

Liberia

Ethnicity in Liberia

Group selection

The following groups are politically relevant in Liberia: **Americo-Liberians, Gio, Krahn (Guere), Mandingo, and Mano**. The ethnic group list based on Fearon (²⁴⁶⁹), although several small groups are dropped as they are not politically relevant according to EPR coding criteria.

²⁴⁶⁹ [Fearon, 2003]

Power relations

1945-1980

From the country's independence (1847) until the military coup of Samuel Doe in April 1980, Liberia experienced a total dominance of the **Americo-Liberians** (freed slaves from the U.S.) in the political field (²⁴⁷⁰; ²⁴⁷¹). Through the True Whig Party, they monopolized the leading positions in the one-party state apparatus and the army. Their regime can be appropriately described as a "settler colony" (²⁴⁷²). Thus, the Americo-Liberians are coded as having a "monopoly" over political power in this first period.

²⁴⁷⁰ [Ballah, 2003]

²⁴⁷¹ [Harris, 2006]

²⁴⁷² [Outram, 1999]

All **Indigenous Peoples** of Liberia were excluded from political affairs in a clear division between the "civilized" Americo-Liberians and the "uncivilized" natives. The indigenous peoples faced severe political and economic discrimination (including forced labor), and effective voting rights for them were not in force before the 1985 elections (²⁴⁷³). All indigenous ethnic groups are therefore combined to one politically relevant ethnic group and coded as "discriminated".

²⁴⁷³ [Outram, 1999]

1981-1989

Doe's coup brought an end to the Americo-Liberian dominance. With the indigenous peoples taking over political power, however, ethnic differences became much more salient and politically significant. Thus, from this period on, the different indigenous ethnic groups in the country are coded as distinct politically relevant groups.

Doe's rule relied heavily on his own **Krahn** group, which occupied the state's key positions. They soon dominated political and military life in Liberia (²⁴⁷⁴; ²⁴⁷⁵). Thus, the Krahn are coded as "dominant" during Doe's regime.

²⁴⁷⁴ [Ballah, 2003]

²⁴⁷⁵ [Outram, 1999]

Americo-Liberian leaders were executed or dismissed from their jobs immediately after the coup as Doe stroke out to retaliate

against Americo-Liberians (²⁴⁷⁶). Hence, the Americo-Liberian group is coded as “discriminated”.

²⁴⁷⁶ [Ballah, 2003]

There is also widespread discrimination and state violence against the **Gio** and **Mano** ethnic groups (where opposition against Doe was widespread), especially after Quiwonkpa’s (a Gio) failed coup in 1985 (²⁴⁷⁷; ²⁴⁷⁸). Thus, these groups are also coded as “discriminated”.

²⁴⁷⁷ [Ballah, 2003]

²⁴⁷⁸ [Outram, 1999]

No evidence for the political relevance of any other indigenous ethnic group after the end of the discriminating Americo-Liberian rule could be found.

1990-1996

With Taylor’s invasion from Cote d’Ivoire at the end of 1989, the first Liberian civil war breaks out. Liberia becomes a “collapsed state”. There is no central authority anymore (even less so after President Doe is killed), and the state is unable to perform any of its “empirical functions” outside Monrovia (even after the installation of the Interim Government of National Unity) (²⁴⁷⁹).

²⁴⁷⁹ [Outram, 1999]

As there is no functioning central political power during this time and the country is ruled by different rebel groups, warlords, criminal gangs etc., the term “access to state power” becomes completely meaningless. Therefore, this period is coded as “state collapse” (meaning that all groups are coded as “irrelevant”).

1997-2003

Taylor becomes president and rules the country until August 2003. He is from an Americo-Liberian family (with a “native” mother), and from the very beginning of the civil war, he collaborated with the Americo-Liberian elite in his personal business (which mainly involved Liberia’s natural resources and served for his personal enrichment at the expense of the country) (²⁴⁸⁰).

²⁴⁸⁰ [Reno, 1995]

At the same time, many of Taylor’s former civil war combatants were given jobs in the state’s security apparatus. These combatants were to a large extent from the Gio and Mano ethnic groups (which, of course, had been more than willing to join Taylor’s fight against Doe’s regime from which they had been suffering) (²⁴⁸¹; ²⁴⁸²). Taylor’s vice-president, Moses Blah (appointed in 2000), is also a Gio.

