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Freedom House (Author)

Freedom in the World 2024 - Liberia

PARTLY FREE

64

/ 100

Political Rights 30 / 40

Civil Liberties 34 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

60 / 100 Partly Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Overview

Liberia has enjoyed two decades of peace and stability since the second civil war ended in 2003, with the country making considerable progress rebuilding government capacity, reestablishing the rule of law, and ensuring citizens' political rights and civil liberties. Liberia enjoyed its first peaceful transition of power in decades in 2017, and the 2023 elections were especially competitive. However, corruption, impunity, and violence against women are still major problems.

Key Developments in 2023

- In November, opposition candidate Joseph Boakai won the presidential election in a runoff, narrowly defeating incumbent George Weah. The contest was generally peaceful, though some violent incidents were reported during the electoral period. The polls were also affected by progovernment media coverage and the use of state resources.
- In the October legislative elections, held concurrently with the first round of the presidential contest, the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) of then incumbent president Weah became the single

largest party in the lower house and won a plurality of contested Senate seats.

- In December, the US government sanctioned outgoing finance minister Samuel Tweah and two senators for bribery, while Monrovia mayor Jefferson Kojee was sanctioned earlier that month for corruption and human rights abuses.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

Liberia's president is directly elected and can serve up to two six-year terms. Incumbent George Weah of the CDC was defeated by Joseph Boakai of the Unity Party (UP) in a runoff in November 2023. Boakai won 50.6 percent of the runoff vote, while Weah won 49.4 percent. Weah conceded after the National Elections Commission (NEC) announced the results and encouraged supporters to join him in doing so.

European Union (EU) observers reported that the election was largely peaceful and lauded the NEC's efficient management of the polls. However, some violent incidents did occur during the electoral period; in September, before the first round was held, 2 people died and 20 were injured when CDC and UP supporters clashed in Lofa County. EU monitors also noted that state-owned media outlets devoted more of their coverage to the CDC, which also benefited from the use of state resources.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because the presidential election ended with a smooth transition of power and was effectively managed by the country's electoral authority, though the polls were affected by violence and the use of state resources.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

Liberia has a bicameral legislature composed of a 30-member Senate and a 73-member House of Representatives. Representatives serve six-year terms. Senators serve nine-year terms and are elected on a staggered basis.

Legislative contests were held in October 2023, concurrently with the first round of the presidential election. The CDC won 25 seats in the House of Representatives, independents won 19, and the UP won 11. No other party won more than 10. In the Senate, where 15 seats were decided, the

CDC and independent candidates each won 6. The UP, the Liberia Restoration Party, and the Movement for Democracy and Reconstruction each won 1. EU observers called the elections generally peaceful and well administered, though these polls were also affected by progovernment media coverage, election-period violence, and the use of public resources. Candidates additionally engaged in bartering, while voters came to expect gifts when attending campaign events.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because the legislative elections, like the presidential contest, were competitive and efficiently run, though they were similarly affected by violent incidents and the misuse of state resources.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 3 / 4

While the independence of the NEC is mandated by law, it has struggled to enforce regulations in the past, though it demonstrated the capacity to deliver credible elections in 2023. The Code of Conduct Act has not been consistently followed by officials and was not fully enabled in time for the 2023 elections for want of an ombudsman's office to enforce it. EU observers reported that the New Elections Law, which fundamentally defines the Liberian electoral process, does not allow voters to seek legal recourse over violations or appeal NEC decisions. Campaign-finance regulations passed in 2022 were largely ignored in 2023, in part due to a lack of capacity.

The NEC faced challenges employing a new biometric voter-registration process ahead of the 2023 elections. The UP sued the commission in September because it did not publish the final voter roll according to a legal deadline. But the NEC's ability to manage a tight presidential runoff and publish results that were accepted by the competitors boosted perceptions of its independence and credibility. The Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) largely commended the NEC's introduction of the biometric system in an August report.

