



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## If Elected as a non-permanent member in 2026, can Liberia leverage its influence on the UN Security Council?

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2024, 13(02), 145–156

Publication history: Received on 18 September 2024; revised on 27 October 2024; accepted on 31 October 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2024.13.2.2075>

### Abstract

From the exploratory case study method that is also qualitative, this article provides a conceptual understanding of Liberia's bid for the seat as UNSC NPM with an emphasis on its influence on the global stage. Based on the conceptualization of how small states can leverage their influence on the UNSC to substantially contribute to international peace and security, this paper doubts not the possibility for small states to leverage their influence at the UNSC but is particularly skeptical about the leverage of Liberia's influence as a small state on the UNSC. The paper argues that Liberia's prolonged absence from the UNSC since 1961 coupled with its peripheral position in the international system raised a legitimate concern that resonates with the conceptual framework adopted by this paper.

Conclusively, the paper argues that if elected as UNSC NPM, Liberia's position will be similar to the ceremonial role of most African countries that exit the UNSC without a mark of significance difference. It recommends that to make a significant difference, Liberia could take a cue from Estonia and Lithuania experiences cited in this paper as small states that meaningfully impacted the UNSC.

**Keywords:** Influence; Liberia; Non-Permanent Members; Small States; United Nations Security Council

### 1. Introduction

In 1961, Liberia lost its non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to Morocco during the presidency of William V.S. Tubman. During his first address to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2024, Liberia's incumbent President Joseph Nyuma Boakai announced the country's candidacy for the African non-permanent seat on the UNSC in 2026 and urged United Nations (UN) member states to support Liberia's bid to help influence the global decision regarding international peace and security (Koinyeneh, 2024). In his address to the UNGA, President Boakai emphasized Liberia's preparedness to collaborate with Council members to advance peace and security worldwide (Harmon, 2024).

Given the similarities between Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique as post-conflict societies, and considering Sierra Leone's return to the Security Council after 54 years (Chatham House, 2024), and Mozambique's election to the Security Council in 2022 (United Nations, 2022), it is likely that Liberia will be elected based on its lobbying power as an indication of the influence its brings to the high table.

History is replete with some non-permanent members of the UNSC viewed as small powers or small states making use of their influence on the global stage. For example, Brazil's introduction of the "responsibility while protecting" agenda in 2011 (Serbin, & Pont, 2015). Australia's 2014 push for a procedural vote to add to the Council's agenda the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (UN Security Council Report, 2014). Lithuania used its

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influence to organize a meeting for interior ministers in the UNSC to discuss the implementation of resolution 2179 on preventing the flow of terrorist fighters to and from conflict zones. During its term, Lithuania chaired the UNSC Counterterrorism Committee, and the sanctions committees related to Yemen and the Central African Republic (Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations in New York, 2014).

During its presidency in May 2020, Estonia organized the high-level Arria Formula meeting. Foreign ministers from over 50 states took part and discussed the lessons learned from the post-war situation and discussed how to prevent international war crimes in the future. This was also a practical challenge because this event had to be organized online because of COVID-19 (Republic of Estonia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

If Liberia successfully secures a non-permanent seat on the UNSC, can it as a small state leverage its influence to do similar things within the international system? Can it influence the shift in global peace and security policy? Alternatively, will it simply make history by returning for the second time, but as a mere spectator? To address these questions, this article assesses the prospect of Liberia leveraging its influence to impact the international system as it relates to global peace and security. It proceeds in three sections. Section 1 lays out the literature review focusing on background information on the UNSC, and the theoretical and conceptual background focusing on the influence of small states within the context of the Security Council. It presents several cases that challenge the common belief that the centrality of the five permanent members (P5) leaves no room for non-permanent members especially small states to leverage significant influence on Council decision-making. Section 2, which is the core of the article, applies the conceptual framework to Liberia and its influence on the international system. Finally, Section 3 concludes the article.

