

UNLock Liberia
Turning the Page
on Charles Taylor



April - August 2012





55th Anniversary 1957-2012

Founded in 1957, the Fund for Peace is an independent, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) non-profit research and educational organization that works to prevent violent conflict and promote sustainable security. We promote sustainable security through research, training and education, engagement of civil society, building bridges across diverse sectors, and developing innovative technologies and tools for policy makers. A leader in the conflict assessment and early warning field, the Fund for Peace focuses on the problems of weak and failing states. Our objective is to create practical tools and approaches for conflict mitigation that are useful to decision-makers.

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The Fund for Peace Conflict Early Warning and Assessment

Produced in partnership with Liberia Democracy Watch



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UNLock Liberia Bomi and Grand Gedeh

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The second-most frequently reported category of incidents between April and August, 2012, was Pressures on Effective Governance. By many accounts, corruption is a big problem in Liberia. Cases of corruption by public security forces and government—to include embezzlement, nepotism, mismanagement of development funds and malfeasance in the justice system—were widely recorded. Recently, Laymah Gbowee, the fellow Nobel Peace Prize laureate of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, decided to leave the government claiming that the President failed to adequately tackle the issue of corruption in her government.³ President Sirleaf has been accused of nepotism in the past, when three of her sons were allocated prominent government positions. Additionally, after a steady improvement on the Corruption Perceptions Index, in 2011 Liberia's score worsened for the first time since 2007.⁴ Further indicative of challenges with respect to state legitimacy and effective governance, there were numerous protests and strikes throughout the country in response to various issues, including land grabbing, police checkpoints, low salaries and the perceived unlawful detention of suspects.

The third-most often reported category of

On April 26, 2012, the International Criminal Court convicted Liberia's former president Charles Taylor for his role in the commission of crimes against humanity during the war in Sierra Leone in the 1990s. For Sierra Leone, this brought a dark chapter to a close — and for Liberia as well.

From 1989 to 1990, Charles Taylor and Prince Johnson fought to overthrow then-president Samuel Doe. After Johnson captured and killed Doe (sipping a Budweiser as he chopped off his ears), he and Taylor fought a bloody war for control of Monrovia. Taylor eventually took power, but the country was plunged into a civil war that lasted until 2003 when peacekeepers were deployed and Taylor was exiled to Nigeria.

Researchers from The Fund for Peace (FFP) and Liberia Democracy Watch (LDW) were present in Gbarnga, Taylor's erstwhile base of operations, for a conflict assessment workshop on the day of the conviction. Riot police and UNMIL forces were deployed en masse, standing by in the event of protest. However, time had apparently passed Taylor by. People went about their businesses. "It's over," one person said.

Charles Taylor's chapter may be closed but the echoes of history still remain a decade after the end of the war. Prince Johnson is now Senator of Nimba County. The same ethnic tensions that contributed to the outbreak of war still exist today. For much of the country beyond Monrovia, the government is a faint and distant idea. Basic infrastructure and public services are few. According to the October 2012 report of the International Monetary Fund, Liberia is the fifth poorest country in the world.¹ Unemployment, especially among the youth,

is very high. In the absence of the rule of law, mobs and communities take justice into their own hands. At the border with Côte d'Ivoire (from whence Taylor originally launched his rebellion against Doe) armed groups and mercenaries are reportedly active at the local level. Sustainable human security has not yet taken hold in Liberia. As the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) continues to draw down, the continued weakness of the police and army has raised real concerns over whether the government is ready to take ownership of the country's security when the mission finally departs.

This report is not a comprehensive political risk assessment of the likelihood of conflict onset in Liberia. Rather, it is a snapshot of the priorities and concerns of a local civil society network living in communities across Liberia's 15 counties. Over the last five years, this network has been regularly taking the pulse of the country, gathering and coding incidents that indicate the risk of human insecurity from their point of view. This report reflects the social, economic, political, and security factors that must be managed for a peaceful and prosperous future.

