

The CMC and Political Renewal in Contemporary Liberia: Opposition Politics or a Genuine Agent of Democratic Change

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of the Citizens' Movement for Change (CMC) in Liberia, investigating whether it functions as a genuine agent of democratic renewal or primarily as a protest-oriented opposition group. The research is grounded in democratic renewal theory, complemented by opposition politics theory, to explain the party's emergence, behavior, and potential influence. Using a mixed-method qualitative design, the study employs a case study approach supplemented by document and content analysis, as well as direct observation, to examine the CMC's organizational structure, strategic orientation, political messaging, and capacity for grassroots mobilization. The analysis reveals that the CMC shows significant promise in promoting democratic transformation through local engagement, reform-focused initiatives, and accountability advocacy. At the same time, its effectiveness is limited by structural and contextual factors, including its hesitancy to form coalitions, dependence on charismatic leadership, public perceptions of its leader, and Liberia's complex ethnic and religious landscape. The study concludes that strengthening internal governance, implementing reform agendas at the grassroots, strategically managing public perception, and fostering inclusive support across societal divisions are critical for the CMC to consolidate its role as a driver of democratic change. These findings offer insights into the dynamics of opposition politics and the challenges and opportunities for democratic renewal in hybrid political systems.

Keywords: Agent of democratic change, Citizens' Movement for Change, Grassroots mobilization, Liberia, Opposition politics, Political renewal,

INTRODUCTION

Arising within Liberia's increasingly competitive multiparty system, the Citizens Movement for Change (CMC) has quickly emerged as a significant newcomer in the country's contemporary political landscape. Under the leadership of Nimba County Representative Musa Hassan Bility, the movement presents itself as an alternative to established party traditions, portraying its mission as confronting long-standing political elites and promoting governance reforms rooted in popular participation or grassroots politics. Following its formal establishment and inaugural national convention in early 2025, the CMC has focused on consolidating its organizational structure and asserting its relevance as a national political actor. Its agenda emphasizes transparency, inclusive socio-economic development, and a clear break from the alliance-building and patronage networks that have historically shaped Liberian politics (Johnson, 2025; Cole, 2026).

Liberia, recognized as Africa's oldest republic, has long experienced intense party rivalry, fluctuating political coalitions, and persistent calls for democratic reform. Dominant parties such as the Unity Party (UP), which has been influential since post-conflict politics, have often been criticized for reinforcing existing power arrangements while failing to resolve enduring challenges such as corruption, slow economic growth, and fragile state institutions (Afrobarometer, 2021; BTI Transformation Index, 2024). Against this backdrop, the rise of movements like the CMC signals widespread public dissatisfaction with traditional political actors and reflects growing demands for more accountable, inclusive, and participatory governance models.

A central feature of the CMC's political identity is its explicit refusal to align with established political parties, including the governing UP, and the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), the main opposition, which the movement accuses of poor governance and abandoning the aspirations of ordinary Liberians (Gee, 2025). In addition, the CMC has sought to position itself as a defender of democratic principles by openly contesting state actions or the traditional status quo it views as undermining national development. Through this stance, the movement, whether aware or unaware, portrays itself as a protector of civil liberties, a grassroots movement, and freedom of expression. These dynamics invite critical debate over whether the CMC constitutes a genuine vehicle for political renewal or merely represents another opposition group within Liberia's already crowded political landscape (Gee, 2025).

In light of this context, the study presents a critical examination of the role of the CMC within Liberia's evolving democratic framework through four interconnected segments. The first segment, which also serves as the introduction, outlines the study's objectives, significance, and methodology.

The second segment covers two thematic areas as a research imperative. Firstly, it presents the theoretical framework, placing particular emphasis on democratic renewal theory, complemented by the opposition politics theory. Together, these theories offer a cohesive framework for analyzing the structural conditions leading to the emergence of the CMC, its strategic behavior as a political challenger, and its contribution to the deepening of substantive democracy in Liberia. Secondly, this segment discusses the concept of an agent of democratic change. This core Political Science concept, which aligns with the theoretical framework, requires clarification as it encapsulates the CMC's public projections.

The third segment offers a comprehensive overview of the CMC's history, highlighting its organizational structure, strategic direction, political messaging, and ability to mobilize grassroots support.

As the central focus of the paper, the fourth segment evaluates the CMC's potential to serve as a genuine catalyst for political renewal rather than as a traditional opposition group. Additionally, it examines the challenges the CMC faces in translating reformist rhetoric into concrete democratic outcomes, leading to the conclusion and subsequent recommendations.