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## 2. Method and Materials

This article takes cognizance of the exploratory case study method. The purpose of using this method, which is also qualitative, is to help the researcher gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon or topic. It involves conducting a detailed investigation of a specific case or cases to explore and generate new insights, theories, or hypotheses. The study typically involves collecting and analyzing qualitative data through methods such as interviews, document analysis, and observations (JRSA, 2021). In this study, the researcher's interest is not to interview and hypothesize the phenomenon (case studies) under study but to theorize the phenomenon with the sole intent of generating new insights. The data that constitutes the secondary material was analyzed through document analysis also equated to relevant literature review sourced from the internet through Google search engines and Google Scholar search engines.

### 2.1. Contribution to Knowledge

A scholarly article contributes to knowledge in many ways. One way this article contributes to knowledge is by providing enlightenment, which is critical to addressing challenges. In this context, this article provides an eye-opener for Liberia, precisely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to learn how other smaller countries leveraged their influence to make remarkable gains at the UNSC. It also contributes to knowledge by demystifying the convention wisdom that non-permanent members cannot leverage their influence at the UNSC and are just mere spectators.

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## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1. Brief Background Information on the UNSC

As the premier global body for maintaining international peace and security, the structure of the UNSC has remained largely unchanged since its founding in 1946 (Council of Foreign Relations, 2024). It comprises 15 member states, including 5 permanent members (P5) (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) who hold veto power, and 10 non-permanent members elected (E10) for two-year terms with veto power. These non-permanent members are chosen to represent different geographic regions and are responsible for ensuring a broad international perspective in the Council's work (Council of Foreign Relations, 2024).

Historically, the members of the P5 have exercised the veto power to varying degrees. Counting the years when the Soviet Union held its seat, Russia has been the most frequent user of the veto, blocking 158 resolutions since the Security Council's founding. Comparatively, the United States has used the veto ninety-two times; it last vetoed a resolution on April 18, 2024, which called for full UN membership for Palestine (Council of Foreign Relations, 2024) (Washington argues that statehood should emerge out of negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian officials, rather than be granted preemptively by the UN.) The United States has historically used its veto power to protect Israel from Security Council decisions, with approximately one-third of its negative votes since 1972 applied to resolutions critical of Israel (Council

of Foreign Relations, 2024) China has used the veto more frequently in recent years, though it has historically been more sparing than the United States or Russia; Beijing has now blocked twenty-one resolutions, and Moscow has joined in on more than three-quarters of the resolutions that China has vetoed. In contrast, neither France nor the United Kingdom has exercised its veto power since 1989, and each has advocated for other P5 members to use it less (Council of Foreign Relations, 2024).

The Security Council has the authority to investigate disputes and recommend solutions, impose sanctions, and authorize the use of force to maintain or restore peace and security (United Nations, n.d.).

### **3.2. The Non-Permanent Members**

According to Article 23, para. 2 of the Charter of the United Nations, Non-permanent members only serve a term for 2 years, if they are elected. In order to be elected, a UN member has to garner the support of most of the members in the General Assembly and this takes a lot of effort. Even if elected, non-permanent members have to cooperate with other powers to influence security policy. They do not have the right to veto, and if elected, they also have to represent the interests of other powers that voted for them (Gailišs, 2023).

As of 2024, the non-permanent members of the UN Security Council are Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Sierra Leone, and Slovenia.

These countries were elected for two-year terms which started in January 2024. They joined the existing non-permanent members: Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, and Switzerland (Xinhua, 2024).

### **3.3. Newly Elected Members for 2025-2026**

In June 2024, the UN General Assembly elected five new non-permanent members for the 2025-2026 term. These elected members are Pakistan (182 votes), Somalia (179 votes), Panama (183 votes), Denmark (184 votes), and Greece (182 votes) (Aydogan, 2024).

These countries will begin their terms on January 1, 2025, replacing Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, and Switzerland, whose terms end on December 31, 2024 (Aydogan, 2024).

The rotational nature of the non-permanent members ensures diverse representation, providing a platform for countries from different regions to contribute to the work of the Council, often focusing on issues affecting their respective regions while maintaining a global perspective on peace and security.