The most frequently reported category of incidents between April and August was Insecurity (which includes murder, assault, robbery, rape, and violent protests, as well as attacks by public security forces and armed gangs). These concerns over human security highlight the weaknesses of the Liberian National Police, which lacks the capacity, financial resources and personnel to effectively deal with the current security and evolving security concerns. There is only one police officer for every 850 Liberian citizens and the visibility of the national police is especially low in rural areas.²

incidents related to human rights violations. Sexual violence (particularly the rape of children and teenage girls) and abuses committed by teachers, were among the most often documented cases. Other human rights related incidents in this reporting period included domestic violence, violation of the rights of the accused and forced displacement.

Finally, a significant proportion of the reported incidents were related to land competition, which on several occasions led to violence. In the construction of roads and private projects there is frequently confusion over efficient and appropriate compensation to land owners and residents who are to be displaced as a result.

There are also land disputes between individuals and between communities. One of the main sources of these disputes is the complex legal systems that govern land ownership in Liberia, as the same piece of land often falls under both customary and statutory law, creating competing claims of ownership. These cases are hard to settle as most Liberians lack proper documentation and while a land registry does exist, it has not been maintained since the outbreak of the war, rendering it largely useless. Other land disputes have their origin in the civil war, when combatants captured — or were given — the land of those who fled as a reward for their participation in the conflict. As refugees are gradually returning to Liberia, they often find their property occupied, creating tensions in the community.

Furthermore, this latter type of conflict frequently has an ethnic dimension, since — given the dynamics of the Liberian civil war — the ex-combatants and returnees often belong to different ethnic groups. For instance, in Nimba County, the Gio and Mano people fought on the side of former President Charles Taylor, while those who fled mostly belong to the Mandingo ethnic group. Therefore, the increased prevalence of these conflicts not only indicates that the reforms and policies that the government has put in place to address land disputes are slow to show results, but also highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive reconciliation program among the various tribal and ethnic groups.

- 1 International Monetary Fund (2012). World Economic Outlook Database: October 2012 Edition. Retrieved from <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/02/weodata/index.aspx>.
- 2 Mackay, M (2012, October 11). Nobel Peace Prize winner rips fellow laureate over corruption. CNN. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/11/world/africa/nobel-peace-prize-leymah-gbowee/index.html>.
- 3 Transparency International (2011). Corruption Perceptions Index. Retrieved from <http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/overview>.
- 4 Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio and SIPRI (2011). Security Sector Reform in Liberia. Retrieved from <http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/liberia/pdf/Liberia%20SSR%20Report.pdf>.



UNLock Liberia Methodology

About the Report

From March 2010 to August 2012 FFP conducted 14 conflict assessment workshops in Liberia in partnership with LDW. In Bong, Bomi, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Nimba, and Lofa Counties, as well as Monrovia, individuals and civil society organizations have been trained in a conflict assessment methodology utilizing FFP's Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST) framework. The CAST framework was then adapted for relevance through a consultative and participatory process and tailored to the local conflict landscape, resulting in the UNLock framework with eight indicators. The framework is applied by the network of local civil society representatives to assess, anticipate, and take actions to prevent violent conflict.





Since the UNLock Early Warning System was established in 2008, participants have been submitting incident reports to a password-protected database organized by date, location and indicator. These incident reports are then compiled to generate an image of

the conflict landscape in Liberia which is then used to anticipate and respond to the major pressures that could lead to conflict. In the short term, this information acts as a warning, allowing people to avoid potential conflict zones. More broadly, this information can be used by government and civil society to inform conflict sensitive approaches to development and policy. As of this publication, over 1,800 incident reports had been filed representing participation from at least 100 civil society organizations.

UNLock has focused on two counties in Liberia for this report due to several reasons. FFP staff traveled to Liberia in July 2012, and held an UNLock workshop in Bomi County, and saw many of these pressures still reflected. Grand Gedeh has been included due to its proximity to Cote d'Ivoire and increased reports of rising tensions from UNLock network participants in the county, as well as from findings from LDW visitations. In particular, there have been reports of armed groups in the area.