²⁴⁸¹ [Ballah, 2003]

²⁴⁸² [Outram, 1999]

Overall, ethnicity became a less important factor concerning the access to state power during Taylor’s rule. Taylor also included some political opponents into his government (even if this was only to stifle the opposition) (²⁴⁸³). There is, thus, a certain (informal) power-sharing between different ethnic groups. Within this arrangement - considering the above mentioned facts and given Taylor’s central role in the government - the Americo-Liberians are coded as “senior partner”, and the Gio and Mano groups as “junior partners”.

²⁴⁸³ [Outram, 1999]

However, with regard to state repression, ethnicity is still of great significance. The former dominant group, the Krahn, as well as the **Mandingo** group – perceived as their collaborators – are now

the targets of ethnic discrimination during Taylor’s rule, resulting in dismissals from the state apparatus, state violence, etc. ⁽²⁴⁸⁴⁾. Therefore, both the Krahn and Mandingo groups are coded as “discriminated”.

²⁴⁸⁴ [Outram, 1999]

Again, no evidence could be found suggesting political relevance of any other ethnic group.

2004-2005

Between Taylor’s demission in mid-2003 – after new rebel groups (composed mostly by members of the Mandingo and Krahn ethnic groups ⁽²⁴⁸⁵⁾) had advanced as far as the capital Monrovia – and the free and fair multi-party elections in 2005, there was a transition period with an inclusive transitory government. (The newly elected president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (a member of the Americo-Liberian elite), assumed office in January 2006.)

²⁴⁸⁵ [Harris, 2006]

The cabinet posts and National Transitional Legislative Assembly seats were equally divided between the civil society (and other neutral political forces) and the warring factions (i.e. the corresponding ethnic groups).

Chairman of this power-sharing government was Gyude Bryant, a neutral politician whose ethnic group (the Grebo) did not play a significant role in the country’s war history ⁽²⁴⁸⁶⁾. It seems clear to me that he did not represent his ethnic group but was rather a compromise candidate who – thanks to his (ethnic) neutrality – did not belong to any of the rival factions and was “fresh” in Liberia’s high politics. There is, moreover, no evidence of an improved political standing of the Grebo group during Bryant’s rule. Therefore, the group is not added to the list of politically relevant ethnic groups.

²⁴⁸⁶ [BBC, 2003]

All ethnic groups involved in the past and ongoing ethnic conflicts are now included in the power-sharing arrangement (Americo-Liberians, Krahn, Mandingo, Gio, and Mano) and therefore coded as equal “senior partners” of the government.

Again, no evidence could be found suggesting political relevance of any other ethnic group (e.g. the Kpelle or Kru).

2006-2017

Johnson-Sirleaf’s tenure as elected president is characterized by political stability and certain economic progress. Nevertheless, ethnic divides still play an important role in postwar Liberian politics ^(2487; 2488). Note that the U.S. State Department HR Reports of 2008 and 2009 explicitly mention the Americo-Liberians (“Congos”), Krahn, Gio, Mano, and Mandingo as the most relevant groups in Liberia’s ethno-political rivalries – which is exactly in line with the coding so far.

²⁴⁸⁷ [Freedom House, 2010]

²⁴⁸⁸ [US State Department, 2006–2009]

Johnson-Sirleaf formed a government of so-called “technocrats” from among all ethnic groups. Nominations to the executive and judiciary are said to be made based on the concept of “inclusive governance” ⁽²⁴⁸⁹⁾. Also, recruitment to the army (and the police)

²⁴⁸⁹ [Freedom House, 2010]

seems to be ethnically balanced (²⁴⁹⁰). Cross-ethnic nominations become also evident when examining the composition of the first Johnson-Sirleaf government (²⁴⁹¹). Therefore, this period is coded as a power-sharing regime with all politically relevant ethnic groups included. These relevant groups are the five mentioned above, which are the same as those coded as politically relevant in the previous periods. Johnson-Sirleaf is a member of the Americo-Liberian establishment. (Although not Americo-Liberian by ancestry, she was brought up within the Americo-Liberian elite.) Thus, the Americo-Liberians are coded as “senior partner” of the government, and the Gio, Mano, Krahn and Mandingo groups as “junior partners”.

In November 2010, Johnson-Sirleaf won the presidential elections for a second time and many of the posts in the new cabinet were filled with members of the old government (²⁴⁹²). Reshuffles within the government were quite common, but mainly served the purpose of moving ministers from one ministry to another. No signs of political discrimination or exclusion were found. Hence, no major changes of the ethnic composition of the Liberian government are found to have happened.

