

# Unveiling the Peril of Protest Votes: An Enlightenment to Guide Political Behavior in Liberia

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**Abstract:** Considering the Liberian society as the contextual setting or background, this study interrogates protest votes as another form of political behavior. It employs the conceptual analysis approach categorized as one of the kinds of qualitative research methods. Using the frustration-aggression theory as its theoretical framework, the paper unveils the inherent peril or risk associated with protest votes unknown to registered voters. It sees protest votes as an emotional response due to the dissatisfaction with incumbent candidates to realize campaign promises. On the premise that frustration has the proclivity to affect logical reasoning, the paper equates dissatisfaction to frustration which has implications for protest votes. Based on this premise, which is empirical, the paper argues that evidenced by the clamor (“I am calling from the most abandoned district”, “2023 is coming”) ahead of the 2023 elections, the Liberian society might witness a cyclical or repeated phenomenon of previous election results prompting the increasing clamor.

The paper concludes whether the argument proffered herein is empirical or not, it does not take away the fact that protest vote is an emotional decision of voters’ dissatisfaction. As an emotional response influenced by frustration, it has the proclivity to affect their judgment during elections. For this reason, the paper cautions those making the clamor to be mindful because the frustration behind the inclination may result in illogical judgment. And finally, the paper clarifies that this caution is not in any clever or smart way to support and endorse the reelection of the incumbent leadership or candidates.

**Keywords:** Elections, Frustration-aggression theory, Liberian society, protest votes,

## I. INTRODUCTION

The results of the 2014 special senatorial election proved beyond reasonable doubt that it was a gain for the opposition bloc (Congress for Democratic Change) evidenced by the inability of incumbent candidates especially from the ruling Unity party to retain their seats. History recalls only two incumbent Senators, Prince Y. Johnson from Nimba County, elected in 2005, and Jewel Howard Taylor of Bong County, retained their seats (Butty, 2014).

Similarly, in the 2017 Presidential election, incumbent Senator George Manneh Weah won 61.5 percent of the total vote and won 14 out of Liberia's 15 counties. He overwhelmingly defeated Vice President Joseph Boakai representing the ruling Unity Party (VOA, 2017).

During the December 8, 2021, special senatorial election, the Liberian society witnessed similar political behavior evidenced by the majority of the winners from the opposition bloc unseating the incumbent candidates from the ruling Coalition

for Democratic Change (CDC) (Karmo, 2021). A particular case in point can be seen from incumbent Senator Abraham Darius Dillon Montserrado County, a member of the opposition bloc that in two distinct elections overwhelmingly vanquished two candidates from the ruling party CDC, Paulita Wie (Frontpage Africa, 2020) and incumbent Rep. Thomas Fallah (Mengonfia, 2021).

Placed under the lenses of social scientists, the above social phenomena are expressions of political behaviors that typify protest votes. It indicates complete dissatisfaction of the electorates or voters that forced them to decline the renewal of the social contract between them, the ruling Unity Party, and incumbent senators. This behavior would in other words suggest a lesson that could have been utilized by the elected officials to address the aspirations of the electorates. On the contrary, some electorates continue to complain and express dissatisfaction with some incumbent elected officials of the current political system. Some called on radio platforms or talk shows that “they are calling from the most abandoned districts”, “2023 is coming, they will see”, “we will teach the same lesson we did to the 2014 Senatorial election by rejecting almost all the senators. We will make sure they will not be reelected”, “We will make President Weah one term President in the history of Liberia”.

All these expressions connote something important about protest votes that may be unknown to the electorates this paper seeks to unveil. What the paper seeks to unveil is the danger associated with protest votes viewed as the crux of the paper.

For the record, this article is not in any way intended or appears to promote any political institutions directly or indirectly. It is solely an academic paper that offers enlightenment as a contribution to knowledge.

Structurally this paper is interrogated from four segments. This first segment, a research imperative lays out the theoretical framework to guide subsequent discussion in the paper. Precisely, it emphasizes the frustration-aggression theory that explains protest votes. The second segment provides a conceptual analysis of protest votes. Importantly, it puts the Liberian society into context about protest votes. The third segment unveils the danger of protest votes. In other words, a provides a hint that could be used to guide political behavior. Finally, the last segment concludes the paper.