The 8 UNLock indicators for which data is sought include social, economic, and political/military pressures on the state:

Social and Economic Indicators

-  Demographic Pressures
-  Refugees or Displaced Persons
-  Group Grievance
-  Economic Pressures

Political and Military Indicators

-  Governance/Legitimacy
-  Public Services
-  Human Rights
-  Insecurity

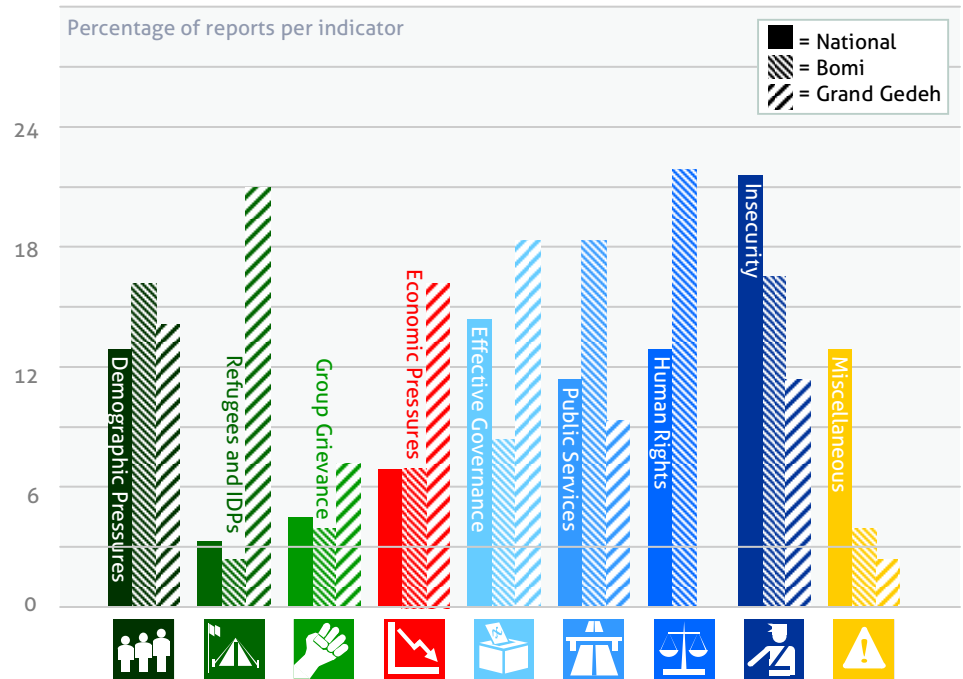


UNLock Liberia Indicator Trends

Comparative Periodic Analysis: Indicator Trends

As with previous UNLock Liberia publications, this one focuses on two counties for a more detailed review. In this case, because of the relative richness of the data in these two counties over this five month period, and because of the risk factors highlighted in the data, this report focuses on Grand Gedeh and Bomi counties. Regarding human insecurity, Grand Gedeh was of heightened concern because of the continued existence of a large Ivorian refugee population which strains limited resources, armed activities across the border with Cote d'Ivoire, and the deplorable state of the roads which virtually isolates the county from the rest of the country during the rainy season. In Bomi, there were many complaints by respondents about eviction and the demolition of homes in the course of government development projects. Bomi is also host to a large UNMIL base and its heavy reliance on UNMIL for even basic public services and security highlighted the inability of the government to expand its reach even a short 70 kilometers outside of the capital, raising real concerns for exacerbated pressures when the mission finally withdraws.

Reports by Indicator: April to August 2012





UNLock Liberia County-Level Analysis

About Grand Gedeh County

Although Grand Gedeh is geographically the second-largest county of Liberia, its population only constitutes 3.6 percent of the total population. It is situated at the southeast of the country and consists of eight districts: B'Hai, Gbao, Glio-Twarbo, Puto, Gboe-Ploe, Konobo, Tchien and Cavalla. Over 96 percent of its people are Khran speakers (as was deposed President Samuel Doe) and the county also hosts people from the Sapo, Bassa and Kpelle ethnic groups.