Objective of the Study

Specifically, the study assesses whether the CMC functions as a genuine agent of political renewal or primarily operates as a protest-oriented opposition movement by analyzing its organizational structure, strategic orientation, political messaging, capacity for grassroots mobilization, and the challenges it faces in translating reformist rhetoric into meaningful democratic outcomes.

Significance of the study

This study contributes to academic discussions surrounding opposition politics, political renewal, and democratic consolidation in post-conflict African states, with a specific focus on Liberia. From a policy standpoint, the article provides valuable insights for policymakers, civil society organizations, and political actors who are exploring alternative methods of promoting participatory and accountable governance. Additionally, it offers an evidence-based evaluation of emerging political movements and their potential impact on democratic practices and political behavior in Liberia. Ultimately, the study holds comparative significance as it serves as a reference point for analyzing similar reform-oriented political movements throughout Africa.

Methodology-Research Design

This article adopts a mixed-method qualitative design with a focus on case study research design supplemented by document/content analysis and direct observation, all of which are appropriate for in-depth investigation of contemporary political phenomena like the CMC in Liberia. The Case study approach enables a researcher to explore complex social and political phenomena within their real-world context, where boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018; Plano & Walton, 2023).

The document and content analysis, which is grounded in a comprehensive literature review, serves as secondary data (George, 2024; Lumivero, 2025) that enables the researcher to examine not only the political messaging and strategies employed by the CMC but also its capacity for grassroots mobilization and organizational structure. In addition, direct observation was utilized as a tool, drawing on the researcher's practical experience (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023) to elucidate the challenges encountered by the CMC.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored in the democratic renewal theory, complemented by opposition politics theory to explain the emergence, behavior, and potential impact of the CMC.

The Democratic Renewal Theory

The democratic renewal theory, popularized by Marshall Ganz and buttressed by other scholars, is not a singular, unified doctrine like Realism, liberalism, or Marxism. Instead, it serves as a broad framework within democratic theory and political science that addresses the "crisis" facing contemporary democratic systems and seeks avenues for revitalization (Gagnon & Vasilev, 2016; Ganz, 2024). This theory arises from concerns regarding democratic decline, citizen disenchantment, elite capture, and institutional stagnation in established democracies. The author posits that the theory sheds light on how new political movements emerge in reaction to democratic stagnation, elite dominance, and widespread citizen disappointment (Ganz, 2024). Ganz further contends that effective renewal projects must transcend electoral politics by addressing the root causes of discontent, particularly by ensuring economic security and dignity for citizens. Tcherneva (2025), contributing to this discourse, argues that renewal necessitates more than merely overcoming authoritarian figures at the ballot box; it involves dismantling the conditions that render such figures appealing. This endeavor calls for a positive and compelling vision that guarantees economic security and dignity, alongside the establishment of true economic democracy. Based on the assertions of these authors, this paper submits that politicians often leverage citizens' dissatisfaction with a faltering status quo or ineffective governance to initiate movements that resonate with public expectations.

In the opinion of this paper, a significant limitation of this theory is that politicians often exploit citizen frustration with a declining status quo to mobilize movements, yet these efforts frequently fail to achieve substantial structural change that aligns with the aspirations and expectations of the populace.

Research from Afrobarometer indicates a pronounced discrepancy in Africa between the strong demand for democracy and citizens' satisfaction with its actual performance. While many Africans endorse democratic principles, they feel that the quality of democracy being delivered is inadequate (Mattes, 2019). Although the publication date of this research may fall short of the conventional citation standard of at least five years, the current political realities throughout Africa strongly validate the author's findings. These findings align with Ganz's argument that democracy can stagnate when institutions fail to meet citizen expectations, resulting in discontent that is often exploited by emerging political movements and actors.

In summary, Africa's political evolution in the 21st century embodies many key concerns of democratic renewal theory: a profound desire for meaningful participation, dignity, and economic inclusion, alongside ongoing challenges in translating that desire into institutions that genuinely serve the citizenry.

In the context of Liberia, this article draws on Ganz (2024) and Tcherneva (2025) articulations to frame a pivotal question regarding the CMC: Is the CMC merely responding to public discontent with the political establishment, specifically the UP regime, or is it fostering structural reforms that could revitalize Liberia's democratic system, germane to the aspirations of its citizens?

In conclusion, the theory supports the emergence and evolution of the CMC into a political party holding the UP government's feet to the fire (accountability) and, at the same time, provides a lens for evaluating the CMC's claims of bottom-up governance and popular participation.