## II. METHODOLOGY

As a form of qualitative method, this article in particular employs a conceptual analysis method whereby the concept 'protest votes' is critically analyzed in the Liberian society. As a method of inquiry, conceptual analysis is intended to clarify, identify, and give specific meaning to words (Baldwin and Rose, 2009):

A critical review of the literature on protest votes also forms part of the methodology in the paper. The literature on protest votes was sourced from the Advanced Google and Google scholar search engine, and Bielefeld Academic Search Engine.

### *Theoretical Framework*

To understand and appreciate the issue in this paper, proper comprehension of the underlying theoretical framework is necessary to guide the study. Therefore, this paper adopts the frustration-aggression theory that offers logical explanations for protest votes.

### *Frustration-Aggression Theory*

Pioneered by the early original works of Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939), the frustration-aggression popularly known as the 'frustration-aggression hypothesis' positions among the most seminal and prolific theories in research on aggression. From its inception in the late 1930s till current, the theory has been applied and studied in a variety of academic disciplines in social sciences such as sociology, ethnology, criminology, social psychology, etc. at the macro-level in human societies. This paper is now applied to both sociology and political science at the macro-level.

In paraphrase, the progenitors of frustration-aggression theory assume that aggression is a result of frustration (Dollard & Miller, 1939). The theory argued that when people or society's expectations are blocked by external factors, they experience frustration which, in turn, creates an aggressive drive and this can lead to aggressive behavior that affects society. As proposed by Dollard (1939), Frustration connotes the feeling of tension that occurs when our efforts to reach a goal are blocked and consequently leads to aggression at a given time or instantly.

In their contribution to the theory, Haner and Brown's (1955) research findings revealed that the closer a person is to achieving a goal, the more intense the effects of frustration will be on the subsequent aggressive behavior of the person (Harris, 1974; Breuer and Elson, 2017). In other words, as would be appropriate, the research findings suggest that when goals, expectations, aspirations, etc. are critical to the survivability of individuals, the likelihood of intense frustration is inevitable.

From another dimension, Berkowitz (1989) redeveloped the frustration-aggression hypothesis in a way that most recent research on the causes and effects of frustration use today. Berkowitz argued that frustration causes negative affect, and this negative effect elicits aggression.

All the above contributions of frustration-aggression theory occur at the micro-level that involves the behavior of individuals and small groups. Arguably, this kind of phenomenon has no implications for the disruption of society in general. On the other hand, the theory can also be examined from the macro level. In the fascinating book '*Why Men Rebel*', Gurr (1970) argues at the societal level, frustrations can, for example, be caused by severe economic recessions, a lack of or restricted access to resources, or systematic and/or institutional discrimination against certain groups. Feierabend and Feierabend (1966) described this kind of situation as "systemic frustration". Such macro-level applications of frustration-aggression theory to societies can also be understood through a revolutionary lens.

As the main focus of the theoretical framework, this aspect of the frustration-aggression theory explains all the social protests that led to regime change in some parts of the world recently. To put it differently, this theory can also be used to explain riots and revolutions, which both are believed to be caused by poorer and more deprived sections of society who may express their bottled-up frustration and anger through violence. For example, the most recent protest in Sri Lanka (Perera, 2022); the protest that ended the nearly 30 years of Omar al-Bashir's regime in Sudan (BBC, 2019); the protest that ended the 27 reigns of Blaise Compaore, one of Africa's longest-serving rulers in Burkina Faso (CBC News, 2014), etc. undisputedly, economic factors and violence were common to these protests just cited in this paper.

Interestingly, the theory also posits that aggression, which could be physical violence, verbal, riot, or protest, is not always directed towards the target that is not the source of the aggression (Displaced aggression) but also directed toward the legitimate target responsible for the frustration leading to aggression (Nickerson, 2021). The recent protests just cited not too long ago are classic examples. The aggression was directed at the government as the legitimate target.