Grand Gedeh is rich in natural resources, especially in timber and gold, and it had a booming mining and logging industry before the Liberian civil war. However, the civil war and the subsequent sanctions on timber exports badly hurt these industries, which are still struggling to recover, leaving many people unemployed. Furthermore, the war destroyed the limited existing infrastructure adding to the development challenges of the county.

Due to its proximity to Côte d'Ivoire, Grand Gedeh was and is significantly affected by the various conflicts in the neighboring state.

Most notably, problems related to the living conditions of refugees, including inadequate food supply and transportation challenges, were the most often reported incidents in this period. Moreover, reports were also compiled regarding the continued presence of armed groups in the county who may be training and recruiting individuals inside of Liberia.

The second-most reported indicator in the county was the lack of effective and legitimate governance. A large number of incident reports centered on continued economic pressures, particularly illicit economic activities, such as drug trafficking. Because of Grand Gedeh's isolation and the poor conditions of the roads leading to the county, the cost of fuel and commodities is higher than in the rest of the country. This causes increased tension, particularly between Liberians and the refugee communities. UNLock participants also reported frustrations about the awarding of land to companies for resource extraction and other projects.





Bomi is the second-smallest county in Liberia with a population of 84,119. It is situated at northwestern part of country and has four administrative districts: Dowein, Klay, Senjeh and Suehn Mecca. Its population mostly belongs to the Gola, Dei, Mandingo and Kpelle ethnic groups, with 60 percent being Muslim and 40 percent Christian.

As was true in Grand Gedeh County (where Samuel Doe was born), the civil war had a devastating impact on Bomi. Due to its proximity to Monrovia, many of the fighting factions launched their operations from Bomi, for example the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebel faction that was ultimately responsible for forcing Taylor into exile. The war not only destroyed the county's infrastructure and healthcare system, but also contributed to the stagnation of agricultural activities, iron ore mining and timber production, sectors which had flourished before the war.

Concerns over infrastructure and public services were also reflected in the UNLock reports, as this was the second-most reported indicator between April and August. For instance, there were reports that the poor condition of roads, especially during the rainy season, hinders trade and prevents access to healthcare, while a polluted and inadequate water supply has led to intra-communal conflicts and cholera outbreaks. Additionally, problems with the healthcare system — including corruption, low salaries and

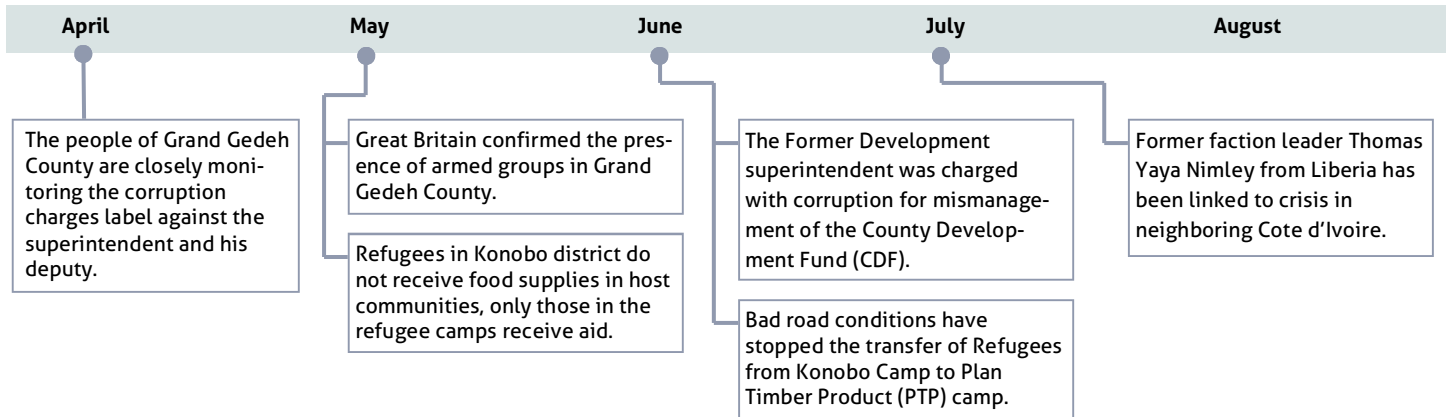
About Bomi County

inadequate capacity — were widely reported. Finally, an overall shortage of teachers and opportunities for receiving higher education has reportedly prompted many young people to migrate to other parts of the country, particularly Monrovia, or abroad, resulting in significant brain drain.