### **3.4. The Role of the Non-Permanent Members**

Despite the perception that the UNSC is dominated by its P5 who, in addition to their veto power, can leverage their tenure, institutional memory, and greater resources to determine council outcomes, the NMP or E10 can collectively and individually make tangible contributions to the council and have the ability to influence its decisions. The means below explain how the NMP/E10 performs its duties contributing toward global peace and security.

### **3.5. Council Procedure**

Council procedures offer NPMs several opportunities to make tangible contributions to the council's work. The most prominent role is the rotating council presidency, though opportunities such as chairing subsidiary bodies also offer occasions to influence specific issues (United Nations Security Council, n.d.)

### **3.6. Council Presidency**

The council presidency rotates every month among all 15 members, meaning NPMs will assume the presidency for one or two months during their terms. The president plays an important role in guiding the work of the council, with the power to influence the monthly program of work and the conduct of meetings. This includes the opportunity for presidents to organize one or several council events around a topic of particular interest. The president is also a critical facilitator of council negotiations and acts as the council's representative in interactions with other UN members and entities, outside stakeholders, and the public (United Nations Security Council, n.d.).

### **3.7. Subsidiary Bodies**

Chairing the council's subsidiary bodies is generally reserved for NPMs and rotates on an annual basis. With more than 20 active subsidiary bodies, NPMs can chair several concurrently. Most subsidiary bodies consist of either committees

established to oversee economic sanctions regimes enacted by council resolutions or working groups focused on thematic issues relevant to the council's work (United Nations Security Council, n.d.).

### **3.8. Council Decision-Making**

The council's procedures foresee its work happening in formal meetings, where resolutions and other decisions are presented, amended, and voted upon. However, much of the council's deliberations occur through informal negotiations (United Nations Security Council, n.d.)

### **3.9. Penholder System**

The council's informal working methods have evolved over time. An arrangement where one or several members (known as "penholders") lead negotiations and draft texts on recurring agenda items is an example. Developed informally in the 2000s, the penholder system has since coalesced into accepted council practice.

The system continues to evolve and has been criticized for encouraging greater intra-permanent member negotiation, to the exclusion of E10 (Security Council Report, 2024). Calls for a broader sharing of responsibility for "holding the pen" with NPMs have led to commitments to do so, though permanent members continue to dominate penholder positions (Security Council Report, 2024)

### **3.10. Informal Meetings**

Like the penholder system, council practice has evolved to include several forms of informal meetings, most notably informal interactive dialogues and Arria-formula meetings. These meetings allow the council to consider issues or meet with other entities, including other UN bodies and civil society organizations, in situations where there is no consensus on holding a formal meeting (Security Council Report, 2020).

Both informal interactive dialogues and Arria-formula meetings may be called at the initiative of any council member or group of members. Past NPMs or E10 have found these meetings a useful means of hearing from a wider range of perspectives on a given topic while allowing the council to be more interactive and transparent with the broader UN community. Regularly initiated by E10, informal meetings are also an opportunity for E10 to advance their priority issues (Security Council Report, 2020).

### **3.11. Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

This subsection focuses on the influence of small powers within the context of the UNSC.

#### *3.11.1. The Concept of Small States*

From the context of international relations, small states also equated to small power, among other concepts lacking scientific consensus. Viewed from the angle of the UNSC, Thorhallsson (2012) advanced two broad categories of qualitative factors that determine the ability of small states to influence the UNSC. According to the author, the first is the internal competence of small states in areas such as knowledge, initiative, diplomacy, coalition, and leadership skills (Thorhallsson, 2012). The second is the state's image in the international system with specific regard to its perceived neutrality or reputation as a norm entrepreneur in particular policy fields. These qualitative features need to be combined with quantitative variables such as population, territorial size, gross domestic product (GDP) and military capacity that are normally used in International Relations in order to understand small states' ability to become active participants in the UNSC.

