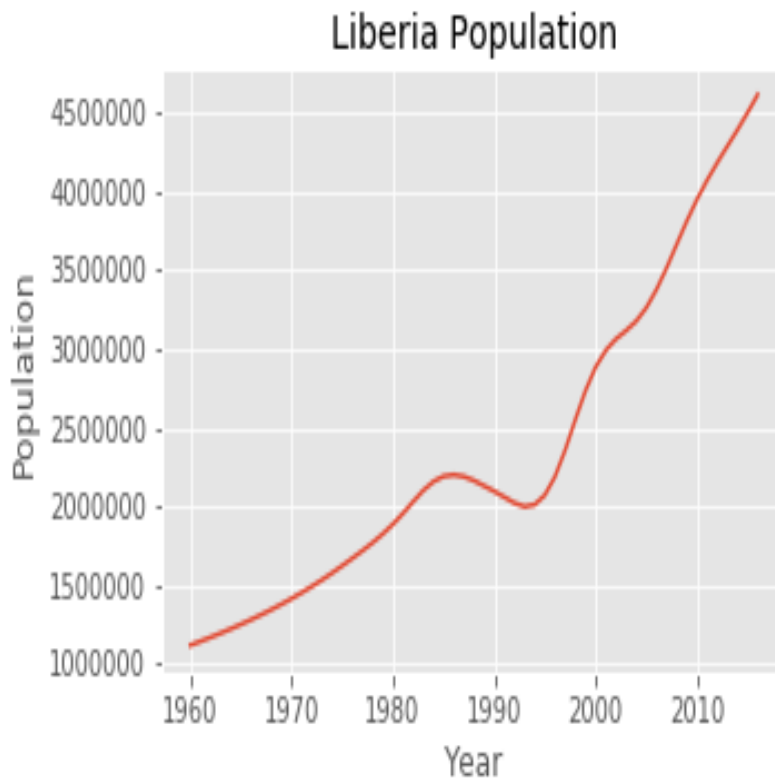


Liberia



Liberia ([listen](#)), officially the Republic of Liberia, is a country on the West African coast. It is bordered by Sierra Leone to its west, Guinea to its north and Ivory Coast to its east, the Atlantic Ocean to its south. It covers an area of 111,369 square kilometers (43,000 sq mi) and has a population of around 4,700,000 people. English is the official language and over 20 indigenous languages are spoken, representing the numerous ethnic groups who make up more than 95% of the population. The country's capital and largest city is Monrovia. Forests on the coastline are composed mostly of salt-tolerant mangrove trees, while the more sparsely populated inland has forests opening onto a plateau of drier grasslands. The climate is equatorial, with significant rainfall during the May–October rainy season and harsh harmattan winds the remainder of the year. Liberia possesses about forty percent of the remaining Upper Guinean rainforest. It was an important producer of rubber in the early 20th century. The Republic of Liberia began as a settlement of the American Colonization Society (ACS), who believed black people would face better chances for freedom and prosperity in Africa than in the United States. The country declared its independence on July 26, 1847. The U.S. did not recognize Liberia's independence until during the American Civil War on February 5, 1862. Between January 7, 1822, and the American Civil War, more than 15,000 freed and free-born black people who faced legislated limits in the U.S., and 3,198 Afro-Caribbeans, relocated to the settlement. The black settlers carried their culture and tradition with them to Liberia. The Liberian constitution and flag were modeled after those of the U.S. On January 3, 1848, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a wealthy, free-born African American from Virginia who settled in Liberia, was elected as Liberia's first president after the people proclaimed independence. Liberia was the first African republic to proclaim its independence, on July 26, 1847, and is Africa's first and oldest modern republic. Liberia retained its independence during the Scramble for Africa. During World War II, Liberia supported the United States war efforts against Germany and in turn the U.S. invested in considerable infrastructure in Liberia to help its war effort, which also aided the country in modernizing and improving its major air transportation facilities. In addition, President William Tubman encouraged economic changes. Internationally, Liberia was a

founding member of the League of Nations, United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity. The Americo-Liberian settlers did not relate well to the indigenous peoples they encountered, especially those in communities of the more isolated "bush". They knew nothing of their cultures, languages or animist religion. Encounters with tribal Africans in the bush often developed as violent confrontations. The colonial settlements were raided by the Kru and Grebo from their inland chiefdoms. Because of feeling set apart and superior by their culture and education to the indigenous peoples, the Americo-Liberians developed as a small elite that held on to political power. It excluded the indigenous tribesmen from birthright citizenship in their own lands until 1904, in a repetition of the United States' treatment of Native Americans. Because of ethnocentrism and the cultural gap, the Americo-Liberians envisioned creating a western-style state to which the tribesmen should assimilate. They promoted religious organizations to set up missions and schools to educate the indigenous peoples. Political tensions from the rule of William R. Tolbert resulted in a military coup in 1980 that overthrew his leadership soon after his death, marking the beginning of years-long political instability. Five years of military rule by the People's Redemption Council and five years of civilian rule by the National Democratic Party of Liberia were followed by the First and Second Liberian Civil Wars. These resulted in the deaths of 250,000 people (about 8% of the population), the displacement of many more and shrunk Liberia's economy by 90%. A peace agreement in 2003 led to democratic elections in 2005, in which Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected President. Recovery proceeds but about 85% of the population live below the international poverty line. Liberia's economic and political stability was threatened in the 2010s by an Ebola virus epidemic; it originated in Guinea in December 2013, entered Liberia in March 2014, and was declared officially ended on May 8, 2015. == History == The Pepper Coast, also known as the Grain Coast, has been inhabited by indigenous peoples of Africa at least as far back as the 12th century. Mende-speaking people expanded westward from the Sudan, forcing many smaller ethnic groups southward toward the Atlantic Ocean. The Dei, Bassa, Kru, Gola and Kissi were some of the earliest documented peoples in the area. This influx of these groups was compounded by the decline of the Western Sudanic Mali Empire in 1375 and the Songhai Empire in 1591. Liberia was a part of the Kingdom of Koya from 1450 to 1898. As inland regions underwent desertification, inhabitants