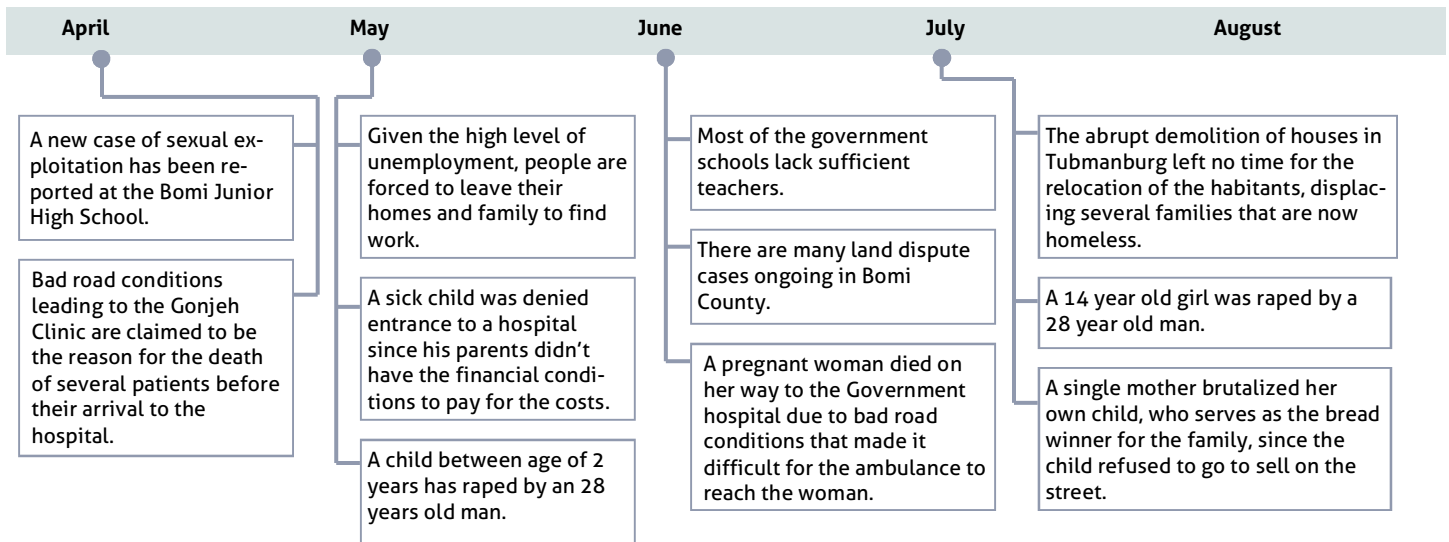
Human rights violations, which were the most often reported incidents, constitute another considerable problem in Bomi. In line with the national trend, sexual violence against small children and teenagers was widely reported, along with cases in the education system where teachers forced female students to have sex in exchange for better grades. Besides the health and social consequences for women, sexual violence reflects a breakdown in the rule of law, which is among the most serious drivers of human insecurity over the long term and needs to be addressed. Other human rights violations in this reporting period included incidents related to child abuse, child labor, restrictions of the freedom of speech and the violation of the rights of detainees.

UNLock reports also highlighted land competition as a major problem in Bomi. Incidents related to land disputes between individuals and communities, and as a result of infrastructure projects which resulted in the eviction of residents. Lastly, concerns over unemployment, inflation, poverty, drug abuse and biases in the justice system were also noted.