Opposition Politics Theory

Similar to the democratic renewal theory, the opposition politics theory does not represent a singular, unified framework like realism, liberalism, or social contract theory. Instead, it functions as a broad framework within democratic theory and political science, articulated by prominent scholars such as Robert A. Dahl, and Louwarse & Zorina. This theory emphasizes the importance of opposition movements in checking the power of ruling elites, expanding political space, and promoting accountability. As his contribution to the discourse, Dahl (1966) framed opposition as essential to democracy and pluralism. In the opinion of this article, Dahl's concept of pluralism assumes that society consists of diverse groups with varying interests. Opposition parties and movements serve as institutional channels through which these interests are expressed. In this sense, opposition reflects the diversity of social, economic, and ideological interests in society. It prevents a single group or elite from dominating political life. It enhances representation by giving voice to minorities and dissenting viewpoints. Therefore, opposition sustains pluralism by translating social diversity into political competition. Moreover, the author likely means that opposition functions as a watchdog over those in power. By criticizing policies, exposing corruption, and presenting alternative proposals. In essence, opposition is not a threat to democracy; it is one of its foundational pillars.

Louwarse and Zorina (2025) conducted an empirical examination of citizen preferences regarding the roles of opposition in democratic politics. While traditional political science often focuses on opposition behavior from the perspective of parties, institutions, or political elites, this study shifts the focus to the citizens themselves. It reveals what ordinary citizens expect from opposition parties in real democracies. According to the authors, citizens desire three main functions from opposition parties: oversight, cooperation, and the provision of alternatives. Although the authors' empirical analysis includes Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, each with distinct advanced political systems, the concept also resonates with contemporary African politics, albeit in varied ways, as evidenced by substantial scholarly research and survey data. In Bratton and Logan's (2025) working paper, which remains relevant despite the passage of decades, citizens increasingly demand that their leaders be held accountable not just during elections but through continuous oversight of government performance. Similarly, Mangena and Cloete's (2025) analysis underscores how citizens are advocating for genuine alternatives to superficial democracy.

In essence, Louwarse & Zorina's three citizen priorities manifest in unique ways, influenced by historical, institutional, and socio-economic contexts. Nevertheless, they collectively reflect a broader movement toward more responsive, inclusive, and accountable political systems in Africa.

In Liberia, the CMC's refusal to align with established parties and its confrontational approach to the current political landscape under the UP government exemplify the theory of opposition politics. Rather than adopting a critical yet supportive stance or seeking alliances with the UP, the CMC assumes the role of a political critic and challenger. The movement has publicly accused UP officials of breaching Liberia's Code of Conduct and failing to uphold democratic standards and has even filed formal complaints with the Office of the Ombudsman (The Analyst News, 2025).

Conceptualization of Agent of Democratic Change

This study seeks to refine the concept of the agent of democratic change from the perspective of opposition politics. Within this framework, an actor, whether individual or collective, operating outside the established ruling power structure is considered. These actors engage in strategic actions and promote ideas that challenge entrenched power, broaden political contestation, and advance democratic frameworks, norms, or participation in contexts where such elements are limited, constrained, or in decline. This definition encompasses political parties and elites that may initiate reforms, dismantle elite monopolies, or negotiate pathways for democratic openings (Szmolka, 2022).

Recent studies on opposition politics in Africa highlight that actors outside government now play a far more layered and strategic role in democratic development than earlier theories suggested. In many hybrid or semi-authoritarian systems, where checks and balances are weak and leadership turnover is restricted, opposition groups operate within tight institutional limits. Traditional democratization literature tended to treat opposition

parties mainly as electoral challengers seeking office. However, more contemporary research shows that their activities go well beyond elections. They often call out abuses of incumbency, organize public dissatisfaction, frame alternative policy visions, and reshape political debate, even when they are unlikely to win power in the short term (Bertrand 2021).

Within Africa's hybrid regimes, opposition actors frequently work to weaken dominant-party control and widen the arena of political competition without necessarily triggering immediate regime change. Their influence lies not only in electoral outcomes but also in redefining public discourse and expanding civic space. This perspective resonates with broader arguments that political struggle on the continent is deeply shaped by structural conditions, such as colonial legacies, centralized state systems, and institutional fragility, which both restrict and shape how opposition groups function as potential drivers of democratic reform rather than mere electoral contestants (Dan Suleiman, 2025).

Similarly, opposition alliances in countries such as Nigeria show how coordinated strategies can be used to resist prolonged single-party dominance and counter attempts by incumbents to entrench their power, thereby helping to sustain political competitiveness where democratic standards are strained (Adetayo, 2025)

In addition, research on opposition communication in electoral-authoritarian contexts, including Tanzania and Zimbabwe, reveals how democratic rhetoric is adapted to local realities. Rather than simply echoing Western liberal models, opposition actors blend calls for democracy with locally grounded concerns and community-level aspirations, crafting messages that resonate within constrained political environments (Paget, 2024).