### *Conceptual Underpinning*

In order to have a better understanding and appreciation of the issues in this article, a proper understanding of the underlying concepts of the study are necessary. The key concepts in this study include political behavior, elections, and protest vote

## III. POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

As one of the key concepts in the studies of political science that persist throughout time, political behavior enjoys scholarly attention. In the words of Professor Jaime Settle, political behavior is simply defined as the study of how people think, feel, and act concerning politics (Settle, 2014). Settle opines that people display political behavior through public opinion, ideology, partisanship, political knowledge, participation, campaigns, the media, and polarization.

According to Olalekan (2022), "political behavior may be defined as any action regarding authority in general and

government in particular”. Considered an addition to the list of what constitutes or exemplifies political behavior, Olalekan (2022) includes voting in elections, activism in interest groups, illegitimate political activities (including coups d’état, terrorism, revolutions/rebellions, protest, resistance, social movement, and apathy).

Richard Rose (2007) broadly defined political behavior as the study of the behavior of political actors such as voters and politicians. From Settle’s and, Olalekan’s definitions of political behavior, it is easy to infer the behavior of voters that is often manifested during elections, protest votes, and ad campaigns. The behavior of politicians manifests mainly through propaganda, manipulation, buying votes, deception, consistency, inconsistency, reciprocity, etc.

From a careful analysis of the definitions of political behavior, the below inference emerged.

- Political behavior examines actions and acts of individuals, rather than characteristics of institutions such as political parties legislature, executive, judiciary, etc.
- The behavior of the individuals or groups of individuals is the primary unit of analysis.
- Depending on the manifestation as in protest or protest votes, political behavior can be defined as a collective behavior that is also of serious interest to the study of sociology.
- It is not only confined to voters, but also the government. For instance, the inclination of an incumbent government to rig elections exemplifies political behavior.
- Political behavior is always influenced or triggered by a number of socioeconomic and political factors. This is because how people think, feel, and act concerning politics as asserted by (Settle, 2014), got to be caused by something. For example, a protest vote is considered the prime focus of this paper is influenced by the voters’ or registered electorates’ dissatisfaction with the incumbent regime. This is where the theoretical framework (frustration-aggression theory) of the paper fits or comes in. In this case, the people feeling and actions concerning politics are influenced by dissatisfaction and frustration.

Another typical example could be vote buying and vote selling. In African politics, it is no doubt about poverty is identified as the main driving force behind voters selling their votes to politicians. In this example, voters’ feelings and actions concerning politics are influenced by the theory of reciprocity that offers them no durable solution to their aged problems.

### *Elections*

From a political science perspective, an election is one of the most important rights of citizens conceptualized as the franchise or the right to vote. According to Dorling Kindersley, “an election is defined as the process of voting someone to be their political leader or representatives in government.” (Kindersley, 2022). As a universal political culture sustained and legitimized by constitutional provisions, it varies in different political systems. However, it is popularly done through a secret ballot in modern democracies. It is not a political behavior but a platform for political behavior. For example, protest votes happen during an election, vote buying or vote selling happens during elections, a campaign happens during an election, politicians engage in propaganda to influence voters’ decisions during elections, etc.

As a process, the conduct of elections is governed by laws in every society as free and fair. According to political scientist Robert Dahl, “free and fair” is identified as one of the “institutional prerequisites” of democracy. For Dahl, an election is “free and fair” when coercion is comparatively uncommon. Dahl’s assertion resonates with contemporary standards definitions such as voter registration, voters have access to reliable information, citizens can run, all voters are able to vote, voters are not intimidated, voting is free from fraud, ballots are counted accurately and the correct results are reported, and the results are respected (LibertiesEU, 2021). Interestingly, these standards defining “free and fair” elections complement chapter seven (7) of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, And Governance adopted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in May 2004.

In African politics, “free and fair” elections remained debatable. This is evidenced by election disputes, particularly fraud or irregularities adjudicated by Supreme courts or national high courts. In most instances, results are not respected. A contemporary example can be seen in the recent Kenya elections in which the main opposition leader Raila Odinga of the Azimio La Umoja (Declaration of Unity) refused to respect the results announced by the electoral commission chairman (Yusuf, 2022). At last, the Supreme Court confirms William Ruto’s victory against Raila Odinga (Olewe, 2022).

