

An Overview of Election Violence in Africa: Prospects for a Violence Free Election in Liberia- 2023

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ABSTRACT

Since the advent of the twenty first century, many national electoral processes held the world over especially among African states have been characterized as having achieved a range of outcomes. These have covered an extensive spectrum ranging from groundbreaking and in other cases revolutionary strides towards the institutionalization of democracy through the ballot box. At the other end of this vast spectrum exists the continuum of negative conduct associated with voting namely rigging and electoral fraud; precipitating violence that in some instances escalates into civil conflict. While elections are often considered as the silver bullet solution to conflict, the intensity of violence is sometimes so high that even an election considered free, fair and transparent may not be free of violence or intimidation. There have been numerous accounts of acts of violence and electoral intimidation on the African continent and elsewhere on the globe within the last decade or so. For this reason, election violence as a topic for academic discourse is receiving increasing attention.

Liberia is a country emerging from a fourteen-year protracted civil conflict and it is grappling with healing of wounds caused by its civil strife. Concurrently, Liberia has been struggling to foster national unity in a divided state given its historical, social economic and political inequalities, as well as, increasing division amongst its citizenry that has developed for almost the last two centuries of its existence as a nation state.

Within less than a year from now (October 2023) Liberians will be going to the polls to participate in presidential and general elections) as mandated by the Constitution of the Republic. The poll will be principally held to elect the president and members of the National Legislature which comprises senators and representatives for the fifteen political sub-divisions within the country. However, judging from the unfolding trend of events in the current electoral process, there are already signs to suggest that the road to elections may possibly turn turbulent. The exacerbation of a highly politically charged atmosphere may have left doubts in the minds of many that the pending 2023 Presidential and general elections in Liberia may not be free, fair or transparent; and least of, all prospects of violence.

Liberia's electoral processes have received support and assurances from international partners and regional organizations through provision of funds, election materials and oversight for the conduct of these elections. Additionally it is of utmost significance that there is genuine commitment expressed by the Government of Liberia to fulfill its share of responsibilities both financially and morally. But what is left is the fulfillment of these responsibilities in practical terms.

Moreover, the National Elections Commission (NEC) of Liberia as an independent body is under obligation to conduct itself as an impartial body that should strive to minimize influence or manipulation locally and or internationally. Notwithstanding the NEC is to play this role in an impartial manner. Likewise, political parties and actors also need to play their role in a responsible way; while the voters themselves must

conduct their actions in a peaceful manner in order to ensure the prospect for a violence free electoral process in Liberia's upcoming 2023 presidential and general elections. All of these should contribute to the holding of a free, fair and transparent election free of violence and intimidation.

Keywords: Civil Conflict, Democracy, Elections, Division, Violence, Voters,

INTRODUCTION

One may ask, what is election or electoral violence? Elections or electoral violence may be described as a variant and or sub-set of political violence. However, "electoral violence is an activity motivated by an attempt to affect the results of the elections – either by manipulating the electoral procedures and participation or by contesting the legitimacy of the results"(Liisa, 2007).

As such, the key objective of electoral violence is aimed at influencing the behavior of the voters or political actors in a physical or psychological manner in the interest of one of the contesting parties. Electoral violence can be further expressed as "Any harm or threat of harm to any person or property involved in the election process, or the process itself, during the election period (Lyons, 1998)." These include pre-election activities, destruction of campaign posters and other election campaign materials of any of the parties, or potentially divisive propaganda messages against an opposition party, as well as, attempts to delay or prevent the voting rights of members of the opposing party. Others are violation of the legal framework and all other negative acts that have the propensity to unlawfully influence the results which do not reflect the verdict of the ballot box. It must be noted that electoral violence can take place at any stage of the electoral process. It can happen before or on the polling day; or even after the elections process. This was in the case of neighboring Guinean Elections in 2010 after presidential elections were held. In the case of Liberia it was as a result of election rigging in the 1985 elections that precipitated Liberia's fourteen years civil conflict which began on 24December of 1989.