The empirical examples presented align with the concept of an agent of democratic change, as they highlight how actors positioned outside established power structures strategically engage in political contestation to expand democratic space. Opposition parties in hybrid regimes across Africa, along with coalitions in countries like Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, operate beyond the core ruling establishment, actively challenging entrenched authority and the patterns of dominant-party control. Through electoral participation, coalition-building, legislative resistance, and reform-oriented political messaging, these actors do more than merely compete for office; they enhance accountability, promote the alternation of power, and increase opportunities for citizen representation. Importantly, they operate within constraining or backsliding democratic contexts where institutional checks are weak, and incumbents often consolidate their power. In this regard, they embody the key characteristics of agents of democratic change: their external positioning relative to ruling elites, strategic participation in structured contestation, a normative commitment to democratic principles, and intentional efforts to deepen or defend a competitive political order.

While coalition-building is commonly linked to movements that seek democratic transformation, especially in dominant-party or hybrid political systems, the CMC's unwillingness to collaborate with other opposition parties does not automatically remove it from the category of agent of democratic change (Menjor, 2025). Its position can instead be understood through three analytically grounded perspectives.

To begin with, scholarship on African opposition politics makes clear that alliances are tactical decisions rather than obligatory standards. Reform-driven movements sometimes choose to remain independent to protect their ideological clarity, maintain organizational independence, and sustain credibility as alternatives to entrenched political elites (Ajwang, 2025; Resnick, 2011). If the CMC portrays other opposition parties as embedded within the same political establishment it aims to challenge, then its decision to avoid coalition arrangements may represent a calculated effort to distinguish itself as a transformative outsider rather than a routine opposition participant.

Secondly, Bernhard et al (2020) argued that the defining features of a democratic change agent extend beyond alliance formation. What ultimately matters is whether a movement deepens political competition and reinforces democratic principles. Should the CMC actively mobilize citizens, propose substantive policy alternatives, enhance accountability debates, and challenge the UP administration through institutional or civic mechanisms, it may still perform the role of an agent of democratic change, even without formal partnerships. From this standpoint, its agency is measured by its reform agenda and strategic engagement, not solely by its willingness to cooperate with others.

That said, Samet (2024) claims that rejecting coalition politics may also constrain its potential impact. In political contexts where opposition forces are fragmented, alliances can provide greater bargaining strength against dominant incumbents. For instance, in contemporary Liberian politics, it has been proven that no single political party has won an election without a strategic, broad-based alliance with other political parties. Led by George Weah, the CDC coalition solidified victory by partnering with Jewel Howard-Taylor (NPP) for Charles Taylor's base and Prince Johnson (MDR) for Nimba County support (The Nordic Africa Institute, 2018). Similarly, the current government led by the UP victory in the 2023 runoff was significantly supported by a broad alliance of other political parties, such as the Movement for Democracy and Reconstruction (MDR), the Liberia People's Party (LPP), All Liberia Coalition Party (ALCOP), Grassroots Development Movement (GDM) (ECG, 2024).

So, by operating independently, the CMC risks remaining largely rhetorical, shaping political discourse without acquiring the structural influence necessary to produce tangible institutional change. Consequently, its identity as an agent of democratic change depends on whether its independence broadens democratic space. If isolation undermines collective opposition strength, its function may resemble protest-driven politics more than sustained systemic reform.

In summation, although coalition-building can enhance democratic effectiveness, which exemplifies Liberian politics, it is not the only standard by which reformist agencies are judged. The critical question is whether the CMC's independent strategy meaningfully advances accountability, citizen participation, and competitive pluralism within Liberia's evolving democratic landscape.

Organizational Structure, Strategic Orientation, Political Messaging, and Grassroots Dynamics of the CMC

This segment of the paper provides an overview of the CMC's history, detailing its organizational structure, strategic orientation, political messaging, and capacity for grassroots mobilization.

Organizational Structure

Since securing its official registration prior to the 2025 senatorial by-elections, the Citizens Movement for Change (CMC) has moved quickly to consolidate and formalize its internal structures. The movement has developed an organized, layered leadership system consisting of national and regional coordinators, advisory bodies, and specialized positions dedicated to planning, research, and data management.