moved to the wetter coast. These new inhabitants brought skills such as cotton spinning, cloth weaving, iron smelting, rice and sorghum cultivation, and social and political institutions from the Mali and Songhai empires. Shortly after the Mane conquered the region, the Vai people of the former Mali Empire immigrated into the Grand Cape Mount County region. The ethnic Kru opposed the influx of Vai, forming an alliance with the Mane to stop further influx of Vai. People along the coast built canoes and traded with other West Africans from Cap-Vert to the Gold Coast. Arab traders entered the region from the north, and a long-established slave trade took captives to north and east Africa. === Early colonization === Between 1461 and the late 17th century, Portuguese, Dutch and British traders had contacts and trading posts in the region. The Portuguese named the area Costa da Pimenta ("Pepper Coast") but it later came to be known as the Grain Coast, due to the abundance of melegueta pepper grains. European traders would barter commodities and goods with local people. In the United States, there was a movement to resettle free-born blacks and freed slaves who faced racial discrimination in the form of political disenfranchisement, and the denial of civil, religious and social privileges in the United States. Most whites and later a small cadre of black nationalists believed that blacks would face better chances for freedom in Africa than in the U.S. The American Colonization Society was founded in 1816 in Washington, DC for this purpose, by a group of prominent politicians and slaveholders. But its membership grew to include mostly people who supported abolition of slavery. Slaveholders wanted to get free people of color out of the South, where they were thought to threaten the stability of the slave societies. Some abolitionists collaborated on relocation of free blacks, as they were discouraged by racial discrimination against them in the North and believed they would never be accepted in the larger society. Most blacks, who were native-born by this time, wanted to work toward justice in the United States rather than emigrate. Leading activists in the North strongly opposed the ACS, but some free blacks were ready to try a different environment. In 1822, the American Colonization Society began sending black volunteers to the Pepper Coast to establish a colony for freed blacks. By 1867, the ACS (and state-related chapters) had assisted in the migration of more than 13,000 blacks to Liberia. These free African-Americans and their descendants married within their community and came to identify as Americo-Liberians. Many were of mixed race and educated in American culture; they did not identify with the indigenous natives of the tribes they encountered. They intermarried largely within the colonial community, developing an ethnic group that had a cultural tradition infused with American notions of political republicanism and Protestant

Christianity. The ACS, the private organization supported by prominent American politicians such as Abraham Lincoln, Henry Clay, and James Monroe, believed repatriation of free African Americans was preferable to widespread emancipation of slaves. Similar state-based organizations established colonies in Mississippi-in-Africa and the Republic of Maryland, which were later annexed by Liberia. The Americo-Liberian settlers did not relate well to the indigenous peoples they encountered, especially those in communities of the more isolated "bush". They knew nothing of their cultures, languages or animist religion. Encounters with tribal Africans in the bush often developed as violent confrontations. The colonial settlements were raided by the Kru and Grebo from their inland chiefdoms. Because of feeling set apart and superior by their culture and education to the indigenous peoples, the Americo-Liberians developed as a small elite that held on to political power. 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The leadership of the new nation consisted largely of the Americo-Liberians, who initially established political and economic dominance in the coastal areas that had been purchased by the ACS; they maintained relations with United States contacts in developing these areas and the resulting trade. Their passage of the 1865 Ports of Entry Act prohibited foreign commerce with the inland tribes, ostensibly to "encourage the growth of civilized values" before such trade was allowed in the region. By 1877, the Americo-Liberian True Whig Party was the most powerful political power in the country. It was made up primarily of people from the Americo-Liberian ethnic group, who maintained social, economic and political dominance well into the 20th century, repeating patterns of European colonists in other nations in Africa. Competition for office was usually contained within the party; a party nomination virtually ensured election. Pressure from the United Kingdom, which controlled Sierra Leone to the west, and France with its interests in the north and east led to a loss of Liberia's claims to extensive territories. Both Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast annexed some territories. Liberia struggled to attract investment in order to develop infrastructure and a larger, industrial