Score Change: The score improved from 2 to 3 because the Liberian electoral authority successfully managed a close presidential election in which the results were accepted by candidates.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 3 / 4

Political parties generally do not face undue legal or practical obstacles that prevent them from forming or operating, and they can form coalitions. A total of 20 candidates contested the presidential election's first round in October 2023. Independent candidates did well in legislative races, winning representation in both houses.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 4 / 4

Opposition parties have a realistic chance of gaining office and power through elections. The 2017 and 2023 presidential elections have been won by candidates then in opposition.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because Liberia enjoyed a second consecutive presidential contest that ended with a peaceful transfer of power.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 3 / 4

Allegations of undue influence or pressure on voters by powerful groups are somewhat rare. However, a general wariness of election-related violence persists in Liberia and violent incidents were reported during the 2023 electoral period.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 3 / 4

Lebanese people and people of Asian descent whose families have lived in Liberia for generations are denied citizenship and cannot participate in political processes. This provision was retained in a 2022 law that granted Liberians the right to hold dual citizenship. Contractors working for the NEC during the 2023 electoral period were told to verify the eligibility of people based on factors including their name and "accent."

Women are poorly represented in national politics and hold few leadership positions in political parties. In May 2023, political parties promised that at least 30 percent of their candidates would be women in a memorandum of understanding with the NEC. In July, however, the EISA reported that the parties' candidate lists did not reach this target.

Social stigma against LGBT+ people discourages them from advocating for their rights.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 3 / 4

Once elected, government officials are duly installed in office, and elected legislators generally operate without significant interference. However, bribery and corruption influence policy prioritization, including at the executive level.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Corruption remains pervasive. Anticorruption institutions lack the resources, political independence, and capacity to function effectively. Reforms made to the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) Act in 2022 gave it prosecutorial powers that have gone unused.

In November 2023, the Center for Transparency and Accountability criticized the LACC for taking no action against officials sanctioned by the US government, including three people who won Senate races. In December, the US State Department sanctioned outgoing finance minister Samuel Tweah and two senators over bribery accusations. Monrovia mayor Jefferson Kojee was separately sanctioned earlier that month for corruption and human rights abuses, with the Treasury Department accusing him of putting pressure on anticorruption investigators.

Audits of government departments have highlighted improper procurement and financial management practices. Authorities have made no progress determining what happened to four auditors who died in mysterious circumstances in 2020. The General Auditing Commission remains limited by a failure to operationalize its fiscal independence, as provided for by legislation.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because of the continued impunity enjoyed by government officials and constraints on corruption investigations.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 2 / 4

The 2010 Freedom of Information Act is rarely used, and the government responds slowly, if at all, to information requests. Transparency guidelines for public procurement processes are not fully enforced, and procurement processes are seriously impacted by corruption. Commitments made under the Open Government Partnership are not supported by the requisite political will.

The LACC, which collects asset declarations, is not obligated to disclose those submitted by executive-branch members and has not complied with civil society and media requests to do so.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 2 / 4

Liberia's constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press, but these rights are sometimes restricted in practice. Investigative reporters receive threats, including from members of the government who have vowed to sue in response to journalistic inquiries. Although the 2019 Press Freedom Act effectively decriminalized libel, "sedition," and "criminal malevolence," defamation remains a civil offense, and journalists risk jail time for nonpayment. Investigative reporting can lead to media houses being summoned to court. In July 2023, a civil court issued a closure order against the Spoon Network, a television and radio broadcaster, over a defamation case filed by Wilmot Smith, a former government official. The broadcaster had reported on corruption allegations against Smith. The broadcaster was allowed to resume its operations in August.

Law enforcement agencies and political actors constitute the main source of security problems for journalists. The United Nations counted eight attacks on journalists during the 2023 electoral period. The offices of the *New Dawn* newspaper were attacked by approximately 100 armed assailants in a nighttime raid in October, leaving two staff members injured.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 3 / 4

Religious freedom is protected in the constitution. Members of the Muslim community report discrimination in government appointments and allege undercounting in the census (the 2008 census reported that 12.2 percent of the Liberian population was Muslim). Muslim groups have also reported improvements in government policy regarding their community.

