Liberia ranked 112 out of 117 countries surveyed on the International Food Policy Research Institute's 2019 Global Hunger Index, a composite ranking of undernourishment and related indicators.[43] A 2018 analysis by the Liberian government and international partners found that 18% of Liberians faced moderate to severe food insecurity, meaning they regularly lack food and consistently do not consume a diet of adequate quality.[44] Roughly 36% of children under five years old are "stunted," or too short for their age—a risk indicator of impaired cognitive and physical development.[45]

Low global oil prices and a poor business climate have dimmed interest in Liberia's nascent oil and gas sector. Several U.S. oil firms, including Chevron, ExxonMobil, and Anadarko Petroleum, have relinquished licenses to offshore blocks, in some cases following unsuccessful exploration activities. According to the State Department, foreign investors have cited corruption as a key obstacle to engagement in Liberia, with graft perceived to be "most pervasive in government procurement, contract and concession awards, customs and taxation systems, regulatory systems, performance requirements, and government payments systems."[46]

Human Rights

According to State Department monitors, key human rights challenges in 2018 included extrajudicial killings by police, arbitrary and prolonged detention, and harsh and overcrowded prison conditions.[47] Additional challenges included discrimination and violence against women and marginalized communities. While Weah earned plaudits for supporting a new press freedom act, which repealed various criminal statutes that had been used to harass and arrest journalists, his government also has targeted opposition media figures and shuttered critical news outlets.[48]

---

delayed due to lack of funding." See IMF, *Liberia: Request for a Four-Year Arrangement,* op. cit.

[40] Reuters, "ArcelorMittal to cut up to 450 jobs, slash exports from Liberia," November 18, 2015, and Bridgestone, "Firestone Liberia, Inc. Statement Regarding Workforce Reduction," March 13, 2019.

[41] World Bank, *Republic of Liberia: From Growth to Development—Priorities for Sustainably Reducing Poverty and Achieving Middle-Income Status by 2030,* May 21, 2018.

[42] Ibid.

[43] 2019 Global Hunger Index, available at https://www.globalhungerindex.org/results.html.

[44] World Food Program (WFP) Liberia, "Country Brief," October 2018.

[45] WFP Liberia, "Country Brief," op. cit., and World Health Organization, "Stunting Policy Brief," 2014.

[46] State Department, *2019 Investment Climate Statements: Liberia,* July 11, 2019.

[47] State Department, *2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Liberia*, March 2019.

[48] *Deutsche Welle,* "Liberia's contradictory attitude to a free press," October 17, 2019.

Reporters have faced harassment and violence from government officials, including members of the national legislature, and press outlets self-censor to evade persecution.[49]

Sexual and gender-based violence is widespread; the State Department reports that rape remains "a serious and pervasive problem" despite efforts to address the issue by successive governments as well as nongovernmental organizations operating in Liberia.[50] Access to justice is constrained by an under-resourced, uneven, and often ineffective justice system in which judicial corruption is common, and by social practices and attitudes that discourage reporting and prosecution. In August 2019, President Weah signed into law the Domestic Violence Act, which criminalizes various forms of intimate partner violence, including spousal rape—long excluded from legal definitions of sexual assault.[51] That legislation ultimately did not include a provision that would have criminalized female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), which Liberia's legislature has not prohibited despite considerable pressure from the Sirleaf and Weah administrations, donors, and domestic and international civil society groups.[52] The practice remains widespread and is politically sensitive. Same-sex relations are illegal under Liberian law, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals face violence, discrimination, harassment, and hate speech.

Interethnic grievances over access to land and other resources have been a source of social and political tension and conflict. Surrounding the 2017 polls, NDI election observers documented derogatory statements and other forms of discriminatory behavior targeting Liberia's Muslim community (roughly 12% of the population) and the largely Muslim Mandingo ethnic group (3%), some of whom were barred from registering or voting.[53] Mandingo mobilization formed the backbone of the 1997-2003 insurgency against Taylor.