In the middle of 2025, the founder and Political Leader of the CMC, Representative Musa Hassan Bility, expanded the party's organizational presence by appointing regional coordinators in strategic counties, including Nimba, Bong, and Lofa. These appointments were part of a broader strategy to enhance internal coordination and extend the party's influence nationwide. The creation of offices such as the Vice Chair for Planning, Data, and Statistics, along with a National Coordinator responsible for Advisory Council Statistics, reflects a deliberate shift toward building a structured and professional party bureaucracy rather than operating as a loosely organized political movement (Africa-Press, 2025; Quoi, 2025)

Beyond establishing formal leadership positions, the movement has also approved a constitution and by-laws during a national convention, thereby giving legal and structural definition to its internal governance framework. This milestone gathering brought together delegates, community-level actors, and key stakeholders to consolidate a common vision for the organization and to position it for active participation in the political arena (New Dawn, 2025).

Strategic Orientation

The CMC deliberately presents itself as more than a mere protest organization, positioning itself as a forward-looking political movement focused on development and reform. Under Bility's leadership, the movement emphasizes principles such as good governance, accountability, inclusive growth, and empowering citizens, often drawing a clear distinction between its approach and that of the ruling UP. In public communications,

CMC officials have consistently turned down opportunities for negotiations or alliances with the UP, arguing that such cooperation would conflict with their reform-driven agenda (Gee, 2025).

The movement's approach to communication also focuses on promoting policy initiatives and development programs that reflect its broader vision for change. For example, in early 2026, Bility introduced a rural development program that included proposals for improving essential infrastructure, establishing health centers, supporting youth and women's empowerment, and providing microloans, demonstrating the CMC's dedication to tangible community improvements rather than just conventional political pledges (Doloquee, 2026; Wah, 2026).

Grassroots Dynamics

The CMC places strong emphasis on grassroots engagement as a key aspect of its strategy. Its expansion in local communities, especially in politically pivotal areas like Nimba County, Grand Bassa County, and Montserrado County, has been driven by active citizen involvement and the integration of community leaders. Prominent local personalities, including former legislators and experienced grassroots organizers, have been incorporated into leadership roles that connect the national leadership with local supporters. These positions aim not only to broaden the party's organizational presence but also to strengthen interaction with constituents on matters such as promoting women's participation, using data to guide policies, and enhancing community outreach (Africa Press, 2025; Wah, 2026).

In addition to holding formal positions, the CMC has developed programs that focus on local communities and directly engage everyday citizens, particularly youth and women. One example is the creation of the CMC "Girls Brigade," designed to empower young women and promote a political vision centered on integrity and national cohesion, rather than on tribal or sectarian loyalties. These efforts reflect the movement's strategy to build grassroots support and develop future leaders from within the communities themselves (Women Voices Newspaper, 2025).

Also, events featuring Bility in rural and urban settings, such as rallies in Grand Gedeh with hundreds of supporters, further illustrate the movement's capacity to attract grassroots enthusiasm and translate it into sustained political momentum ahead of key elections (The Analyst News, 2026).

In summation, the above factors highlight the CMC as an emerging political force, characterized by an expanding organizational framework, a strategic emphasis on governance reforms and community-level mobilization, and increasing involvement at the local level that extends beyond just election periods. The party's long-term impact will largely hinge on its capacity to preserve these structures, keep grassroots support active, and develop a unified national strategy ahead of Liberia's 2029 general elections.

Political Messaging

The political messaging of the Citizens' Movement for Change centers on:

Breaking from the traditional political status quo and critiquing established elites as self-serving. The movement presents itself as a departure from Liberia's conventional political order. The movement strongly condemns both the governing UP and the leading opposition, the CDC, claiming that neither has adequately served the interests of ordinary citizens. According to its narrative, successive administrations have fallen short in fulfilling commitments related to reform, effective governance, and national development. At the core of this position is widespread frustration over corruption and the persistent weakness of public service delivery (Suah, 2026; Cole, 2026).

Anti-corruption and practical governance. A core element of the CMC's public narrative frames corruption as the fundamental driver of Liberia's persistent difficulties and pledges a direct and uncompromising response to it. Bility depicts corruption as a destructive force that is steadily eroding national progress, leaving ordinary Liberians to bear the consequences through joblessness, deteriorating infrastructure, and weak public service delivery (Cole, 2026).

In communicating its agenda, the party underscores tangible initiatives to signal seriousness and follow-through. These include undertaking infrastructure improvements, assisting local community organizations, and maintaining close interaction with grassroots supporters.

Likewise, the CMC's 2026 agenda, unveiled at the beginning of the year, prioritizes road rehabilitation, job creation, broader access to healthcare, and the cultivation of national cohesion grounded in merit and effective leadership rather than political favoritism (Suah, 2026).

Selective opposition collaboration. While the CMC has resisted entering into official alliances with traditional political parties, it has at times worked alongside other opposition actors on matters related to protecting democratic norms and safeguarding civil freedom, such as publicly criticizing restrictions on civic space. This suggests a pragmatic, issue-based form of cooperation that remains consistent with the movement's core principles (Lomax, 2026).