economy. There was a decline in production of Liberian goods in the late 19th century, and the government struggled financially, resulting in indebtedness on a series of international loans. On July 16, 1892, Martha Ann Erskine Ricks met Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle and presented her a hand made quilt, Liberia's first diplomatic gift. Born into slavery in Tennessee, Ricks stated, "I had heard it often, from the time I was a child, how good the Queen had been to my people – to slaves – and how she wanted us to be free." === 20th century === American and other international interests emphasized resource extraction, with rubber production a major industry in the early 20th century. In 1929 allegations of modern slavery in Liberia led the League of Nations to establish the Christy commission. Findings included government involvement in widespread "Forced or compulsory labour", minority ethnic groups especially were exploited in a system which enriched well connected elites within Liberia. As a result of the Christy report, President Charles D. B. King and Vice-president Allen N. Yancy both resigned. In the mid-20th century, Liberia gradually began to modernize with American assistance. During World War II, the United States made major infrastructure improvements to support its military efforts in Africa and Europe against the Nazis. It built the Freeport of Monrovia and Roberts International Airport under the Lend-Lease program before its entry into the Second World War. After the war, President William Tubman encouraged foreign investment in the country. Liberia had the second-highest rate of economic growth in the world during the 1950s. Liberia also began to take a more active role in international affairs. It was a founding member of the United Nations in 1945 and became a vocal critic of the South African apartheid regime. Liberia also served as a proponent both of African independence from the European colonial powers and of Pan-Africanism, and helped to fund the Organisation of African Unity. On April 12, 1980, a military coup led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe of the Krahn ethnic group overthrew and killed President William R. Tolbert, Jr.. Doe and the other plotters later executed a majority of Tolbert's cabinet and other Americo-Liberian government officials and True Whig Party members. The coup leaders formed the People's Redemption Council (PRC) to govern the country. A strategic Cold War ally of the West, Doe received significant financial backing from the United States while critics condemned the PRC for corruption and political repression. After Liberia adopted a new constitution in 1985, Doe was elected president in subsequent elections, which

were internationally condemned as fraudulent. On November 12, 1985, a failed counter-coup was launched by Thomas Quiwonkpa, whose soldiers briefly occupied the national radio station. Government repression intensified in response, as Doe's troops retaliated by executing members of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups in Nimba County. The National Patriotic Front of Liberia, a rebel group led by Charles Taylor, launched an insurrection in December 1989 against Doe's government with the backing of neighboring countries such as Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. This triggered the First Liberian Civil War. By September 1990, Doe's forces controlled only a small area just outside the capital, and Doe was captured and executed in that month by rebel forces. The rebels soon split into various factions fighting one another. The Economic Community Monitoring Group under the Economic Community of West African States organized a military task force to intervene in the crisis. From 1989 to 1996 one of Africa's bloodiest civil wars broke out, claiming the lives of more than 200,000 Liberians and displacing a million others into refugee camps in neighboring countries. A peace deal between warring parties was reached in 1995, leading to Taylor's election as president in 1997. Under Taylor's leadership, Liberia became internationally known as a pariah state due to its use of blood diamonds and illegal timber exports to fund the Revolutionary United Front in the Sierra Leone Civil War. The Second Liberian Civil War began in 1999 when Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, a rebel group based in the northwest of the country, launched an armed insurrection against Taylor. === 2000s === In March 2003, a second rebel group, Movement for Democracy in Liberia, began launching attacks against Taylor from the southeast. Peace talks between the factions began in Accra in June of that year, and Taylor was indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for crimes against humanity the same month. By July 2003, the rebels had launched an assault on Monrovia. Under heavy pressure from the international community and the domestic Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement, Taylor resigned in August 2003 and went into exile in Nigeria. A peace deal was signed later that month. The United Nations Mission in Liberia began arriving in September 2003 to provide security and monitor the peace accord, and an interim government took power the following October. The subsequent 2005 elections were internationally regarded as the most free and fair in Liberian history. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Harvard-trained economist and former Minister of Finance, was elected as the first female president in Africa. Upon her inauguration, Sirleaf requested the extradition of Taylor from Nigeria and transferred him to the SCSL for trial in The Hague. In 2006, the government established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address the causes and crimes of the civil war. == Geography == Liberia is situated in West Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean to the country's southwest. It lies between latitudes 4° and 9°N, and longitudes 7° and 12°W. The landscape is characterized by mostly flat to rolling coastal plains that contain mangroves and swamps, which rise to a rolling plateau and low mountains in the northeast. Tropical rainforests cover the hills, while elephant grass and semi-deciduous forests make up the dominant vegetation in the northern sections. The equatorial climate is hot year-round with heavy rainfall from May to October with a short interlude in mid-July to August. During the winter months of November to March, dry dust-laden harmattan winds blow inland, causing many problems for residents. Liberia's watershed tends to move in a southwestern pattern towards the sea as new rains move down the forested plateau off the inland mountain range of Guinée Forestière, in Guinea. Cape Mount near the border with Sierra Leone receives the most precipitation in the nation. Liberia's main northwestern boundary is traversed by the Mano River while its southeast limits are bounded by the Cavalla River. Liberia's three largest rivers are St. Paul exiting near Monrovia, the river St. John at Buchanan and the Cestos River, all of which flow into the Atlantic. The Cavalla is the longest river in the nation at 515 kilometers (320 mi). The highest point wholly within Liberia is Mount Wuteve at 1,440 meters (4,724 ft) above sea level in the northwestern Liberia range of the West Africa Mountains and the Guinea Highlands. However, Mount Nimba near Yekepa, is higher at 1,752 meters (5,748 ft) above sea level but is not wholly within Liberia as Nimba shares a border with Guinea and Ivory Coast and is their tallest mountain as well. === Counties and districts === Liberia is divided into fifteen counties, which, in turn, are subdivided into a total of 90 districts and further subdivided into clans. The oldest counties are Grand Bassa and Montserrado, both founded in 1839 prior to Liberian independence. Gbarpolu is the newest county, created in 2001. Nimba is the largest of the counties in size at 11,551 km² (4,460 sq mi), while Montserrado is the smallest at 1,909 km² (737 sq mi). Montserrado is also the most populous county with 1,144,806 residents as of the 2008 census. The fifteen counties are administered by superintendents appointed by the president. The Constitution calls for the election of various chiefs at the county and local level, but these elections have not taken place since 1985 due to war and financial constraints. === Environmental issues === Endangered species are hunted for human consumption as

bushmeat in Liberia. Species hunted for food in Liberia include elephants, pygmy hippopotamus, chimpanzees, leopards, duikers, and other monkeys. Bushmeat is often exported to neighboring Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast, despite a ban on the cross-border sale of wild animals. Bushmeat is widely eaten in Liberia, and is considered a delicacy. A 2004 public opinion survey found that bushmeat ranked second behind fish amongst residents of the capital Monrovia as a preferred source of protein. Of households where bushmeat was served, 80% of residents said they cooked it "once in a while," while 13% cooked it once a week and 7% cooked bushmeat daily. The survey was conducted during the last civil war, and bushmeat consumption is now believed to be far higher. Liberia is a global biodiversity hotspot – a significant reservoir of biodiversity that is under threat from humans. Liberia hosts the last remaining viable populations of certain species including western chimpanzees, forest elephants and leopards. Liberia contains a significant portion of West Africa's remaining rainforest, with about 43% of the Upper Guinean forest – an important forest that spans several West African nations. Slash-and-burn agriculture is one of the human activities eroding Liberia's natural forests. A 2004 UN report estimated that 99 per cent of Liberians burnt charcoal and fuel wood for cooking and heating, resulting in deforestation. Illegal logging has increased in Liberia since the end of the Second Civil War in 2003. In 2012, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf granted licenses to companies to cut down 58% of all the primary rainforest left in Liberia. After international protests, many of those logging permits were canceled. Liberia and Norway struck an agreement in September 2014 whereby Liberia ceases all logging in exchange for \$150 million in development aid. Pollution is a significant issue in Liberia's capital city Monrovia. Since 2006 the international community has paid for all garbage collection and disposal in Monrovia via the World Bank.