Grand Gedeh Timeline: UNLock Incident Reports 2012



Bomi Timeline: UNLock Incident Reports 2012





UNLock Liberia Conclusion

Looking Ahead

Liberia has made some significant progress over the near-decade since fighting ceased and a fragile peace was restored. This progress includes the successful holding of two national elections with only minor violence reported, the ambitious reconstruction of the capital and the opening of the country for direct foreign investment. In addition, Liberians themselves have made progress in healing the divisions that kept their country locked in a seemingly interminable cycle of violence for nearly a decade and a half. Ethnic and religious cleavages, which were exploited and exacerbated by warlords like Taylor and Doe, have gone a long way towards being healed with most Liberians desiring peace and stability more than a return to war.

However, despite these achievements, there remain several factors that could fuel a return to instability, particularly in Bomi and Grand Gedeh counties. As noted above, while the government has declared its intention to rapidly extend public services outside of the capital, it has been very slow in doing so. Most Liberians, even in a county as close to

the capital as Bomi, still do not have regular access to safe drinking water, education, and basic medical services. In addition, the extremely poor capacity of the police and judicial system has deeply undermined the legitimacy of the government, which more and more Liberians are coming to see as corrupt and inadequate. This leads to real fears that when UNMIL pulls out of the country there will be a security gap that may lead to the resumption of fighting, particularly over access to basic goods and services.

As highlighted in the Grand Gedeh example above, another concern to Liberia's security is the insecurity of its neighbors, particularly Côte d'Ivoire. In a county like Grand Gedeh, which in the past has been used as a base for the launching of insurgencies both within Liberia itself and also Côte d'Ivoire, tensions continue over border insecurity and resource competition. In addition, the isolation of that particular county from the rest of the country often drives a deeper sense of abandonment and disregard by the government in Monrovia. These factors will need to be

given serious attention in the coming year, particularly if Côte d'Ivoire becomes unstable again, as there is the possibility of such instability dragging Liberia into conflict again.

Finally, although Liberia has come a long way from the gross human rights abuses experienced during the Taylor period, there is still a fundamental lack of human security pervasive throughout the country and in these two counties in particular. Rape, child abuse, and other forms of sexual violence are prevalent and are becoming more so. These are fueled by the overall lack of a police presence to prevent or respond to such crimes and the judiciary to prosecute and adjudicate them. Without rapid government investment into cleaning up corruption and building the capacity of these two fundamental sectors, most everyday Liberians will continue to mistrust the leadership in Monrovia and the ability of their country to become stable and democratic absent outside assistance.



About The Partners

About The Fund for Peace

The Fund for Peace is an independent, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) non-profit research and educational organization that works to prevent violent conflict and promote sustainable security.

We promote sustainable security through research, training and education, engagement of civil society, building bridges across diverse sectors, and developing innovative technologies and tools for policy makers.

A leader in the conflict assessment and early warning field, the Fund for Peace focuses on the problems of weak and failing states. Our objective is to create practical tools and approaches for conflict mitigation that are useful to decision-makers.

The Fund for Peace adopts a holistic approach to the issues stemming from weak and failing

states. We work at both the grassroots level with civil society actors and at policy levels with key decision makers. We have worked in over 50 countries with a wide range of partners in all sectors: governments, international organizations, the military, nongovernmental organizations, academics, journalists, civil society networks, and the private sector.

The Fund for Peace offers a wide range of initiatives focused on our central objective: to promote sustainable security and the ability of a state to solve its own problems peacefully without an external military or administrative presence. Our programs fall into three primary thematic areas:

- Conflict Early Warning and Assessment;
- Transnational Threats; and
- Sustainable Development, Sustainable Security.



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About Liberia Democracy Watch

Liberia Democracy Watch was established in late 1996 in the build up to the 1997 elections in Liberia. The organization was founded by a group of university graduates who envisioned a society devoid of socio-political abuses, corruption and the waning respect for the rule of law. As part of its first engagement, LDW was a founding member of the elections observatory group: Liberia Elections Observers Network (LEON), a

collection of local elections observer groups funded by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) which comprised the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), FOCUS and many other local organizations. Between 1997 and 2005, Liberia was wrought with socio-political and economic abuses necessitating the shift of focus to human rights and related issues.



www.liberiademocracywatch.org



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