However, one may deduce that election violence is due to the so obvious link between the electoral process and its aftermath and that great emphasis must be placed on understanding the root cause or causes of electoral violence within a particular region or country. It is furthermore crucial to understanding individual nation's electoral history in order to forecast and gauge the susceptibility of the outbreak of violence. Hence, the emphasis on fragile democracies shall not be taken lightly; especially, during periods in which the electoral process is nearing or when completed. It is obvious that not only fragile democracies are the sole perpetrators of electoral violence.

The events of January 6, 2021 in the United States where the seat of power (Capitol Building) was raided, exemplified the instance of electoral violence in the aftermath of presidential elections. Furthermore, this incident presented a stark contrast to the widely held narrative that election violence is commonplace in and hitherto always considered as synonymous with fragile democracies as opposed to stable democracies. The United States of America as a major promoter and champion of liberal democratic values, electoral processes and the smooth transition of power, experienced on January 6, 2021 an unprecedented attack on its capitol building. This assault became a major inflection point that led to a paradigm shift in the acceptance of violence as a political tool (Kleinfeld, 2022).

There are growing schools of thought that point to the excessive liberal democratic practices as being a contributing causes of electoral violence. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to state that, elections are also perceived as one of the catalysts or accelerators of violence. An example of this is the fact that elections may escalate existing tensions, especially when poll outcomes are deemed not credible by a significant segment of the population.

This becomes more evident with the remote causes of electoral violence often being related to poorly

managed, chaotic processes and glaring deficiencies and crises in the run up to elections. The 1985 presidential elections in Liberia are a typical example of a election following a military coup and political instability that followed in the following years. This election was marked by intimidation and violence meted out against opposition political parties by the ruling National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) whose leader and Head of State was Samuel Kanyon Doe. Similarly, the 1997 elections that brought Charles Taylor to power observed as free and fair was however considered by others as greatly influenced by fear and intimidation (Harris, 1999).

Similarly so the 2005 Presidential Elections was generally deemed as free and fair though was not free of contestation by the leading opposition party, Congress for Democratic Change (CDC). These elections were seen by some as an end to Liberia's fourteen years civil conflict and a transition to democratic governance. This was largely the viewpoint of international and some local stakeholders who played a significant role that contributed to the peaceful atmosphere in which these elections were held under the auspices of an international peacekeeping force.

This paper seeks to clarify some of the apparent causes of election violence; particularly in Africa with emphasis on prospects of a violence free election in the October 2023 Liberian Presidential and General Elections. From the standpoint of ascendancy to leadership in the African context, the practice of holding elections utilizing western styled governance systems was introduced to African societies by the occupying European powers towards the end of the colonial era. The electoral practices, which were incorporated into the leadership and governance structures of newly independent African states, became a part of democratic values and processes.

BACKGROUND

Historically, there were very few, if not, any such activities in form of canvassing or voting by citizens as the means of selecting their leaders or transition of power from one leader to the next in pre-colonial Africa. The modern Republic of Liberia founded by freed black slaves with support from the American Colonization Society (ACS) and the Government of the United States of America in 1822 adopted western culture and democratic values of holding elections long before many countries on the continent gained independence in the 1950s, 60's and at later times.

With this background, it became obvious that the holding of elections under a western styled democracy in many African countries was a new phenomenon that became a challenge to the pre-existing socio-economic and political dynamics among the peoples of the newly established African republics on the continent. Furthermore a basic rationale is the assertion that the approach in international relations that is concerned with forms of states and their international expressions has a significant contribution to make to the study of political transitions and possibilities for the consolidations of democracy (Lindberg, 2001). This particular dimension of the potential in international relations theory has been ignored (Herbst, 1990). This has never been more apparent especially in relation to election violence in Africa.