### *Protest Vote*

As an example of political behavior, a protest vote connotes a vote cast in an election to demonstrate dissatisfaction or disapproval with the choice of candidates or the current political regime (Southwell, 1998). In other words, a protest vote explains an election in which the overwhelming voters or electorates denied the continuity of the incumbent government or the choice of the incumbent ruling party due to failure to fulfill campaign promises. In the words of Rosenthal and Sen (1973), a protest vote communicates that some portions of the electorates are dissatisfied with the existing status quo. Similarly, a protest vote is also defined as “a ballot cast for a candidate with a minimal chance of winning, to register dislike for the other candidates (Ballotpedia, n.d.). According to the FindLaw (2020), protest voting “generally occurs when a voter



decides to cast their vote for nobody or a candidate or party that the voter does not expect to win". As it appears, this definition is complicated as such requires elucidation. It asks the question, what indicates or tells that the victor was never expected to win the election? The answer may not be empirical. However, from an opinion poll or voter perception survey, it can be assumed that a particular candidate will not win the election probably because he/she lacks the numbers, popularity, no political base or constituent, not the incumbent that has what all it takes to win the election at his/her disposal or advantage, etc. For example, by the parity of reason, who could have expected the landslide victory of the opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema in the 2021 elections in Zambia against the incumbent president standing in an advantageous position (Mfula, 2021)? Similarly, who could have expected the landslide victory of the opposition leader Adama Barrow in the 2016 elections in The Gambia (BBC News, 2016)? These two opposition leaders in Zambia and The Gambia have political bases or constituents and popularity but not the kind of resources at the disposal of the incumbent presidents that lost the elections in Zambia and The Gambia

In summary, not every defeat in elections is a protest vote. For a vote to be considered a protest, the following must come to bear:

1. The contesting candidate must be perceived as the favorite but defeated massively because of his/her affiliation or alignment with the ruling establishment or party believed to have disappointed the masses, personal ideology, or unpopularity with the electorates.
2. Massive defeat of the incumbent candidate due to any of the same reasons reflected in number one. The opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema's landslide victory over incumbent Edgar Lungu in Zambia's presidential election is one of the classic examples of protest votes. Hichilema got 2,810,777 votes against Lungu's 1,814,201, (Mfula, 2021) Similar example can be seen in the Gambia election in which the opposition leader Adama Barrow, who won more than 45% of the vote (BBC News, 2016). In 2000, Abdoulaye Wade of the opposition Senegalese Democratic Party defeated incumbent Abdou Diouf of the Socialist Party of Senegal (Owete, 2016). In 2000, Anerood Jugnauth of the Militant Socialist Movement of Mauritius defeated incumbent Navinchandra Ramgoolam of the Labour Party (Owete, 2016). In 2012, Macky Sall of the Alliance for the Republic routed Abdoulaye Wade of the Senegalese Democratic Party in Senegal (Owete, 2016).
3. Impossibility of cheating or election rigging by the contesting candidates outside the realm and influence of incumbent establishment or political party. The two landslide victories of the opposition leaders cited in number two are practical examples. Considering

their positions outside the realm and influence of power, the rigging of the election arguably remains impossible. In African politics, the accusation of rigging elections is often directed at the incumbent party that appoints election commissioners or electoral authorities. The perception has been the incumbent establishment has everything at their disposal or advantage to rig the election.

4. Must be a landslide or overwhelming victory that removes the incumbent candidate from the position. Again, the elections from Zambia and The Gambia cited in this paper are practical examples.
5. In summation, a protest vote must favor an opposition or independent candidate. In other words, the reelection of the incumbent candidate whether won by landslide or overwhelming votes cannot be defined as a protest vote. This is because the victor (incumbent candidate) is not the antagonist in the race or political battle. He/she is the protagonist. So, how can such victory be a protest vote? Moreover, retention or reelection simply implies satisfaction of the voters or electorates.

#### *Typology of Protest Vote*

Protest votes manifest in many forms. They are:

*Null ballots*- are ballots incorrectly or wrongly marked that rendered them invalid votes (Hill and Young, 2007). This definition suggests that voters intentionally null the ballots to reduce the expected candidate's chances of winning. However, it leads to a question that pleads an answer. Why will the voters choose to null the ballots instead of voting to increase the numbers of whom the protest favors? The reason is very simple, the null or invalid ballots may also affect whom the protest vote favors because it has the proclivity to reduce all the candidates in the race.