Complementing Thorhallsson's concept, (Wivel et al., 201) posits that the general statistical measurements of small states encompass the size of the territory, population size, gross domestic product, and military expenditure, thus referring to a separate group of states that are not great powers and that lack power in a quantitative sense.

Keohane (2006) identified small power based on qualitative criteria. Accordingly, smallness is when a small state or power cannot influence the international system on its own and can only influence the international system in cooperation with other powers.

Similarly, Gailišs (2023) argues that small states cannot on their own influence security in the world but do it by participating in coalitions and alliances. In the same vein, Chowdhury (2012) maintains that small powers or states need to cooperate with international organizations to be more successful. They lack economic influence and weight in diplomatic consultations, and they are also constrained by being in other regional organizations and the fact that their

policies are subordinated to great powers. Despite their limitation, the author pointed out that small powers or states can influence the international system by adding value to already existing international mechanisms and common norms (Chowdhury, 2012). The examples of how Lithuania, Australia, and Estonia leveraged their influence early cited in the introduction of this paper bear attestation to Chowdhury's claim.

In what could be termed as a buttress to the claims raised by the above like-minded authors, Súilleabháin (2014), emphatically opines that small powers or small states face difficulties at the UNSC. These difficulties include information access, lack of capacity, and structural barriers to full participation. The author further claims that small powers have limited ability to process information and get information, and the lack of capacity means that the mission is limited in size.

From the perspective of the world system theory developed by Immanuel Wallerstein in the 1970s, small states at the UNSC also fit into the conceptualization of periphery countries which are not entirely inclusive of all the NPMs of the UNSC. This is because some NPMs have moved away from the peripheral position. These NPMs who are positioned at the periphery of the international system are the least-developed and still developing countries. They produce labor-intensive and/or low-skill products and are typically exploited as a source of cheap labor, raw materials, and agricultural production for core and semi-periphery countries (World Population Review, 2024). Sierra Leone, Mozambique, and Somalia are among the periphery countries. While Greece Denmark and Denmark among the newly elected NPMs are among the core countries (Chase & Kawano 2000).

From the above conceptualization of small states equated to small powers, none of the authors pinpointed or labeled small states of the UNSC NPM/E10. Therefore, it would be unfair and at the same time erroneous to generalize all of the NPM/E10. This is because some of the UNSC NPMs or E10 do not fit into the qualitative and quantitative criteria defining small states and even the world system concept or theory. Arguably, can Japan, Switzerland, the Republic of Korea, and Slovenia fit into the conceptualization of small states or powers? What about Canada, Norway, Germany, etc. that once served as NPMs/E10? Each of these states fits into the conceptualization as articulated by the various authors in this paper. So, it is safe to argue that not all the NPMs/E10 are small states or small powers. These states are considered small because of the structure of the UNSC which disadvantaged them. For example, Japan, Canada, Norway, Germany, South Africa, Nigeria, etc. satisfied some of the qualitative and quantitative criteria possessed by the P5 and are not positioned at the periphery of the international system.

On the other hand, this paper without being prejudiced to the fact is inclined to rationalize that the conceptualization of small states is ascribed to Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Algeria, and even Liberia which is bidding for a non-permanent seat on the UNSC. It is not because they are in Africa that is arguably positioned at the periphery of the international system. Take, for example, the GDP and military capacity of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Mozambique which are some of the qualitative criteria for small states. The indicators of these two criteria are extremely evidential to establish the facts in the issue about Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mozambique, and even other African countries that served as UNSC NPM.

The dates of the various authors publications about the conceptualization of small states seemed to fall short of the minimum standards for citing publications (not more than 5 years). This glaring fact could justify an inquiry questioning their applications to contemporary international politics. However, there is no doubt that despite far above 5 years, their articulation or conceptualization of small states also equates to small powers resonates with the contemporary international system. Therefore, their citations in this paper cannot be viewed as faulty. In summary, the conceptualization of small states does not in any way imply that they cannot leverage their influence at the UNSC. As mentioned in subsequent sections, this paper provides practical examples.