Aspects of elections in Liberia encompass the insights of both international relations and historical sociology. A major element of the elections process is situated primarily on the idea of the state's consolidation of power, in particular reference to a somewhat refined "western states" structure. Yet, there is still not a consensus on what the implications for transitions to, and consolidation of, democracy might be. According to (Lindberg, 2001) Incentives for state action originate from two sources: the domestic and the international. Not only international "factors" often referred to in comparative studies of regime change can be discussed and understood, so can domestic processes that constitute internal incentives for state reproduction; hence, the two spheres of international and national politics can be studied as parts of one process where states rearticulate or fail to rearticulate, adapt or fail to adapt, transform or fail to transform

themselves (Lindberg, 2001).

Arguably, in some state- society relationships, traditional comparative accounts from sociology as well as political science have much experience to draw upon. There is much concern about institutional reform in Africa during the last thirty years or so. Perhaps there is still something to learn from history, and temporal situations as well as spatial comparisons. Presumably, this may be a prime cause as to why many newly independent African republics have been finding it difficult to adapt to what is described as “democratic values and processes” introduced by western nations in the conduct of free, fair, transparent, or more so, violence free elections on the continent. This article suggests that what should be compared are not so much concrete events as the operative logic of institutions. It may be that the logic of the neo-patrimonial form of governance in the typical African state is not that far from the logic of governance in earlier, as well as, contemporary, and European political institutions and formations.

Consequently, many post-colonial elections on the African continent which may have somewhat been labeled by observers as free, fair and transparent still maintained reports that largely associated with intimidation and violence, before, during, and after the polls. This is in consideration to the views of many analysts that elections are not the root cause of violence, but rather perceived as a catalyst or accelerator of violence. As such, elections may either escalate existing tensions, especially when they are not regarded as credible or void of intimidation or legal contestation. Given these variables and outcomes on the history of elections generally, one may suggest that the remote cause or causes of electoral violence are often related to poorly managed, ill-managed or un-managed crises deeply rooted in the historical background, as well as, socio-economic inequalities or political divides of a given country. The history of elections particularly in Liberia is no exception.

This article seeks to conceptualize some causes of election violence in general, so as to help expand the understanding of the categories of such violence. Many authors have defined causes to electoral violence in different ways. While it is important to gather all possible causes of electoral violence on the African continent, it should include others elsewhere on the globe. Therefore, since electoral violence occurs in various contexts in different parts of the world, it certainly becomes difficult to make a single-minded conclusion on generally applicable causes.

This is why the outcomes of elections in many countries outside the African continent have generally not been desirable and have raised significant concerns for all. For example, the processes and results of elections in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Indonesia in recent years have been characterized by violence; thus leading to the loss of human lives and destruction of properties. Likewise, evidence that countries in Central and South America were preparing for elections gave rise to a number of violent incidences in these countries at an alarming rate. In Serbia, electoral violence often happens when the elections are accompanied by low standards of democracy (authoritarian rule) combined with limited space for a competitive race and ethno-cultural rivalries (Mochtak, 2016).

Furthermore an all-pervading example in contemporary geo-politics is in Ukraine where, Victor Yanukovich, was elected as Ukraine’s fourth President in 2010. He was un-democratically removed from power in a 2014 violent coup d’état leaving Ukraine in a civil conflict that has had far reaching geo-political implications up till present and for the foreseeable future.

In neighboring Russia, electoral violence is used to prolong authoritarian rule. In so doing, the state uses an advanced coercion strategy, covering physical and psychological dimensions (Smeltzer & Buyon, 2022). Additionally in other countries such as Belarus, Azerbaijan and Cambodia incumbent leaders used violence in their elections to maintain their stay in power (State rebuilding after State Collapse, 1998).

Since the end of World War II the United States of America has taken up the mantle as the champion of

democratic values. Yet in contemporary times it has experienced unprecedented election violence that has cast doubts concerning the degree of freedom and fairness in its electoral process. A recent example of this is the unprecedented case of post-election violence that led to the death of several persons and property damage in the nation's capital. This is to demonstrate that election violence has no borders or limitations and neither is it exclusive to a particular form of government or body politic. Based upon the recent experience there is major attention now being paid to the fast approaching 2024 elections in the United States. With election violence happening in the recent past there remains the likelihood of a repeat occurrence especially when rivaling candidates will once again be running against each other in an increasingly polarized American society.