In African politics, null ballots as it is defined is not always the case. It usually happens due to the illiteracy of the voters exacerbated by poor voter education. For instance, during Nigeria's April 2011 presidential election, 1,259,506 (3.19%) votes were rejected as invalid out of the 39,469,484 votes cast (Adegboyega, 2019).

Similarly, in Ghana's 2020 Presidential election, invalid votes accounted for 2.33% (IDEA, n.d.). The Incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo won the election with 51.30% votes (Kokutse, 2020). In these distinct elections, the incumbent president Nana Akufo-Addo in Ghana, and Goodluck Jonathan in Nigeria won (INEC, 2011, Kokutse, 2020).

On the other hand, invalid or null votes in the 2021 Zambia election accounted for 124,906 (IFES, 2021) won by the opposition leader.

*Blank Votes*- as the name implies, are ballots with no markings on them. This typology of a protest vote seems to be very

uncommon or rarely happens in African elections. Ballot papers are always marked as valid or invalid votes.

*Spoiled ballots*- are ballots that have been defaced, crossed out, or otherwise marked in a way that makes the ballot ineligible (Driscoll, Amanda, and Michael, 2014). This other typology of protest vote is just like an invalid vote or ballot papers. This is because when something is not eligible, it is the same as invalid.

*Abstention*- as a form of a protest vote, it could be equated to low turnout simply because the registered electorates are discouraged and completely lost trust in the entire system. In other words, abstention occurs when registered voters have the opportunity to cast their vote but choose not to do so because they are annoyed with politicians that failed them. The recent presidential election in Kenya was marked by a historic low turnout in which the commission recorded a 56.17% voter turnout, figures which cannot compare to Kenya's past two elections (Makori, 2022), (Wasike, 2022).

In the mind of the registered electorates, nothing good will come out of the election because all the candidates are the same. Therefore, to them, it is good to stay away from the elections. It also suggests that electorates don't want to regret their votes. What the electorates don't know about this typology of protest votes is that it may result in the wrong candidate or retaining the same candidate believed to have failed them. This is because the incumbent or wrong candidate already has their supporters. Therefore, those abstaining from voting are only reducing the winning chances of the preferred candidate. Because of frustration, they don't think that their votes could make a significant difference in their lives.

*Tactical Protest Votes*-this typology of protest vote manifest when electorates cast their ballot for the candidate most likely to defeat the undesirable candidate, even if the candidate for whom they are voting is not the most preferred candidate perceived to win the election (Findlaw, 2020). This form of protest vote is usually associated with elections in Africa. Below are a few examples that could explain tactical protest votes.

In 2012, Hassan Sheik Mohamud of the Peace and Development Party beat Shariff Ahmed of the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (Owete, 2016).

In 2014, Abdiweli Mohammed Ali of the Ururka Dadaka Puntland routed incumbent Abdirahman Mohamud Farole in Puntland. The incumbent lost the election by just one vote (Owete, 2016).

In 2014, Peter Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party defeated President Joyce Banda in Malawi (Owete, 2016).

In 2015, Beji Caid Essebsi defeated the interim leader of Tunisia, Moncef Marzouki (Owete, 2016). In these elections, none of these opposition leaders were perceived to eliminate the incumbent.

*Organized Protest Votes*- taking the form of abstention, tactical vote, this typology of protest vote occurs when a large number of people consciously vote against the incumbent or preferred candidates. All the votes won by opposition leaders against the incumbent presidents outlined by Owete, (2016) are examples.