### *3.11.2. Conceptualizing Influence in UNSC*

The question of how states leverage their influence at the UNSC sits at the core of international relations. Even though it has been more than four decades since Cox and Jacobson (1973) conceptualized how states leverage their influence in the UNSC. Nevertheless, their opinions still live on, especially in the UNSC. In their historical but classical discourse, Cox and Jacobson (1973) advanced four ways in which states leverage their influence, namely (1) by taking the initiative; (2) by casting a veto and preventing a decision from being taken; (3) through control (e.g. over resources or knowledge); and (4) through brokerage between entrenched positions vis-à-vis a specific issue. In application, Cox and Jacobson's third means works well for the P5 endowed with veto power sanctioned by Article 27 of the UN Charter. The remaining applies to both P5 and NPM o E10.

As his contribution, Baldwin (2002) exposed four means of how states exert their influence in international affairs which also refers to the UNSC namely military, economic symbolic, and diplomatic.

Similarly, Thorhallsson (2012) argues that two broad categories of qualitative factors determine the ability of small states to influence the UNSC. The first is the internal competence of small states in areas such as knowledge, initiative, diplomacy, coalition, and leadership skills. The second is the image of the state in the international system with specific regard to its perceived neutrality or reputation as a norm entrepreneur in particular policy fields. These qualitative features need to be combined with quantitative variables - such as population, territorial size, gross domestic product (GDP) and military capacity - that are normally used in International Relations.

Practically, all the P5 of the UNSC satisfies Baldwin's qualitative and quantitative criteria and Thorhallsson's criteria. First, let's take Baldwin's concept. For example, the United States is positioned at 1 with a power index of 0.0699, Russia is positioned at 2 with a power index of 0.0702, and China is positioned at 3 with a power index of 0.0706 are the first three top of the 2024 Military Strength Ranking (GFP Annual Ranking, 2024). France is positioned at 11 with a power index of 0.1878, and the United Kingdom is positioned at 6 on the table with a power index of 0.1443 (GFP Annual Ranking, 2024). As for the current NPM or E10, Denmark is positioned at 48 with a power index of 0.7743, Pakistan is positioned at 9 with a power index of 0.1711, Somalia is positioned at 142 with a power index of 3.9006, Panama is positioned at 134 with a power index of 3.3388, Greece is positioned at 32 with a power index of 0.4349 (GFP Annual Ranking, 2024).

As for the economic symbol measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), all of the P5 are among the top 15 countries by GDP in trillions as of 2024. For example, the United States is positioned at 1 with a GDP of \$25.43 trillion, followed by China with a GDP of \$14.72 trillion, the United Kingdom in the 6<sup>th</sup> position with a GDP of \$2.67 trillion, France in the 7<sup>th</sup> position with a GDP of \$2.63 trillion, and Russia in the 8<sup>th</sup> position of the table with a GDP of \$2.24 trillion (Safe Guide Global, 2024). Regrettably, none of the current NPM or E10 is among the rankings.

In the opinion of Baldwin and Thorhallsson, diplomacy connotes countries with strong diplomatic influence having an impact on the international system or order. Granted, no scientific consensus regarding precise measurement exists in academia. However, the only popular measurement is the foreign policy of countries that determines the influence of their diplomacy. Moreover, their economic potency is another determinant of diplomatic influence. For example, the growing influence of China in Africa evidenced by its recent China-Africa Cooperation Summit pledging over \$50 billion in financial aid to Africa to deepen ties speaks the significance of its diplomatic influence in Africa (Bao, 2024). Doubtlessly, it is China economic potency that drives its diplomacy in Africa.

Arguably, Russia is another example of growing influence in Africa. Russia is emerging as the security partner of choice for a growing number of African governments in the region, displacing traditional allies like France and the United States (Banchereau & Donati, 2024). Interestingly, Moscow has jumped ahead of Beijing as the leading arms seller in sub-Saharan Africa with a market share of 26%, compared to 21% over the previous period (Douet, 2023). These examples bear attestation to Russia's diplomatic influence through its military diplomacy. Of course, the US influence doubtlessly remains high as well.