Finally, pro-democratic reforms. The CMC supports changes to Liberia's electoral framework and broader political procedures, echoing long-standing demands from civil society groups and reform-oriented actors who seek to strengthen inclusion and fairness within the country's democratic system.

Although the party does not always provide comprehensive policy blueprints for these reforms, its public commitment to restructuring the system situates it within a reformist, pro-democracy tradition (Fellajuah, 2025).

Assessing the CMC Potential as an Agent of Democratic Change

Considered the central focus of the paper, this segment of the study or article evaluates the CMC's potential to serve as a genuine catalyst for political renewal versus its role as a traditional opposition group. Additionally, it examines the challenges the CMC faces in translating reformist rhetoric into concrete democratic outcomes, leading to the conclusion and subsequent recommendations.

The CMC Potential as an Agent of Democratic Change

Drawing on the analysis of the CMC's organizational structure, strategic orientation, political messaging, and grassroots dynamics presented in the third segment of this paper, one can reasonably conclude that the movement possesses considerable potential to operate as an agent of democratic change in Liberia. This potential is particularly evident in its emphasis on community-level mobilization, reform-driven rhetoric, and its stated commitment to accountability in governance.

From the perspective of opposition politics, however, an agent of democratic change is not defined merely by its criticism of incumbents. Rather, it is characterized by its capacity to foster meaningful accountability, articulate credible and coherent policy alternatives, broaden inclusive citizen participation, and advance institutional reforms that reinforce democratic norms and structures. When assessed against these criteria, the CMC demonstrates several attributes that align with the wider goals of democratic renewal and political transformation.

Accountability Advocacy

Through its consistent criticism of what it describes as governance shortcomings under the UP government, CMC presents itself as a monitoring force within the political system. By drawing attention to concerns related to transparency, corruption, and uneven policy direction, in theory, it suggests that the CMC seeks to strengthen both institutional checks among state actors and public oversight from citizens within Liberia's democratic order.

Alternative Political Narrative

The CMC presents itself as a transformation-focused political movement rather than a platform built on clientelism or patronage networks. Its public communication highlights institutional reform, active citizen participation, and the reorganization of governance structures. These themes align closely with broader debates in democratic renewal theory and contemporary scholarship on opposition politics.

Grassroots Mobilization

The establishment of the CMC "Girls Brigade" underscores the party's commitment to empowering young women and advancing a political vision rooted in integrity and national cohesion. This deliberate focus on cultivating robust local networks and actively engaging communities illustrates an approach that transcends mere negotiations among political elites. Should this trend persist, it could significantly enhance citizen participation in democratic processes and bridge the gap between state institutions and the general populace.

In summation, these features collectively signal that the CMC possesses the foundational attributes of an agent of democratic change, particularly in a hybrid political environment where democratic institutions remain fragile.

The Obvious Challenges the CMC Will Encounter

Despite these strengths, the CMC's transformative potential is constrained by several obviously observed challenges.

Rejection of Coalition Politics

In a politically divided environment like that of Liberia, cooperation among opposition groups is often crucial for facilitating institutional change and enhancing electoral prospects. This assertion is evidenced by the success of the CDC in the 2018 elections and the UP's triumph in the 2023 elections. These instances exemplify the dynamics of contemporary politics in post-conflict Liberia, which has proven that no single party can win elections without strategic alliance-building.

The CMC's hesitation to partner with other opposition parties could weaken its capacity to consolidate reform-minded forces into a cohesive alliance strong enough to shape legislative agendas or constitutional amendments. Although maintaining independence may help the party protect its internal unity and distinct identity, it also risks marginalizing it within the broader political arena.

Risk of Personalization

As is common with many newly formed political movements across Africa, the long-term survival of the CMC could depend more on the appeal and influence of its leader than on the strength of its institutional foundations. If mechanisms for internal accountability, leadership transition, and consistent policy development are weak or insufficiently structured, the movement may end up reproducing the same leader-centered political culture it claims to challenge. A classic example includes the decline of the People's Liberation Party following the death of its founder and political leader, Dr. Daniel E. Cassell. Under the leadership of Cassell, the PLP aimed to connect with Liberians who believed they had been sidelined by the dominant political parties. The party openly faulted the ruling CDC, accusing it of worsening economic conditions, tolerating corruption, and failing to deliver effective governance. To build public recognition and broaden its support base, Cassell and the PLP combined community-based humanitarian initiatives with outspoken public commentary and sustained grassroots engagement. Unfortunately, his death removed the party's central figure and charismatic leader, creating a leadership vacuum and weakening the PLP's cohesion and public appeal (Smartnews, 2023).