*Linking Protest Votes to the Theoretical Framework (Frustration-Aggression Theory)*

In retrospect, the basic assumption that underlines the frustration-aggression theory is when people are frustrated, they experience a drive to be aggressive towards the source(s) of their frustration (Dollard & Miller, 1939). In politics, people or registered voters or electorates engage in protest votes simply because of dissatisfactions with the political system that has failed them and therefore avenge their dissatisfaction directly at the incumbent. Inarguably, dissatisfactions lead to frustration that can stimulate aggressive behavior. Of course, a protest vote is a form of nonviolent aggressive behavior displayed by the electorates toward the incumbent political party or candidate responsible for their frustration. Frustration or dissatisfaction is caused when what Liberians referred to as the "bread and butter" issues critical to their basic human needs postulated by the American Psychologist, Abraham Maslow in 1943 are blocked by the actions of the very politicians they elected through the ballot box. All the African elections in which opposition leaders or candidates defeated the incumbent speaks to the veracity of the theory. The dissatisfactions of the masses or majority electorates prompted protest votes. If they were satisfied with the incumbent leadership, they would have retained them in the positions or offices.

#### IV. CONTEXTUALIZING PROTESTS VOTE IN LIBERIA

This segment of the paper contextualizes protest votes in Liberia. Precisely, it looks at the typology of protest votes that characterized elections in Liberia. Below are a few typologies of protest votes that characterized elections in post-conflict Liberia.

*Null, Spoiled, or Invalid votes*; there have been nulled, spoiled or invalid votes in all elections in post-conflict Liberia. However, as per the definition, it seems uncommon in Liberia's elections. However, the possibility cannot be ruled out. Arguably, the main reasons have been attributed to voters' illiteracy and poor civic voter education by the National Election Commission. Below are instances of invalid votes believed to be attributed to poor or lack of civic voter education programs across the country that could have adequately sensitized electorates before the day of voting.

In the 2017 Presidential and Representatives Elections conducted across the country, invalid votes accumulated to 84,057 (The New Dawn, 2017). By the definition of invalid or null votes, this situation cannot be viewed as a protest vote simply because it happened due to the ignorance of the voters.

A similar instance can be seen from the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 referendum marred by a huge number of invalid votes,

precisely accounting for over 60 percent of the total votes (Doodoo, 2020). On grounds that the referendum fails to attain Constitutional two-thirds of registered voters' votes, it went against the interests of the incumbent government. Therefore, it is safe to make the inference that it was a protest vote. However, the main reason for this fiasco stemmed from an inadequate civic voter education program for all eight propositions. As the 1986 Liberian Constitution required, the program could have happened at least a year before the referendum. Arguably, if this was a protest vote despite it agreeing with the definition of null votes cited in this article, the electorates would have marked "No". Instead, the electorates or registered voters nulled the ballot paper because of the challenge of understanding the eight propositions.

*Organized protest vote:* most people in Liberia may not be aware of this typology of protest vote in Liberia's elections. As a reminder, this typology of protest vote occurs when a large number of people consciously vote against the incumbent or preferred candidates. It could take the form of abstention, or tactical vote. Below are a few instances.

During the 2014 special senatorial election, among the 12 senators that stood for reelection, only two returned to the capitol building. In other words, the ten incumbent senators lost the election (Morris, 2014). They were massively flogged by their opponents. Arguably, this tactical or organized protest vote could be the first of its kind in post-conflict Liberia.

The 2017 presidential and representatives' elections in which the major opposition leader, George Manneh Weah defeated Vice president Joseph Nyumah Boakai of the incumbent ruling party is another instance of tactical or organized protest votes. Among the fifteen counties in Liberia, Senator George Weah won fourteen indicating a landslide victory evidenced by 61.5 percent of the more than one million votes tallied (MacDougall and Cooper, 2017).

During the December 8, 2021, special senatorial election, the opposition bloc unseated the incumbent candidates from the ruling Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) (Karmo, 2021). A spectacular case in point can be seen from incumbent Senator Abraham Darius Dillon Montserrado County, a member of the opposition bloc that in two distinct elections overwhelmingly vanquished two candidates from the ruling party CDC, Paulita Wie (Frontpage Africa, 2020) and incumbent Rep. Thomas Fallah (Mengonfia, 2021). Dillion won over eighty thousand (80,000) or sixty percent of the votes cast (The Independent, 2020).

C.B. Barshell from the Unity Party (UP) defeated the incumbent Bill Twehway from Congress of Democratic Change (CDC) in electoral district #3, Montserrado county.

Electoral district #5 in Montserrado is another interesting case. Rustonlyn Suacoco Dennis from another opposition bloc defeated the incumbent Henry Fahnbulleh from the ruling establishment.