In summary, it can be argued that Baldwin's criteria and Thorhallsson's criteria favor P5 in which the concept of veto power creates the grounds to leverage their influence on the global stage.

From a different dimension of how to leverage its influence, Loprespub seems to complement Thorhallsson's concept. The author argues that countries that enter the council well-prepared, with a good understanding of council working methods and a clear and reasonable set of priorities can make meaningful contributions on a range of issues while advancing the topics of greatest importance to them (Loprespub, 2020). Inarguably, Loprespub's concept resonates with knowledge, initiative, diplomacy, coalition, and leadership skills advanced by Thorhallsson which are extremely crucial to making a meaningful impact on the UNSC. In other words, going to the UNSC, especially as an NPM borders on knowledge that empowers states' representatives with the leadership skills to push or drive initiatives through diplomatic prowess.

According to research conducted by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, small powers could use coalition building, organizing special events, and taking the penholder role to successfully influence the Security Council. Agenda setting and work on resolutions are important, but other factors could benefit small powers (Haugevik et al., 2021).

A critical look into Loprespub's concept and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute proves to work well for not only the P5 but also the NPM or E10 of the UNSC. History is replete with how small states or powers leveraged their influence through the Loprespub concept. Below are a few examples of some small states that left an indelible legacy of leveraging their influence on the UNSC NPM seat.

Estonia as a small state succeeded in bringing a new aspect into the UNSC work:

The cybersecurity agenda. As part of its presidency, for the first time in the UNSC history, Estonia during the COVID 19 organized a virtual meeting in a format of Arria-formula, focused on stability in cyberspace, cyber norms, and international law, thus contributing both to global and national security agenda (Reire, 2021).

Interestingly, Estonia's UNSC priorities were very well-defined and precise. They were international law, rules-based world order, new threats (climate change and cyber security), and working methods of the Council (Raik, 2021), Estonia is also the co-penholder with Norway on the theme of Afghanistan, which was a major topic on the UNSC agenda already before the withdrawal of the US forces in 2021 (Estonia, 2020).

Lithuania is another small state that made significant indelible history at the UNSC. Through its seasoned representative on the UNSC, Lithuania went to the UNSC with a clear initiative or agenda to prevent small arms from coming into the hands of war criminals, terrorist organizations, and human rights abusers.

Lithuania insisted that the UNSC should use embargo rights more extensively and contribute to the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty and initiated discussion on small arms trade prevention, which included improving control of small arms in conflict de-escalation processes and cooperation between sanction committees and peacekeeping missions (Security Council, 2015a). It also organized a meeting for interior ministers on the UNSC to discuss the implementation of resolution 2179 on preventing the flow of terrorist fighters to and from conflict zones. During its term, Lithuania chaired the UNSC Counterterrorism Committee, and the sanctions committees related to Yemen and the Central African Republic (Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations in New York, 2014). It actively contributed to improving the implementation of sanctions and the transparency of the work of sanction committees (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021).

The example of Estonia and Lithuania conceptually and practically demonstrates that small countries can leverage their influence at the high table of the UNCS. Their success stories point to Loprespub's concept which also complements Thorhallsson's concept articulated in this paper (Gailiņš, 2023). Moreover, both countries used niche diplomacy in order to set agenda rather than make new resolutions, they were neutral like other countries in the UNSC; thus, they did not show any mediation initiatives, cooperated with other powers, for instance, in the EU format and with their great power allies, but they did not build coalitions by themselves. Both countries highlighted the security situation in Ukraine as a priority or put it on their agendas because Russian support for the Donbass separatists and actions to intervene militarily in Ukraine threatened international norms and laws, organizing side events which is another way to influence UNSC was employed by both countries although not a priority or strategy (Gailiņš, 2023).