Since 2017, Liberia has ranked as a Tier 2 Watch List country on the State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, submitted pursuant to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA, Division A of P.L. 106-386).[54] Per the TVPA, failure to improve from Tier 2 Watch List ranking for three consecutive years results in a downgrade to Tier 3 (worst) status, which may carry restrictions on access to certain types of U.S. assistance. The Administration granted Liberia a waiver from such a downgrade in 2019 because the State Department found that Liberia's "government has devoted sufficient resources to a written plan that, if implemented, would constitute significant efforts to meet the minimum standards" for TIP elimination.[55]

Postwar Transitional Justice Efforts

Accountability for wartime human rights violations in Liberia remains a highly sensitive topic. A postwar Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which operated between 2005 and 2010, recommended the establishment of a war crimes tribunal, but no such court has been established. This is partly attributable to opposition from former combatants and others likely to be targeted by such a tribunal, some of whom are current or former elected officials. The TRC recommended

[49] State Department, *2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Liberia*, op. cit.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Executive Mansion, "President Weah Signs Domestic Violence Bill into Law," August 14, 2019.

[52] President Sirleaf issued an executive order prohibiting FGM in the closing days of her administration, but the order expired after one year. Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor, "Liberia: Temporary Ban on Domestic Violence, Including Female Genital Mutilation," January 31, 2018.

[53] NDI, *Final Report: Liberia 2017 Presidential and Legislative Elections*, op. cit.

[54] See CRS Report R44953, *The State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report: Scope, Aid Restrictions, and Methodology*, by Michael A. Weber, Katarina C. O'Regan, and Liana W. Rosen.

[55] State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2019.

the prosecution of at least three members of the current legislature.[56] Such individuals wield influence not only within the legislature but also as vote mobilizers at the national level; for instance, Senator Prince Johnson, one of two former armed faction leaders currently serving in Liberia's legislature, arguably was critical to President Weah's winning 2017 political coalition. Opponents of a possible war crimes court also include former President Sirleaf, whom the TRC identified as having provided financial support to Charles Taylor in the early years of Liberia's first civil war.[57] Some Liberians may oppose potential transitional justice measures out of a reluctance to revisit wartime atrocities or fear of rekindling social tensions.

In September 2019, President Weah appeared to endorse the establishment of a war crimes court and requested that the legislature advise him on the issue.[58] After Weah's announcement, a resolution calling for a war crimes tribunal quickly garnered the two-thirds support required for passage in Liberia's House of Representatives. Weah subsequently walked back his support for the court, however, and it remains to be seen whether Weah's announcement paves the way for the creation of a court and/or the implementation of other transitional justice measures.

U.S. Judicial Responses

Some perpetrators of wartime atrocities have faced justice abroad, including in the United States. In 2009, Charles Taylor's U.S.-born son, Roy M. Belfast Jr. (AKA Charles "Chuckie" Taylor), was sentenced to 97 years in prison by a U.S. District Court for wartime acts of torture.[59] Belfast remains the only individual prosecuted in the U.S. judicial system specifically for atrocities committed during Liberia's conflicts. Others have faced immigration-related charges, however, often in relation to fraud or perjury linked to nondisclosure of involvement in wartime abuses in applications for U.S. asylum, residency, or citizenship.[60] Several Liberian nationals have been convicted on such offenses, which can carry lengthy prison sentences and/or result in deportation and loss of citizenship or residency permission.[61] Former armed faction leader George Boley was deported from the United States in 2012 in connection with his involvement in the use of child soldiers.[62] This marked the first deportation under the Child Soldiers Accountability Act (P.L. 110-340), which made use of child soldiers a ground for deportation from the United States.

[56] Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report Volume II (Consolidated Final Report)*, July 2009.