In recent years in West Africa a large number of elections have been held in a seemingly peaceful environment, with relatively few acts of violence being recorded. Yet as an example, since the 1990's, numerous countries in this part of Africa have seen electoral periods as an opportunity to express intimidation, if not violence. However, (Reeder & See berg, 2018) found an overall high-risk of electoral violence during local elections and presidential elections in Sub-Saharan African Countries; citing that stakes are even higher when it comes to presidential elections. The following countries in West Africa namely: Togo(2005), Nigeria(2007), Cote D'Ivoire in 2010-2011 and Guinea(2010), are some of the examples of States that experienced electoral violence. These forms of electoral violence have all had their roots traced to their historical backgrounds, socio-economic and political inequalities. Understanding these variables is essential to implementing a proactive approach that would aid in deescalating tension and eventually mitigating of election violence amongst contesting parties.

Historically, Liberia experienced post-elections violence under the disguise of political violence in 1871 when an angry mob influenced by defeated Republican Party candidate of the minority elite mulattos attacked and killed Edward James Roye, Liberia's first non- mulatto but rather dark-skinned president (Marinelli, 1964).He was accused falsely of attempting to manipulate the Liberian Legislature to change the constitutional tenure of the presidency from two to four years and for misuse of the loan of 1870 (Marinelli, 1964).However, reforms in the election laws of Liberia under a one- party form of government which lasted for more than a century eventually saw similar changes in the tenure of the presidency from four to six years and for senators and representatives, to nine and six years respectively (Liberian Constitution Revised, 1986).

Since independence in 1847, records have shown that elections in Liberia have not been devoid of fraud or violence. In fact, the Guinness Book of Records has recorded presidential elections held in Liberia's 1927 elections as one of the most fraudulent elections in world history(McWhirter, 1982). This was the result of the election between presidential candidates Charles D.B. King and Thomas J. Falkner; with 15,000 registered voters that saw King garnering 229,527 votes; far more than the total population of the country at the time, while his rival, Fulkner obtained 9,000 votes (Mwakikagile, 2001).

What has been described as Liberia's first democratic elections held in 1997 (Lyons, 1998) that brought former Liberian President Charles Taylor to power which was viewed as free, fair and transparent was largely characterized by intimidation (Harris, 1999). It became obvious that many Liberians who were tired of war, coupled with a feeling of a looming threat of going back to war if Taylor was not elected President, played a major role in the election of Taylor in the 1997 Presidential elections. Furthermore, it has been observed how football legend and former Senator, George Weah, the twice defeated presidential candidate alleged being cheated through electoral fraud had subsequently developed an uncompromising resilience to continue running and eventually won the presidency with support from his followers in the 2017 elections against his main rival former Vice President, Joseph Boakai with an categorical zero tolerance stance towards defeat. This stance by Weah had also been viewed as another form of intimidation by those who were in opposition and not in support of Weah. At the same time, the elections were also intended to elect

new senators and representatives whose tenures were to be ending after serving nine and six years respectively in keeping with provisions in the Liberian Revised Constitution of 1986.

It is important to note that the 1986 Revised Constitution further calls for the holding of elections every six years not only for senators, representatives, vice president, and the president, but also for local leaders including chiefs, city mayors and other local officials in the Executive Branch of Government. Article 56 states that: “ All cabinet ministers, deputy and assistant cabinet ministers, ambassadors, ministers and consuls, superintendents of counties and other government officials, both military and civilian, appointed by the President pursuant to this Constitution shall hold their offices at the pleasure of the President.” However, there have been national debates about whether superintendents, city mayors, and other local leaders should be elected as opposed to being appointed. Although, calls have been made towards this end, it requires either a constitutional amendment or the enactment of a law to effect it. Therefore, in furtherance of democratic practices, elections of these local leaders should be strongly considered in the near future to strengthen democratic values across the country.