Liberia is holding a general election in 2017, therefore the president (Johnson-Sirleaf) remained in office for the entire period, and her cabinet has remained mostly unchanged (²⁴⁹³). No political discrimination based on ethnicity is reported (²⁴⁹⁴; ²⁴⁹⁵). Rather, discrimination is most reported against homosexuals, and minority groups of Whites and Asians who are restricted in their citizenship rights (²⁴⁹⁶). However, the EPR dataset does not consider non-citizens, such as migrant workers. Hence, the Lebanese (and similar groups) are not politically relevant according to these criteria.

The Ebola epidemic has posed the greatest problem to Liberian politics over this time, first breaking out in early 2014. This has placed great economic and administrative pressure on the government (²⁴⁹⁷). This is the most pertinent issue in the country today and is likely to have economic repercussions for the most vulnerable in the future, ethnic minorities or otherwise.

²⁴⁹⁰ [International Crisis Group, 2009]

²⁴⁹¹ [Gerdes, 2011]

²⁴⁹² [International Crisis Group, 2012]

²⁴⁹³ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

²⁴⁹⁴ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

²⁴⁹⁵ [U.S State Department, 2016]

²⁴⁹⁶ [U.S State Department, 2016]

²⁴⁹⁷ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Liberia

From 1946 until 1980

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Indigenous Peoples	0.98	DISCRIMINATED
Americo-Liberians	0.02	MONOPOLY

From 1981 until 1989

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Gio	0.08	DISCRIMINATED
Mano	0.07	DISCRIMINATED
Krahn (Guere)	0.05	DOMINANT
Americo-Liberians	0.02	DISCRIMINATED
Mandingo	0.017	IRRELEVANT

From 1990 until 1996

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Gio	0.08	STATE COLLAPSE
Mano	0.07	STATE COLLAPSE
Krahn (Guere)	0.05	STATE COLLAPSE
Americo-Liberians	0.02	STATE COLLAPSE
Mandingo	0.017	STATE COLLAPSE

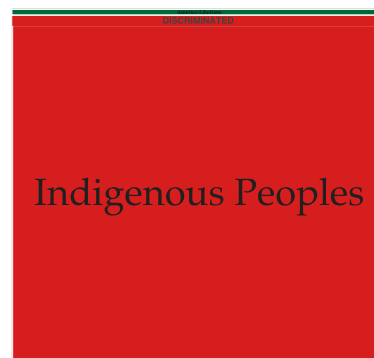


Figure 517: Political status of ethnic groups in Liberia during 1946-1980.



Figure 518: Political status of ethnic groups in Liberia during 1981-1989.



Figure 519: Political status of ethnic groups in Liberia during 1990-1996.

From 1997 until 2003

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Gio	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER
Mano	0.07	JUNIOR PARTNER
Krahn (Guere)	0.05	DISCRIMINATED
Americo-Liberians	0.02	SENIOR PARTNER
Mandingo	0.017	DISCRIMINATED

From 2004 until 2005

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Gio	0.08	SENIOR PARTNER
Mano	0.07	SENIOR PARTNER
Krahn (Guere)	0.05	SENIOR PARTNER
Americo-Liberians	0.02	SENIOR PARTNER
Mandingo	0.017	SENIOR PARTNER

From 2006 until 2017

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Gio	0.08	JUNIOR PARTNER
Mano	0.07	JUNIOR PARTNER
Krahn (Guere)	0.05	JUNIOR PARTNER
Americo-Liberians	0.02	SENIOR PARTNER
Mandingo	0.017	JUNIOR PARTNER



Figure 520: Political status of ethnic groups in Liberia during 1997-2003.



Figure 521: Political status of ethnic groups in Liberia during 2004-2005.



Figure 522: Political status of ethnic groups in Liberia during 2006-2017.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Liberia

From 1946 until 1980

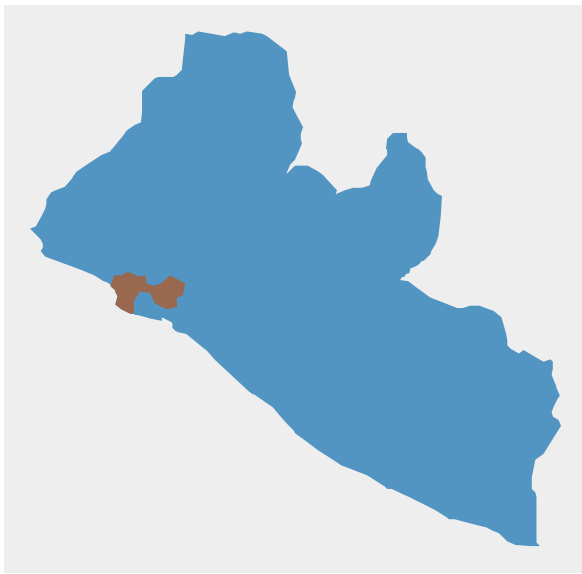


Figure 523: Map of ethnic groups in Liberia during 1946-1980.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Indigenous Peoples	96 404	Statewide
■	Americo-Liberians	1332	Regional & urban

Table 179: List of ethnic groups in Liberia during 1946-1980.