[57] Pursuant to this designation, the TRC barred Sirleaf (then in her first term as president) from holding public office for 30 years. Sirleaf refused to resign, and Liberia's Supreme Court subsequently ruled the ban unconstitutional, paving the way for Sirleaf's 2011 reelection—as well as the election, to public office, of other alleged perpetrators.

[58] See, e.g., President Weah's remarks before the 74th U.N. General Assembly, September 25, 2019.

[59] Belfast was the first defendant to be tried and convicted under 18 U.S.C. § 2340A, a U.S. federal extraterritorial statute that makes it a crime for persons present in the United States to commit or abet torture abroad. He previously had pled guilty to federal passport fraud pertaining to passport application perjury in relation to his father's identity. Justice Department, "Roy Belfast Jr., A/K/A Chuckie Taylor, Sentenced on Torture Charges," January 9, 2009.

[60] Kim Thuy Seelinger, "The Sentencing of 'Jungle Jabbah': U.S. Approaches to the Prosecution of Alleged Liberian War Criminals," in Civitas Maxima, *2018 Annual Report*, 2019.

[61] These include Mohammed Jabbateh, a former rebel commander sentenced to 30 years in U.S. prison, and Jucontee Thomas Woewiyu, a top official in Charles Taylor's rebel movement who had yet to be sentenced as of late 2019. See Department of Justice, "Former Liberian War Lord Known As 'Jungle Jabbah' Sentenced To 30 Years In Prison For Immigration Fraud And Perjury," April 19, 2018, and "Liberian War Criminal Living in Delaware County Convicted of Immigration Fraud and Perjury," July 3, 2018.

[62] Boley, who has not faced charges in Liberia, won election to Liberia's House of Representatives in 2017.

U.S. Relations and Assistance

As noted above, the United States played a key role in Liberia's founding, and bilateral ties generally have been close, characterized by substantial U.S. assistance. U.S. engagement in Liberia expanded significantly during the administration of President Sirleaf, under successive U.S. Administrations and with bipartisan support from Congress. Sirleaf addressed a joint session of Congress in 2006, and between FY2006 and FY2018, Congress appropriated over $2.1 billion in State Department- and USAID-administered aid to Liberia to support stabilization, development, security sector reform, and health programs.[63] This total does not include assistance provided via other U.S. agencies and substantial Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) aid funding (see below). It also excludes U.S. funding for UNMIL provided through assessed contributions to the U.N. peacekeeping budget, as well as U.S. support for Liberia's Ebola response or programs funded through regionally or centrally managed programs.

The Trump Administration has expressed support for strong U.S.-Liberia ties. In late 2019, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Tibor Nagy hosted the fourth U.S.-Liberia Partnership Dialogue, a high-level diplomatic engagement that most recently focused on "youth engagement, trafficking in persons, economic growth, and strengthening health and education systems."[64] Congress has continued to appropriate sizable bilateral foreign assistance for the country (see below), and has held hearings on its development and governance prospects.[65] Congress also has fostered relations through a House Democracy Partnership (HDP) program with the Liberian legislature, which is one of 21 HDP partner legislatures worldwide. Launched in 2006, the Liberia HDP program has focused on the development of Liberian parliamentary capacity, including through peer-to-peer visits. In October 2019, five Members of Congress visited Liberia, where they met with various legislators and President Weah.[66]

Immigration Issues. Liberian immigration to the United States has played a significant role in bilateral relations. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were roughly 85,000 foreign-born individuals from Liberia living in the United States in 2018 (latest available).[67] Liberians in the United States first received Temporary Protected Status (TPS)[68] in 1991 during the first civil war. In the years since, qualifying Liberians have been granted TPS and/or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED)—temporary blanket relief from removal provided by the President—in the context of Liberia's conflicts and, later, the Ebola outbreak. Efforts to extend the immigration status of Liberians eligible for such protections have drawn bipartisan congressional support.