== Politics == The government of Liberia, modeled on the government of the United States, is a unitary constitutional republic and representative democracy as established by the Constitution. The government has three co-equal branches of government: the executive, headed by the president; the legislative, consisting of the bicameral Legislature of Liberia; and the judicial, consisting of the Supreme Court and several lower courts. The president serves as head of government, head of state and the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of Liberia. Among the other duties of the president are to sign or veto legislative bills, grant pardons, and appoint Cabinet members, judges and other public officials. Together with the vice president, the president is elected to a six-year term by majority vote in a two-round system and can serve up to two terms in office. The Legislature is composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The House, led by a speaker, has 73 members apportioned among the 15 counties on the basis of the national census, with each county receiving a minimum of two members. Each House member represents an electoral district within a county as drawn by the National Elections Commission and is elected by a plurality of the popular vote of their district into a six-year term. The Senate is made up of two senators from each county for a total of 30 senators. Senators serve nine-year terms and are elected at-large by a plurality of the popular vote. The vice president serves as the President of the Senate, with a President pro tempore serving in their absence. Liberia's highest judicial authority is the Supreme Court, made up of five members and headed by the Chief Justice of Liberia. Members are nominated to the court by the president and are confirmed by the Senate, serving until the age of 70. The judiciary is further divided into circuit and speciality courts, magistrate courts and justices of the peace. The judicial system is a blend of common law, based on Anglo-American law, and customary law. An informal system of traditional courts still exists within the rural areas of the country, with trial by ordeal remaining common despite being officially outlawed. Between 1877 and 1980, the government was dominated by the True Whig Party. Today, over 20 political parties are registered in the country, based largely around personalities and ethnic groups. Most parties suffer from poor organizational capacity. The 2005 elections marked the first time that the president's party did not gain a majority of seats in the Legislature.

=== Corruption === Corruption is endemic at every level of the Liberian government. When President Sirleaf took office in 2006, she announced that corruption was "the major public enemy." In 2014, the US ambassador to Liberia stated that corruption there was harming people through "unnecessary costs to products and services that are already difficult for many Liberians to afford". Liberia scored a 3.3 on a scale from 10 (highly clean) to 0 (highly corrupt) on the 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index. This gave it a ranking 87th of 178 countries worldwide and 11th of 47 in Sub-Saharan Africa. This score did, however, represent a significant improvement since 2007, when the country scored 2.1 and ranked 150th of 180 countries. When dealing with public-facing government functionaries 89% of Liberians say they have had to pay a bribe, the highest national percentage in the world according to the organization's 2010 Global Corruption Barometer.

=== Military === The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) are the armed forces of the Republic of Liberia. Founded as the Liberian

Frontier Force in 1908, the military was retitled in 1956. For virtually all of its history, the AFL has received considerable material and training assistance from the United States. For most of the 1941–89 period, training was largely provided by U.S. advisers. After the UN Security Council Resolution 1509 of September 2003, the United Nations Mission in Liberia arrived to referee the ceasefire with units from Ghana, Nigeria, Pakistan, and China with the view to assist the National Transitional Government of Liberia in forming the new Liberian military. === Foreign relations === After the turmoil following the First and Second Liberian Civil Wars, Liberia's internal stabilization in the 21st century brought a return to cordial relations with neighboring countries and much of the Western world. As in other African countries, China is an important part of the post-conflict reconstruction. In the past, both of Liberia's neighbors, Guinea and Sierra Leone, have accused Liberia of backing rebels inside their countries. === Law enforcement === The Liberian National Police are the national police force of the country. It has 844 officers in 33 stations in Montserrado County, which contains the capital Monrovia, as of October 2007. The National Police Training Academy is in Montserrado County in Paynesville City. A history of corruption among the police officers diminishes the public trust and operational effectiveness. The internal security is characterized by a general lawlessness coupled with the danger that former combatants in the late civil war might reestablish militias to challenge the civil authorities. == Economy and infrastructure == The Central Bank of Liberia is responsible for printing and maintaining the Liberian dollar, which is the primary form of currency in Liberia. Liberia is one of the world's poorest countries, with a formal employment rate of 15%. GDP per capita peaked in 1980 at US\$496, when it was comparable to Egypt's (at the time). In 2011, the country's nominal GDP was US\$1.154 billion, while nominal GDP per capita stood at US\$297, the third-lowest in the world. Historically, the Liberian economy has depended heavily on foreign aid, foreign direct