In electoral district # 8 of Montserrado County, Acarous Moses Gray from the CDC defeated the incumbent Rufus Neuville. Representative Gray has been consistently accused by some of his constituents that voted for him of allegedly abandoning them as evidenced by the construction of his home on the Robertsfield Highway, outside Monrovia, and his continuous presence and contributions to youths and others in Grand Cape Mount (Johnson, 2021). Probably because of the fear of protest votes, it is interesting to know that Rep. Gray ahead of the 2023 general and presidential elections in Liberia is contemplating or indecisive to contest for reelection in electoral district # 8 (Johnson, 2021).

#### *The Danger of Protest Votes*

Considered the crux of the paper, this segment begins with a question. Do protest votes pose any danger to society? The answer to this critical question commences with what could be viewed as the premises.

Depending on the nature or background of the participants under study, emotion impacts logical reasoning or judgment.

Jung, et al, (2014) opined that emotion can have a significant effect on the way we think, decide, and solve problems or affect logical reasoning.

Admitting to the veracity of the negative impact of emotion on logical thinking, MercyCare Business Health Solutions offers therapy for thinking logically through emotions (mercyCare.org, n.d.).

Similarly, Mainstream corporate Training opines frustration that possibly leads to anger affects the ability to think, and memory, creativity, and concentration weaken. The institution further argues that thoughts become accusatory, exaggerated, and rigid because of anger. They concluded that when assumptions are treated as facts, it is possible to be irrational (Mainstream Corporate Training, 2021)

Finally, (Blanchette, n.d.) argued that an induced emotional state influences deductive reasoning. She concludes that reasoning is affected by the emotional value of stimuli.

From the above premises, it makes no error to equate protest votes to frustration defined as an emotional response to the failure of the political system to deliver on campaign promises. Bearing in mind that a protest vote is also defined as dissatisfaction with the existing status quo or failed political regime, it has the proclivity to stir up frustration. With close reference to the premises, frustration negatively impacts or influences logical reasoning, thinking, or judgment. Moreover, frustration is an emotional stress response or not reaching the desired expectations or outcome that is so germane to one's survivability or basic human needs (Brennan, 2020). Therefore, the tendency for voters' or electorates' judgment or logical reasoning to be affected by their emotions during voting cannot be ignored or ruled out. In other words, because a protest vote is an emotional response to dissatisfaction that leads to frustration, registered voters may not be able to make a logical



judgment about the candidates they want to elect to replace the incumbent. What is important for them is to satisfy their emotional impulses that have implications for the wrong choice or electing the wrong *candidates*. This is why the Chinese philosopher Confucius cautions "When anger rises, think of the consequences." Put it more differently, because the voters are angry with the failed political regime or candidates the inclination for them to think illogically about the consequences of their decisions is possible. What goes on in their mind is to punish the incumbent candidates responsible for their dissatisfaction or frustration. It can be argued that many of the people on different independent radio programs making the clamor "I am calling from the most abandoned district", '2023 is coming' are victims of their protest votes. Arguably, this same increasing clamor ahead of the 2023 elections could be cyclical or a repeat of previous protest votes. This is because the clamor explains an indication of the prospective voters' frustration that is so risky. If care is not taken about how to handle the protest vote in the making, the same clamor ("I am calling from the most abandoned district") will be heard after the election.

## V. CONCLUSION

In light of the Liberian society defined as the contextual setting or background, this paper has explained protest votes as another form of political behavior within the framework of the frustration-aggression theory. The paper established that the increasing clamor ahead of the 2023 elections is a clear indication of a protest vote in the making in which the danger thereof may be unknown to the prospective electorates or voters. For this reason, the paper cautions those making the clamor to be mindful because the frustration behind the inclination may result in illogical judgment. This is not in any clever or smart way to support and endorse the reelection of the incumbent leadership or candidates. It is just to expose the danger behind the inclination.

The paper concludes whether the argument proffered herein is empirical or not, does not take away the fact that protest vote is an emotional decision of voters' dissatisfaction. As an emotional response influenced by frustration, it has the proclivity to affect their judgment during elections.

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