Public Perception of the CMC Leader

In Liberia's political landscape, opposition politicians often exploit public perception not only to influence voters but also to tarnish their opponents' reputations. The current leader of the CMC has been notably linked to both the UP and CDC, parties he now accuses of failing to fulfill their promises. Additionally, the court of public opinion continues to view Musa Bility as part of the corrupt system. Critics and independent observers have pointed to Bility's controversial business and political past, which includes a FIFA ban for ethical violations during his tenure with the Liberian Football Association and previous disputes over tax issues, factors that have negatively impacted his reputation among some Liberians (Conway, 2026).

In 2012, Bility, the owner and CEO of SCRIMEX Enterprise, was indicted for allegedly defrauding the government of \$350,000, with the government asserting that the evidence against his company was substantial

(Conway, 2026).

Furthermore, some political voices have expressed concern that Bility has resorted to leveraging ethnic or religious identity dynamics, warning that this approach may exacerbate divisions instead of promoting universal policy issues.

Overall, Musa Bility's public perception is mixed yet increasingly prominent, generating both genuine grassroots enthusiasm and ongoing scrutiny from rivals, the media, and civil society. His ability to translate his message into widespread voter support across the nation, beyond his established strongholds, will be a crucial test of how Liberians ultimately evaluate his leadership.

Religious Sentiment

Liberia is predominantly Christian, with current estimates indicating that roughly four-fifths of the population identifies with Christianity, while Muslims constitute a much smaller but significant minority. Although the Liberian Constitution formally upholds religious freedom and maintains a separation between religion and the state, Christian practices, language, and symbols remain highly visible in national life and public discourse (USDOS – US Department of State, 2024).

Even within this formally secular framework, religion occasionally enters the political arena. Public opinion research indicates that many citizens believe political leaders sometimes appeal to religious identity during election periods instead of focusing solely on policy issues. This suggests that religious differences can be strategically invoked for electoral advantage, and that opposition can use this as a tool to manipulate voters (USDOS – US Department of State, 2024; Womenvoices newspaper, 2024).

At different moments in Liberia's recent history, proposals have surfaced advocating for the country to be declared officially Christian. Such initiatives have generated resistance, particularly from Muslim groups who view these proposals as potentially exclusionary and threatening to their civic standing (Al-bakri Nyei, 2015; Nebo, 2015).

Given the strong influence of Christian institutions and identities within Liberian society, a Muslim political figure such as Musa Bility may encounter added layers of scrutiny shaped by religious considerations. Political rivals may subtly frame electoral competition along religious or ethnic lines, reinforcing identity-based distinctions (Johnson, 2025).

Scholars note that Bility's position as both a Mandingo, an ethnic minority frequently associated with Islam, and a practicing Muslim places his leadership within a broader test of Liberia's democratic inclusiveness. While many Liberians support cross-religious political participation, historical patterns of underrepresentation of Muslim minorities in government continue to shape certain public perceptions (Fofana, 2025). The sentiment surrounding this issue could be seized and twisted by adversaries, particularly due to Bility's prominent presence at the memorial service for the late Alhaji Garxim Varmuyan Kromah, a former warlord from the Mandingo tribe. This attendance garnered attention, especially given the contentious opinions related to contributions to the devastating Liberian civil war. Public sentiment remains divided, particularly among the Christian community, many of whom associate Kromah with the deaths of thousands of Liberians. However, this does not imply that Bility should have abstained from attending the service; ultimately, it was a situation beyond his control. In fact, his absence could have sent a misleading message to his tribal community. (Citizens Movement For Change, 2026).

In essence, although Liberia has not experienced widespread sectarian violence, the country has witnessed isolated incidents, such as a localized land dispute involving former combatants that escalated into Christian–Muslim riots, resulting in fatalities, the destruction of religious institutions, and the imposition of a curfew by UN peacekeepers (The New Humanitarian, 2004; Reuters, 2005). However, this single episode alone is insufficient to account for broader patterns of sectarian conflict. Nevertheless, the predominance of Christianity and recurring debates regarding the constitutional status of religion have the potential to generate underlying social and political tensions. Within this context, a Muslim political leader such as Bility faces an additional

challenge: he must continually demonstrate that his leadership vision transcends religious identity and resonates with a wider national electorate.

CONCLUSION

The CMC shows considerable promise as a catalyst for democratic transformation in Liberia. Its focus on engaging communities, promoting reform-focused messaging, and upholding accountability distinguishes it from typical opposition parties. Through advocating institutional improvements, encouraging citizen involvement, and offering a viable alternative political vision, the CMC reflects the objectives of democratic renewal in a nation where institutional frameworks remain fragile.