investment and exports of natural resources such as iron ore, rubber, and timber. Following a peak in growth in 1979, the Liberian economy began a steady decline due to economic mismanagement following the 1980 coup. This decline was accelerated by the outbreak of civil war in 1989; GDP was reduced by an estimated 90% between 1989 and 1995, one of the fastest declines in history. Upon the end of the war in 2003, GDP growth began to accelerate, reaching 9.4% in 2007. The global financial crisis slowed GDP growth to 4.6% in 2009, though a strengthening agricultural sector led by rubber and timber exports increased growth to 5.1% in 2010 and an expected 7.3% in 2011, making the economy one of the 20 fastest growing in the world. Current impediments to growth include a small domestic market, lack of adequate infrastructure, high transportation costs, poor trade links with neighboring countries and the high dollarization of the economy. Liberia used the United States dollar as its currency from 1943 until 1982 and continues to use the U.S. dollar alongside the Liberian dollar. Following a decrease in inflation beginning in 2003, inflation spiked in 2008 as a result of worldwide food and energy crises, reaching 17.5% before declining to 7.4% in 2009. Liberia's external debt was estimated in 2006 at approximately \$4.5 billion, 800% of GDP. As a result of bilateral, multilateral and commercial debt relief from 2007 to 2010, the country's external debt fell to \$222.9 million by 2011. While official commodity exports declined during the 1990s as many investors fled the civil war, Liberia's wartime economy featured the exploitation of the region's diamond wealth. The country acted as a major trader in Sierra Leonian blood diamonds, exporting over US\$300 million in diamonds in 1999. This led to a United Nations ban on Liberian diamond exports in 2001, which was lifted in 2007 following Liberia's accession to the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. In 2003, additional UN sanctions were placed on Liberian timber exports, which had risen from US\$5 million in 1997 to over US\$100 million in 2002 and were believed to be funding rebels in Sierra Leone. These sanctions were lifted in 2006. Due in large part to foreign aid and investment inflow following the end of the war, Liberia maintains a large account deficit, which peaked at nearly 60% in 2008. Liberia gained observer status with the World Trade Organization in 2010 and is in the process of acquiring full member status. Liberia has the highest ratio of foreign direct investment to GDP in the world, with US\$16 billion in investment since 2006. Following the inauguration of the Sirleaf administration in 2006, Liberia signed several multibillion-dollar concession agreements in the iron ore and palm oil industries with numerous multinational corporations, including BHP Billiton, ArcelorMittal, and Sime Darby. Especially palm oil companies like Sime Darby (Malaysia) and Golden Veroleum (USA) are being accused by critics of the destruction of livelihoods and the displacement of local communities, enabled through government concessions. The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company has operated the world's largest rubber plantation in Harbel, Margibi County since 1926 with more than 8,000 mostly Liberian employees in 2015, making Firestone Liberia the largest private employer in Liberia. === Shipping flag of convenience === Due to its status as a flag of convenience, Liberia has the second-largest maritime

registry in the world behind Panama. It has 3500 vessels registered under its flag accounting for 11% of ships worldwide. === Telecommunications === There are six major newspapers in Liberia, and 45% of the population has a mobile phone service. Much of Liberia's communications infrastructure was destroyed or plundered during the two civil wars (1989–1996 and 1999–2003). With low rates of adult literacy and high poverty rates, television and newspaper use is limited, leaving radio as the predominant means of communicating with the public. === Transportation === Liberia's economic main links to the outside world come through Monrovia, via the port and airport in the capital. === Energy === Formal electricity services are provided solely by the state-owned Liberia Electricity Corporation, which operates a small grid almost exclusively in the Greater Monrovia District. The vast majority of electric energy services is provided by small privately owned generators. At \$0.54 per kWh, the electricity tariff in Liberia is among the highest in the world. Total installed capacity in 2013 was 20 MW, a sharp decline from a peak of 191 MW in 1989 before the wars. Completion of the repair and expansion of the Mount Coffee Hydropower Plant, with a maximum capacity of 80 MW, is scheduled to be completed by 2018. Construction of three new heavy fuel oil power plants is expected to boost electrical capacity by 38 MW. In 2013, Liberia began importing power from neighboring Ivory Coast and Guinea through the West African Power Pool. Liberia has begun exploration for offshore oil; unproven oil reserves may be in excess of one billion barrels. The government divided its offshore waters into 17 blocks and began auctioning off exploration licenses for the blocks in 2004, with further auctions in 2007 and 2009. An additional 13 ultra-deep offshore blocks were demarcated in 2011 and planned for auction. Among the companies to have won licenses are Repsol, Chevron, Anadarko and Woodside Petroleum. == Demographics == As of the 2017 national census, Liberia was home to 4,694,608 people. Of those, 1,118,241 lived in Montserrado County, the most populous county in the country and home to the capital of Monrovia. The Greater Monrovia District has 970,824 residents. Nimba County is the next most populous county, with 462,026 residents. As revealed in the 2008 census, Monrovia is more than