In March 2019, three days before DED was to expire for certain Liberians resident in the United States since 2002, President Trump reaffirmed the termination but extended the wind-down period through March 30, 2020. In his memorandum, President Trump stated that "Extending the wind-down period will preserve the status quo while the Congress considers remedial legislation"

[63] State Department, *Congressional Budget Justifications for FY2008-FY2020*.

[64] State Department, "Fourth Annual U.S.-Liberia Partnership Dialogue," September 17, 2019.

[65] See, e.g., House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, *The Future of Democracy and Governance in Liberia*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., September 13, 2017.

[66] U.S. Embassy in Liberia, "Highlights Of The Visit Of The U.S. Congressional House Democracy Partnership To Liberia," October 7, 2019.

[67] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

[68] TPS provides temporary protection from removal and work authorization for nationals of countries that DHS designates as unsafe for return because of armed conflict, natural disaster, or other extraordinary conditions. For more information, see CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*, by Jill H. Wilson.

to provide Liberian DED beneficiaries with relief from removal.[69] Congress ultimately granted such relief in the National Defense Authorization Act for 2020 (P.L. 116-92), which directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to adjust the status of eligible Liberian applicants—those continuously present in the United States since November 20, 2014, or the immediate family of such individuals, among other criteria—to lawful permanent resident (LPR) status.

Current U.S. Assistance

Appropriated State Department and USAID-administered assistance for Liberia totaled $112.3 million in FY2018 and $96.5 million in FY2019.[70] Recent U.S. aid largely has focused on health system strengthening and support for public service delivery, civil society capacity building, agriculture sector development, and justice sector improvements. Most U.S. development assistance is implemented by nongovernmental organizations, but the United States has a direct government-to-government financing agreement with Liberia's Ministry of Health that supports health service delivery.[71] The State Department has funded programs to train, equip, advise, and professionalize the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), which was established with U.S. support after Liberia's second civil war, and to build the capacity of civilian law enforcement.[72] DOD has conducted periodic trainings for AFL personnel and provided support to Liberia's defense ministry.[73] Liberia also benefits from a State Partnership Program with the Michigan National Guard. The country hosts 94 Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) working on projects related to education and health.[74] In December 2019, the U.S. Embassy withdrew PCVs from several regions due to liquidity challenges associated with withdrawing money from local banks.

FY2020 aid allocations for Liberia pursuant to P.L. 116-94 have yet to be made public. The Administration requested $32.6 million in State Department- and USAID-administered aid for Liberia in FY2021, which would represent a 66% decrease from FY2019 appropriations.[75] In successive years, Congress has appropriated aid for Liberia far in excess of the levels proposed in the Trump Administration's budget requests.

Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Engagement

Liberia is currently implementing a five-year, $256.7 million MCC Compact that entered into force in 2016. The Compact targets two constraints to economic growth: (1) a lack of access to reliable and affordable electricity, and (2) inadequate road infrastructure. The energy project seeks to provide a new hydropower turbine to the Mt. Coffee Hydropower Plant, train electricity sector personnel, and support the creation of an independent energy sector regulator. The roads project aims to build the capacity of Liberian authorities to plan road maintenance. Liberia previously benefitted from a $15 million MCC Threshold Program (2010-2013) focused on expanding girls' access to education, enhancing land rights and access, and promoting trade.[76]

---

[69] White House, "Memorandum on Extension of Deferred Enforced Departure for Liberians," March 28, 2019.

[70] State Department, *Congressional Budget Justification for FY2020* and FY2019 653(a) allocation report.

[71] USAID, "Liberia: Global Health," updated August 19, 2019, available at https://www.usaid.gov/liberia/global-health.

[72] International Crisis Group, *Liberia: Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform*, January 13, 2009.

[73] DOD and State Department, *Foreign Military Training Report: Joint Report to Congress*, FY2018-2019 and prior.

[74] Peace Corps, "Peace Corps in Liberia," accessed February 4, 2020.

[75] State Department, *Congressional Budget Justification for FY2020*.