Nonetheless, the party faces notable challenges. Its hesitancy to form coalitions constrains its ability to unite reform-minded actors, and a heavy dependence on a charismatic leader raises concerns about personalization and long-term stability. Additionally, public perceptions of the leader's past controversies, alongside Liberia's sensitive religious and ethnic landscape, pose obstacles to building widespread legitimacy.

The CMC's capacity to drive meaningful changes will hinge on strengthening internal governance, implementing reform agendas locally, managing its public image strategically, and fostering inclusive support across religious and ethnic lines. Successfully pursuing these approaches could solidify its role in advancing democratic governance and political renewal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the challenges outlined, below are some practical, targeted recommendations for the CMC to strengthen its potential as an agent of democratic change in Liberia.

Reconsider Strategic Coalition-Building

While preserving its ideological distinctiveness, the CMC could consider forming targeted, issue-specific collaborations with other opposition parties, civil society groups, and reform-oriented lawmakers.

The justification for this recommendation stems from past experiences, such as the CDC's success in 2018 and the UP's in 2023, which show that strategic cooperation among opposition forces can strengthen both legislative influence and electoral prospects. By focusing on mutually agreed reform priorities, such as anti-corruption initiatives, electoral improvements, or increased youth participation, the CMC can establish temporary alliances that create meaningful impact without undermining its fundamental principles. Therefore, the CMC should establish formal negotiation committees within the party to identify potential coalition partners and develop joint agendas on key national reforms.

Strengthen Internal Institutionalization

Establish strong internal governance systems that limit dependence on a single leader and ensure smooth leadership succession, structured policy-making, and accountability processes. Such frameworks help prevent the over-personalization of the party, as observed in groups like the People's Liberation Party (PLP), by creating mechanisms that endure beyond any one individual. Well-organized institutions also enhance the party's credibility with both voters and prospective collaborators.

Proactive Reputation Management

Effectively managing public perception requires openness in communication and a consistent record of ethical conduct. Mixed opinions about Musa Bility, particularly due to previous controversies, could weaken public trust in the CMC. By consistently showing integrity, accountability, and dedication to public service, the party can gradually reshape its image. To achieve this, the CMC could consider the following strategies:

- ✓ Initiate a public awareness campaign that showcases the party's accomplishments, ethical standards, and reform efforts.

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- ✓ Distinguishing the party's identity from that of individual leaders by highlighting collective decision-making and contributions from grassroots members.
 - ✓ Involve independent observers, journalists, and civil society groups in monitoring party activities to strengthen credibility.

Promote Inclusive, Cross-Religious Messaging

Craft a national agenda that prioritizes policy and governance concerns rather than focusing on religious or ethnic identities, promoting inclusivity and unity across the country. This is because, considering that Liberia is predominantly Christian and that Muslim communities have often been marginalized, the CMC should show that its leadership is committed to representing all groups equally. This approach strengthens democratic inclusion and can expand the party's support base.

To achieve this, the CMC could consider the following strategies:

- ✓ Facilitate local discussions, public meetings, and civic gatherings that focus on common national issues instead of highlighting ethnic or identity differences.
- ✓ Ensure that leaders and delegates from various religious and ethnic backgrounds are prominently involved in party activities.
- ✓ Implement a messaging approach that highlights broad, universally relevant policy goals, such as improving education, healthcare, and economic growth, rather than appealing to specific identity groups.

Policy Operationalization and Grassroots Engagement

Develop reform-focused messages into specific policies and practical initiatives, especially within local communities. The rationale for this strategy stems from the fact that citizens tend to back parties that offer tangible solutions and produce real improvements in their communities, rather than merely presenting symbolic challenges to the existing system, as this demonstrates a genuine commitment to democratic progress. To achieve this, the CMC could consider the following strategies:

- ✓ Implement small-scale pilot projects in selected counties to showcase innovative approaches to governance, such as initiatives promoting transparency or programs that empower young people.
- ✓ Create channels for citizens to share their opinions and priorities, ensuring their voices inform policy decisions.
- ✓ Share the outcomes of these local projects widely to strengthen the party's reputation and highlight its impact at a national level.

In summation, by carefully maintaining its autonomy while forming targeted partnerships, establishing formal structures for leadership and decision-making, deliberately shaping public opinion, communicating inclusively, and implementing reform-oriented initiatives within local communities, the CMC can enhance its capacity to serve as a trustworthy driver of democratic transformation in Liberia. These strategies help the party navigate organizational and political challenges while fostering lasting influence.

DISCLAIMER

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