four times more populous than all the county capitals combined. Prior to the 2008 census, the last census had been held in 1984 and listed the country's population as 2,101,628. The population of Liberia was 1,016,443 in 1962 and increased to 1,503,368 in 1974. As of 2006, Liberia has the highest population growth rate in the world (4.50% per annum). In 2010 some 43.5% of Liberians were below the age of 15. === Ethnic groups === The population includes 16 indigenous ethnic groups and various foreign minorities. Indigenous peoples comprise about 95 percent of the population. The 16 officially recognized ethnic groups include the Kpelle, Bassa, Mano, Gio or Dan, Kru, Grebo, Krahn, Vai, Gola, Mandingo or Mandinka, Mende, Kissi, Gbandi, Loma, Fante, Dei or Dewoin, Belleh, and Americo-Liberians or Congo people. The Kpelle comprise more than 20% of the population and are the largest ethnic group in Liberia, residing mostly in Bong County and adjacent areas in central Liberia. Americo-Liberians, who are descendants of African American and West Indian, mostly Barbadian settlers, make up 2.5%. Congo people, descendants of repatriated Congo and Afro-Caribbean slaves who arrived in 1825, make up an estimated 2.5%. These latter two groups established political control in the 19th century which they kept well into the 20th century. Numerous immigrants have come as merchants and become a major part of the business community, including Lebanese, Indians, and other West African nationals. There is a high percentage of interracial marriage between ethnic Liberians and the Lebanese, resulting in a significant mixed-race population especially in and around Monrovia. A small minority of Liberians who are White Africans of European descent reside in the country. The Liberian constitution restricts citizenship to people of African descent. === Languages === English is the official language and serves as the lingua franca of Liberia. Thirty-one indigenous languages are spoken within Liberia, none of which is a first language to more than a small percentage of the population. Liberians also speak a variety of creolized dialects collectively known as Liberian English. === Largest cities === === Religion === According to the 2008 National Census, 85.6% of the population practices Christianity, while Muslims represent a minority of 12.2%. A multitude of diverse Protestant confessions such as Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) denominations form the bulk of the Christian population, followed by adherents of the Roman Catholic Church and other non-Protestant Christians. Most of these Christian denominations were brought by African American settlers moving from the United States into Liberia via the American Colonization Society, while some are indigenous—especially Pentecostal and evangelical Protestant ones. Protestantism was originally associated with Black American settlers and their Americo-Liberian descendants, while native peoples held to their own animist forms of African traditional religion. Indigenous people were subject to Christian missionary, as well as

Americo-Liberian efforts to close the cultural gap by means of education. This proved successful, leaving Christians a majority in the country. Muslims comprise 12.2% of the population, largely represented by the Mandingo and Vai ethnic groups. Sunnis, Shias, Ahmadiyyas, Sufis, and non-denominational Muslims constitute the bulk of the Liberian Muslims. Traditional indigenous religions are practiced by 0.5% of the population, while 1.5% subscribe to no religion. A small number of people are Bahá'í, Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist. While Christian, many Liberians also participate in traditional, gender-based indigenous religious secret societies, such as Poro for men and Sande for women. The all-female Sande society practices female circumcision. The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right. While separation of church and state is mandated by the Constitution, Liberia is considered a Christian state in practice. Public schools offer biblical studies, though parents may opt their children out. Commerce is prohibited by law on Sundays and major Christian holidays. The government does not require businesses or schools to excuse Muslims for Friday prayers. == Education == In 2010, the literacy rate of Liberia was estimated at 60.8% (64.8% for males and 56.8% for females). In some areas primary and secondary education is free and compulsory from the ages of 6 to 16, though enforcement of attendance is lax. In other areas children are required to pay a tuition fee to attend school. On average, children attain 10 years of education (11 for boys and 8 for girls). The country's education sector is hampered by inadequate schools and supplies, as well as a lack of qualified teachers. Higher education is provided by a number of public and private universities. The University of Liberia is the country's largest and oldest university. Located in Monrovia, the university opened in 1862. Today it has six colleges, including a medical school and the nation's only law school, Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law. Cuttington University was established by the Episcopal Church of the USA in 1889 in Suakoko, Bong County, as part of its missionary education work among indigenous peoples. It is the nation's oldest private university. In 2009, Tubman University in Harper, Maryland County was established as the second public university in Liberia. Since 2006, the government has also opened community colleges in Buchanan, Sanniquellie, and Voinjama. == Health == Hospitals in Liberia include the John F. Kennedy Medical Center in Monrovia and several others. Life expectancy in Liberia is estimated to be 57.4 years in 2012. With a fertility rate of 5.9 births per woman, the maternal mortality rate stood at 990 per 100,000 births in 2010. A number of