However, it is up to the Liberian people and political actors to demand successive governments to ensure that elections of certain categories of local leaders such as those mentioned earlier be held as prescribed. In the absence of the totality of these prescribed democratic practices there remains a void in the democratic governance structure in Liberia’s Republican and Unitarian form of Government; and as such constitutes a constitutional violation.

There have been inconclusive outcomes to several investigations into election violence and irregularities whose outcomes are yet to be made public by the National Elections Commission of Liberia since 2019. An example of this took place during the District 15 representative bi-elections where an opposition candidate was physically attacked and property damaged (African Star, 2020). Furthermore the post –senatorial bi-election held in Lofa County witnessed citizens bringing out the “Bush Devil” or traditional mask dancer from the secret society to protest the denial of Senator-Elect Samukai not being allowed to take the seat after defeating his opponent in Lofa County. Additionally, following alleged threats of violence the ruling political establishment supported candidate was declared winner in the senatorial bi-election in what was described by opposition as planned acts of fraud by election officials of the Independent National Elections Commission of Liberia (African Star, 2020). Such allegations were refuted by the National Elections Commission. Nonetheless such allegations, as well as, any such allegations should be thoroughly investigated to an absolute conclusion so that an erosion of confidence in the possibility of having free and fair elections will not take place in 2023.

Having presented examples of electoral violence and alleged perpetrators of electoral violence that have been experienced in recent times in Liberia, there are growing concerns in many quarters (among local and international stakeholders) about the outcome of the forthcoming presidential and general elections in Liberia in 2023.

Furthermore, since the appointment of the National Elections Commission by the head of state in 2017, many just as under previous administrations especially those in opposition have expressed doubts and pessimisms about the credibility, reliability and independence of the commission and its ability to conduct free, fair and transparent elections come 2023. Critics within the opposition have accused the commission of the following:

- 1.) That the head and members of the Board of Commissioners of the National Elections Commission appointed by the president are members of the ruling party (Coalition for Democratic Change), CDC; as such, their handling of electoral matters and decisions of the commission will be influenced and be driven by party loyalty in favor of the ruling establishment;

- 2.) That the commission has failed to ensure that the current voters roll is “cleaned-up”. The cleaning up and updating of the final voter roll is meant to prevent dubious names from appearing on the final version of the 2023 voters’ roll, and that names of registered voters will not be omitted. Fears are if these are not done, the Voters Roll will be vulnerable to fraud and inaccuracy;
- 3.) That the Commission has failed to implement elections investigation rulings handed down by the Supreme Court of Liberia; especially in the case involving the two factions of the (Liberty Party), LP;
- 4.) That the election commission has demonstrated the lack of will to enforce electoral guidelines having to do with pre-campaigning and other mis-conduct that have the propensity to be a catalyst for election violence;
- 5.) That election officials were proven to be involved in elections fraud that give the C.D.C winning candidate in the recent senatorial bi-elections in Lofa County edge over other contesting candidates; and,
- 6.) That the head of the National Elections Commission, Madam Davietta Brown Lansana, has failed to exonerate herself from financial corruption indictments by the Liberian Anti- Corruption Commission, (Dodoo, 2021)

These and many other concerns and accusations of missteps taken by the commission prior to the conduct of the forthcoming 2023 Presidential and General Election, that if not resolved, may cast a shadow of doubt over the ability of the commission to conduct free, fair and transparent elections; thus, potentially prompting political actors and others to call for the replacement of the entire board of commissioners of the National Elections Commission. The listed concerns above are not unique to only Liberia’s elections but are similar to the reactions and conclusions often raised by political contestants across the African continent. Elections in Africa generally and Europe specifically have tended to excite political parties and their members.