[76] MCC, "Liberia Threshold Program," accessed December 26, 2019.

In FY2019 and FY2020, Liberia did not secure a passing grade on half of its MCC Scorecard—a prerequisite for a potential second compact. According to its FY2020 scorecard, Liberia failed to meet standards in fiscal and trade policy, regulatory quality, inflation control, land rights and access, government effectiveness, rule of law, and a range of human development measures.[77]

Outlook

Pressures on Weah's administration are likely to mount. State finances are under increasing strain due to weak economic growth, poor tax administration, declining donor aid, and the departure of UNMIL, which came to play a key role in Liberia's economy. At a time when the government faces popular expectations for dividends from Liberia's postwar transition—including for better infrastructure, improved public services, job creation, and poverty reduction—surging inflation and a depreciation of the Liberian dollar have contributed to falling purchasing power, rising poverty, and a mounting food security crisis. The IMF has welcomed austerity measures on the part of the government, including cuts to the public sector wage bill, and in late 2019 approved a four-year, $213.6 million program to support macroeconomic adjustments and other reforms.[78] Austerity policies are likely to be domestically unpopular, however, and it remains to be seen whether the Weah administration continues to pursue reforms that may be politically challenging.

Efforts to address corruption and other governance demands are likely to encounter pushback from key segments of Liberia's political landscape. Corruption has been a longstanding concern in Liberia and remains prevalent throughout the government, according to the State Department, which has documented a "culture of impunity" in the civil service.[79] Any attempts to enact meaningful anti-corruption measures may thus founder on a lack of political will from legislators and other officials who profit from the current system. Meanwhile, Weah's stated commitment to address mounting calls from civil society and some legislators for postwar transitional justice measures has met with opposition from some legislators who are central to his political coalition.

Recent protests and instances of inflammatory rhetoric have raised concerns over political tensions in the country. In May 2019, the U.S. Embassy condemned ethnically divisive statements by politicians, reproaching those who "incite unlawful acts through ill-considered rhetoric that could jeopardize Liberia's hard-won peace and security."[80] The U.S. Embassy also has warned Liberia's opposition against using charged rhetoric, as it has called on the Weah administration to respect political freedoms.[81] Mounting socioeconomic pressures and calls for governance reform and postwar accountability are key challenges facing Liberia's fledgling democracy; how the country's political class responds to such forces will have implications for Liberia's trajectory.

[77] MCC, "Country Scorecards: Liberia FY20," accessed January 27, 2020.

[78] IMF, "IMF Executive Board Approves US$213.6 Million ECF Arrangement for Liberia," December 11, 2019.

[79] State Department, *2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Liberia*, op. cit.

[80] U.S. Embassy in Liberia, "U.S. Embassy Statement," May 6, 2019.

[81] U.S. Embassy in Liberia, "Dec 28 Joint Statement on Planned Demonstration on 30 December," December 28, 2019.

U.S.-Liberia ties remain close, and the United States appears poised to continue supporting the country's development, albeit with potentially lower aid allocations than in past years. The United States continues to exert significant influence in the country, and Liberian authorities appear receptive to U.S. engagement, as suggested by President Weah's recent suspension of an official whom the U.S. ambassador had accused of promoting societal divisions.[82] At the same time, the Weah administration's mismanagement of donor assistance may be of concern to some Members of Congress, as may enduring corruption, rising political tensions, persistent institutional weaknesses, and continued inaction on transitional justice measures. Members of Congress may continue to debate the relative effectiveness of various tools for advancing U.S. interests in Liberia, including diplomacy, foreign assistance, and possible punitive measures.

Author Information

Tomas F. Husted
Analyst in African Affairs

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.

[82] U.S. Embassy in Liberia, "U.S. Embassy Statement," op. cit.; Liberian Executive Mansion, "President Weah Suspends Deputy Information Minister Eugene Fahngon," May 6, 2019.