From 1981 until 1989

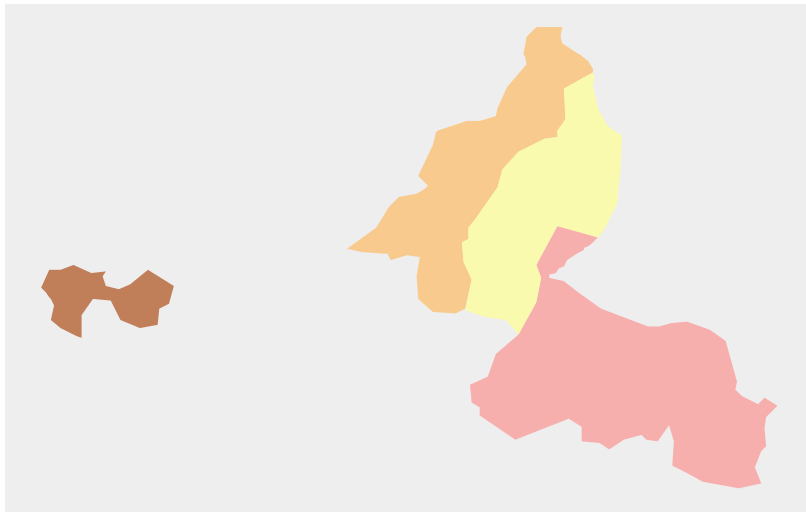


Figure 524: Map of ethnic groups in Liberia during 1981-1989.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Krahn (Guere)	9219	Regionally based
■	Mano	5331	Regionally based
■	Gio	5093	Regionally based
■	Americo-Liberians	1332	Regional & urban

Table 180: List of ethnic groups in Liberia during 1981-1989.

From 1990 until 2017

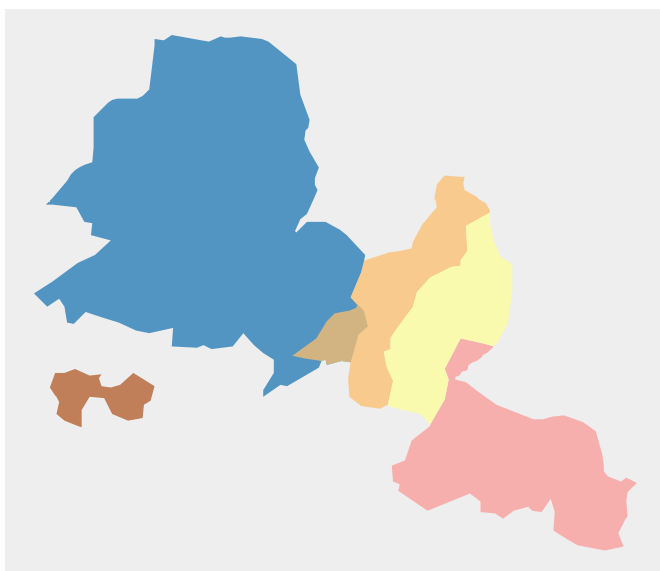


Figure 525: Map of ethnic groups in Liberia during 1990-2017.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Mandingo	28 295	Regionally based
■	Krahn (Guere)	9219	Regionally based
■	Mano	5331	Regionally based
■	Gio	5093	Regionally based
■	Americo-Liberians	1332	Regional & urban

Table 181: List of ethnic groups in Liberia during 1990-2017.

Conflicts in Liberia

Starting on 1980-04-11

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Liberia	Military faction (forces of Samuel Doe)	Indigenous Peoples	1980-04-11	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Liberia	NPFL	Gio	1989-12-23	Presumed	Yes	Yes
Government of Liberia	NPFL	Mano	1989-12-23	Presumed	Yes	Yes
Government of Liberia	INPFL	Mano	1990-05-13	No	No	No
Government of Liberia	INPFL	Gio	1990-05-13	Presumed	Yes	No
Government of Liberia	LURD	Mandingo	2000-05-30	No	Yes	No
Government of Liberia	LURD	Krahn (Guere)	2000-05-30	No	Yes	No
Government of Liberia	MODEL	Krahn (Guere)	2003-04-26	No	Yes	Yes