PIVOTAL ISSUES

Other pivotal issues in the way of the conduct of the 2023 presidential and general elections that have generated controversies in many quarters have to do with the following concerns:

- The conduct of an accurate National Housing and Population Census in 2022

It is very crucial that the conduct of the recurrent National Housing and Population Census in Liberia in 2022 is a prerequisite acting cardinal to providing accurate information not only on the general voting population, but also, to aid in mitigating electoral boundary disputes in political sub-divisions of the country prior to the conduct of elections.

- The Procurement and Introduction of a Biometric Voting System in the Pending 2023 Elections

The conduct of the bio-metric voting system is new to the voting process in Liberia. While this system may be seen as ideal and modern, concerns have been expressed, citing issues and challenges such as: A) high-illiteracy rate, B) timeliness of the introduction of this new system, C) Internet and electricity challenges, D) road accessibility and local connectivity throughout the country, E) electronic data management, among others.

- An Establishment of a Comprehensive Elections Dispute Legal Framework to Adjudicate Election Matters in a Transparent, Timely and Fair Manner.

With the prospect of a highly competitive election there is a strong likelihood that the Supreme Court of the

Republic of Liberia may be called upon to adjudicate in the final analysis. Additionally the judicial and legislative system of Liberia has been described as weak and plagued with corruption (Kaydor 2014). Moreover, since the establishment of the State of Liberia, the Executive Branch headed by the president has been regularly described as an “imperial presidency” which is termed due to the constant interfering by the executive with the workings of the legislature and courts, including judges of the Supreme Court. The most recent and notable instance that attracted international attention was that of retired Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Liberia Kabineh Muhammad Ja’neh Vs. The Republic of Liberia. With the claim and subsequent ruling in his favor by The Regional Community of Justice Court, also known as ECOWAS Court only adds to the diminishing of confidence in the impartiality of the judicial system in Liberia. The claim and subsequent ruling pointed to his rights being violated as a result of his impeachment by the House of Representatives and subsequent removal from office by the Senate of the Republic of Liberia as the Associate Justice of the Supreme Court following a trial in which he represented himself (Community Court of Justice ECOWAS, 2021).

Such episodes may further pose as a concern with many potentially doubting election results especially if the Supreme Court is expected to render a final ruling concerning election disputes and or results. Under these situations, there are serious questions among some as to whether the judicial and other paralegal systems will be left alone to render impartial judgments on election matters; especially, when opposition political figures as well as the incumbent presidential candidate may have already declared themselves as the winning candidates before the completion of the conduct of the pending elections in 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Amongst numerous recommendations, what is primary is dialogue among key national and international stakeholders. This includes Liberian Civil Society, government, non-governmental organizations, International organizations, donors, academics and the general public. It is only through regular dialogue and constant engagement that citizens will feel fully part of the election process. Only through dialogue can the issue of free and fair elections be addressed and emphasized. Free and fair elections play a crucial role in political transitions by evolving democratization and promoting political liberalization.

The way forward to guarantee that all political actors participate in free, fair and transparent elections free of violence in Liberia come 2023 is proposed as follows:

Credible Electoral Administration & Effective Oversight of Electoral Processes

- The Liberian Government should demonstrate a high degree of maturity and tolerance in every stage of the campaign and electoral process to ensure a level playing field in the political space; as well as, equal access to state resources for all political actors;
- The use of para-military units should not be encouraged by both the ruling party and opposition political parties and candidates;
- Political parties and candidates including the ruling party should be proactive and take actions to ensure that their supporters do not engage into a contest of verbal and physical attacks on each other;
- All political actors should strictly abide by the National Elections Commission’s guidelines in every stage of the electoral process;

Effective Oversight of Electoral Processes & Consensus-Building for Democratic Reform

- Every political actor and party must ensure that, their supporters desist from the expression of negative ethnic and religious sentiments that have the propensity to breed undue tensions in the political space of the electoral process leading to the conduct of the pending 2023.