highly communicable diseases are widespread, including tuberculosis, diarrheal diseases and malaria. In 2007, the HIV infection rates stood at 2% of the population aged 15–49 whereas the incidence of tuberculosis was 420 per 100,000 people in 2008. Approximately 58.2% – 66% of women are estimated to have undergone female genital mutilation. Liberia imports 90% of its rice, a staple food, and is extremely vulnerable to food shortages. In 2007, 20.4% of children under the age of five were malnourished. In 2008, only 17% of the population had access to adequate sanitation facilities. Approximately 95% of the country's healthcare facilities had been destroyed by the time civil war ended in 2003. In 2009, government expenditure on health care per capita was US\$22, accounting for 10.6% of total GDP. In 2008, Liberia had only one doctor and 27 nurses per 100,000 people. In 2014, an outbreak of Ebola virus in Guinea spread to Liberia. As of November 17, 2014, there were 2,812 confirmed deaths from the ongoing outbreak. In early August 2014 Guinea closed its borders to Liberia to help contain the spread of the virus, as more new cases were being reported in Liberia than in Guinea. On May 9, 2015, Liberia was declared Ebola free after six weeks with no new cases. According to an Overseas Development Institute report, private health expenditure accounts for 64.1% of total spending on health. == Crime == Rape and sexual assault are frequent in the post-conflict era in Liberia. The country has one of the highest incidences of sexual violence against women in the world. Rape is the most frequently reported crime, accounting for more than one-third of sexual violence cases. Adolescent girls are the most frequently assaulted, and almost 40% of perpetrators are adult men known to victims. Both male and female homosexuality is illegal in Liberia. On July 20, 2012, the Liberian senate voted unanimously to enact legislation to prohibit and criminalize same-sex marriages. == Culture == The religious practices, social customs and cultural standards of the Americo-Liberians had their roots in the antebellum American South. The settlers wore top hat and tails and modeled their homes on those of Southern slaveowners. Most Americo-Liberian men were members of the Masonic Order of Liberia, which became heavily involved in the nation's politics. Liberia has a long, rich history in textile arts and quilting, as the settlers brought with them their sewing and quilting skills. Liberia hosted National Fairs in 1857 and 1858 in which prizes were awarded for various needle arts. One of the most well-known Liberian quilters was Martha Ann Ricks, who presented a quilt featuring the famed Liberian coffee tree to Queen Victoria in 1892. When President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf moved into the Executive Mansion, she reportedly had a Liberian-made quilt

installed in her presidential office. A rich literary tradition has existed in Liberia for over a century. Edward Wilmot Blyden, Bai T. Moore, Roland T. Dempster and Wilton G. S. Sankawulo are among Liberia's more prominent authors. Moore's novella *Murder in the Cassava Patch* is considered Liberia's most celebrated novel. === Polygamy === One-third of married Liberian women between the ages of 15–49 are in polygamous marriages. Customary law allows men to have up to four wives. === Cuisine === Liberian cuisine heavily incorporates rice, the country's staple food. Other ingredients include cassava, fish, bananas, citrus fruit, plantains, coconut, okra and sweet potatoes. Heavy stews spiced with habanero and scotch bonnet chillies are popular and eaten with fufu. Liberia also has a tradition of baking imported from the United States that is unique in West Africa. === Sport === The most popular sport in Liberia is association football, with President George Weah — the only African to be named FIFA World Player of the Year — being the nation's most famous athlete. The Liberia national football team has reached the Africa Cup of Nations twice, in 1996 and 2002. The second most popular sport in Liberia is basketball. The Liberian national basketball team has reached the AfroBasket twice, in 1983 and 2007. In Liberia, the Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Complex serves as a multi-purpose stadium. It hosts FIFA World Cup qualifying matches in addition to international concerts and national political events. === Measurement system === Liberia is one of only three countries that have not officially adopted the International System of Units (metric system), the others being the United States and Myanmar. In the United States, the Omnibus Foreign Trade and Competitiveness Act amended the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 and designated the metric system as "the Preferred system of weights and measures for United States trade and commerce", but is mixed in consumer usage, with the population clinging to old units and industries either fully metric or mixed. Myanmar, has made an official decision to metricate and, since 2013, has been transitioning away from Imperial units in the past few years. Gasoline sales are now in litres. The Liberian government has begun transitioning away from use of United States Customary Units to the metric system. However, this change has been gradual, with government reports concurrently using both United States Customary and metric units. == See also == Outline of Liberia Gender inequality in Liberia == References == == Further reading == == External links == Chief of State and Cabinet Members "Liberia". The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency. Liberia from UCB Libraries GovPubs. Liberia at Curlie (based on DMOZ) Liberia profile from the BBC News. Liberia profile from the African Studies Centre Leiden Country portal. "Liberia Maps", Perry-Castañeda Library, University of Texas at Austin. Wikimedia Atlas of Liberia