Proposals to amend the constitution to establish Christianity as the official religion emerge occasionally and can contribute to interreligious tensions.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 3 / 4

The government does not restrict academic freedom, though education infrastructure remains inadequate.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 3 / 4

The government is not known to illegally monitor online communications. People are generally free to engage in private discussion while in public spaces, but some topics are taboo offline and online, such as discussion of issues affecting LGBT+ people. Political actors tend to threaten individuals critical of them with civil defamation suits, which can increase self-censorship.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 3 / 4

Freedom of assembly is constitutionally guaranteed, and Liberia has a history of public protests and civic actions. The government has previously mandated brief restrictions on internet access during protests, but social media was freely used during the 2023 election period, which was also marked by large rallies.

Score Change: The score increased from 2 to 3 because social media blocks were not imposed during election-period rallies.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 3 / 4

Numerous civil society groups and nongovernmental organizations, including human rights organizations, operate in Liberia. However, groups focused on LGBT+ issues tend to keep a low profile for fear of retribution.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 2 / 4

Unions are free to form and mobilize and are well organized. The rights of workers to strike, organize, and bargain collectively are recognized and realized in practice. However, the law does not protect workers from employer retaliation for legal strike activity.

Labor disputes can turn violent, particularly at mines and rubber plantations. However, a May 2023 strike against mining firm ArcelorMittal was resolved peacefully.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but it is impeded by corruption, backlogs, and funding shortfalls, particularly in rural areas.

Critics have raised concerns that the outcomes of some trials seem predetermined and perceive the judiciary as being controlled by the executive or working to advance its agenda.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4

The right to due process is constitutionally guaranteed but poorly upheld. Many people accused of crimes spend more time in pretrial detention than the length they would serve for a guilty sentence. In April 2023, the UN Development Programme reported that 71 percent of all inmates were pretrial detainees. Prison conditions are very poor, and detainees and prisoners continue to report abuse and threats by law enforcement agents and prison guards.

Citizens with financial means bribe judges to rule in their favor. Arbitrary arrests by law enforcement agents remain a risk.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 2 / 4

The security environment in Liberia has improved dramatically since warfare ended in 2003 and there is freedom from war and insurgencies. However, citizens largely view the police force as corrupt and unprofessional. The police are additionally underfunded.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 2 / 4

Some minority ethnic groups continue to be stigmatized as outsiders, and the Muslim population experiences some discrimination. LGBT+ people face social stigma and the threat of violence.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 3 / 4

Though some unofficial border checkpoints remain active—and border patrol agents sometimes attempt to extract bribes—people are largely able to move freely.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 2 / 4

Conflicts over land remain common. Many originated during the civil wars and subsequent displacement and resettlement. Others are the result of

opaque concession agreements. Judicial backlogs limit the opportunity for legal redress.

The 2018 Land Rights Act (LRA) formalized community ownership of ancestral land. However, the Liberia Land Authority lacks the capacity to deal with emerging disputes.

The LRA offers greater land rights for women, but customary practices that prevail in much of Liberia disadvantage women on issues such as inheritance of land and land ownership after divorce.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 2 / 4

While men and women enjoy equal rights under civil law, gender disparities are common in customary law, which remains dominant in much of rural Liberia and disadvantages women in matters including inheritance and child custody.

Violence against women and children, particularly rape, is pervasive. The government recorded 1,975 cases of gender-based violence in 2022, most of which were cases of rape, sexual assault, or other sex offenses.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 2 / 4

Human trafficking for the purpose of forced labor and prostitution remains a problem, despite government efforts to enhance the country's antitrafficking capacity. In its *Trafficking in Persons Report 2023*, the US State Department noted that one official was prosecuted and convicted of involvement in trafficking.

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