Representative and competitive multi-party systems:

- That the national elections commission must demonstrate to all political actors and parties that it can be trusted to be independent, impartial, and non-partisan to conduct a credible, free, fair and transparent elections in 2023;
- It is important that before these elections, trust must be built amongst the political, actors and parties by setting the rules of the competition, including the establishment of a legal framework to ensure speedy an impartial handling of electoral disputes that may arise;

Impartial Electoral Frameworks:

- That the time frame (start- time & end -time) given to political parties and their supporters to campaign be strictly adhered to and enforced irrespective of political party or actors.
- Ensuring that the voters roll be cleaned up and up dated to guarantee the transparent production and actual distribution of voter cards &to negotiate potential sources of conflict;
- All signs of electoral miss conduct when reported to the commission must be acknowledged and promptly investigated and acted upon irrespective of political party or actor to serve as a deterrent. Similarly the NEC must be proactive when electoral misconduct is observed and act swiftly; and,
- During the electoral period which runs from electoral campaigns to the announcement of the results, transparency must prevail in all electoral operations; including, handling, packaging and transporting of ballots to final destination for secure storage before the actual counting of ballots for the announcement of results;

Inclusion of women and disadvantaged groups:

- Increasing political inclusion should be a major objective in Liberia. Democracy is more likely to develop and endure when all segments of a society are free to participate and influence political outcomes without suffering bias or reprisal. But in many new and emerging democracies, large portions of the population are excluded from politics based on their ethnicity, religion, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation.

Finally, the NEC must hold inter-party and stakeholder dialogue as frequently as possible so as to form a consensus on how to address issues such as:

- a. The conduct of the 2022 National Housing and Population Census;
- b. The bio-metric voting system to be introduced by the NEC in the 2023 elections;
- c. The Voters' roll clean up and updating, and all other matters that may arise in and after the electoral process.

CONCLUSION

These recommendations will be useful to guarantee unhindered participation of all parties and persons in the pending 2023 elections; as well as, ensuring that the elections will be credible and the results be accepted by all. Meanwhile, it is noteworthy to mention that the international partners have in past elections provided material, financial and moral support to Liberia's post-conflict elections and are willing to do same for the 2023 elections. We should also acknowledge contributions of regional and the governing body of the African Union (AU), which has also been quite extraordinary and commendable in these endeavors.

For example, to reinforce the exercise of democracy maintaining peace and helping to eliminate electoral violence in particular, the Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS) has put in place a

number of mechanisms including the supplementary protocol on democracy and good governance (Aning,1988). The protocol provides for straight compliance with constitutional provisions in electoral practices: Consequently, it forbids obtaining or maintaining power through unconstitutional means and defines the parameters for the conduct of peaceful, credible, free, fair and transparent elections in member states (Aning, 1988).

Similarly, the African Union (AU) also contributes to reducing electoral violence through its 2012 memorandum of understanding on stability, development, and cooperation. This memorandum indicates that transparent credible elections are a key element which promotes respect for the fundamental and universal right to participatory and democratic governance. Also, it forbids unconstitutional changes or removal, of governments. In collaboration with various regional organizations on the continent and including the United Nations, different bodies such as UNOWAS, makes every effort and provides support to contributing towards the eradication of electoral violence not only in West African countries, but throughout the African continent. Liberia has been one of the beneficiaries of such support. The choosing of leaders through the practice of holding relatively free and fair elections is a new phenomenon introduced to not just nations of Africa but other nations elsewhere on the globe in the nineteenth century and twentieth century. Liberia is an example of such on the African continent.

Despite the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 21 which states that, “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government as expressed in the periodic and genuine elections”, (Godos, 2015) many democratic countries in Africa and elsewhere that have subscribed to this practice have too often found it difficult to uphold this democratic value by the difficulties in holding of free, fair and transparent elections. In many cases elections that may be described as free, fair and transparent have been characterized by acts of intimidation and violence resulting to the loss of life, destruction of property and sometimes civil conflicts (Harris, 1999). Finally, given the prevailing political climate, intense political rivalry and uncertainty over a peaceful electoral process in Liberia, one may remain skeptical in their prediction as to whether the 2023 Presidential and General Elections in Liberia will be free, fair and or void of violence.

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