In Africa, there is a teaspoon of success stories at the UNSC that to a little extent aligned with Loprespub's concept. South Africa's 2019-2020 term benefited tremendously from institutional memory that had been accumulated following its two prior terms. Before joining the Council in 2019, South Africa had, remarkably, been a member twice in fewer than 10 years (from 2007-2008, and again from 2011-2012). This experience afforded the country a degree of familiarity in understanding the "rules of the game" and Council procedures, based on its existing knowledge of political and institutional dynamics. South Africa's recent term was also bolstered by its reliance on diplomats with extensive multilateral knowledge and prior UNSC working experience (Carvalho & Singh, 2021). Through its credentials that align with Loprespub's concept, South Africa ably leveraged its influence. In October 2019, the country led the negotiation of resolution 2493. Following the difficult negotiations led by Germany in April 2019, South Africa's efforts saw a return of unanimous voting on WPS resolutions (Carvalho & Singh, 2021).

Egypt has been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council five times namely 1949-1950, 1961-1962, 1984, 1996-1997, and 2015-2017. In 1961-1962, Egypt supported the independence of African countries and abstained from voting on decisions supporting Israel, and in 1984 it supported the council's efforts to end Israel's invasion of Lebanon (CCCPA, 2015).

On the flip side of the same coin, the conceptualization of how small states can leverage their influence at the high table of the UNSC seems not to favor most African countries. Arguably, their roles were merely ceremonial. For instance, Nigeria also tops the list of African countries to have been on the UNSC NPM seats with a record of five times from 1966 – 1967, 1978 – 1979, 1994 – 1995, 2010 – 2011, and 2014 – 2015 (Nwalie, 2022) but could not project its influence to shift global security and peace policy. Sierra Leone's presidency of the UNSC in August 2024 did not translate into tangible gains relating to global security and peace policy. One of the key topics during Sierra Leone's presidency was the reform of the Security Council itself, a subject that has been debated for decades. While this makes for compelling

theatre in the UN General Assembly, the reality is that meaningful reform remains unlikely. The P5 have little incentive to dilute their power and consistently pay only lip service to calls for change (Sierraeye Magazine, 2024).

### 3.12. The Case of Liberia

To begin with, Liberia fits into the concept of a small state explained in this write-up. As one of the African countries, it can be argued that Liberia despite being one of the founding members of the UN is positioned at the periphery of the international system. This claim is justified by the world systems theory holding onto the view that periphery countries are less developed than semi-periphery and core countries. These countries are usually behind because of obstacles such as lack of technology, unstable government, and poor education and health systems (World Population Review, 2024). They are the least developed and still developing countries. They produce labor-intensive and/or low-skill products and are typically exploited as a source of cheap labor, raw materials, and agricultural production for core and semi-periphery countries (World Population Review, 2024).

With no intention of sounding derogatory, and sarcastic, Liberia's chances of election to the UNSC NPM/E10 seat can be compared to Sierra Leone, Mozambique, election and other African countries such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, etc. that were elected as NPMs of the UNSC. The comparison stems from their post-conflict and other commonalities such as poverty, youth Unemployment, and more importantly positioned at the periphery of the international system. In other words, if these countries can make it to the UNSC NPM seats, it is possible for Liberia as well. More importantly, Liberia has already satisfied some of the benchmarks for its election. It has contributed to international peacekeeping in Mali and currently the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, one of the early founding members.

So, if elected as NPM/E10 in 2026 to the UNSC can Liberia through its permanent representative or mission to the UN leverage its influence to make meaningful contributions to shifting global security and peace policies? Or join the list of other African countries that played ceremonial roles on the global stage? To answer this question, this section juxtaposes the conceptualizations of how states leverage their influence on the global stage by the influence Liberia is ready to project if elected as an NPM of the UNSC.

The juxtaposition commences with Thorhallsson's (2012) two broad categories of qualitative factors that also complement Baldwin's concept that determines the ability of small states to influence the UNSC. The first is the internal competence of small states in areas such as knowledge, initiative, diplomacy, coalition, and leadership skills. The second is the state's image in the international system with specific regard to its perceived neutrality or reputation as a norm entrepreneur in particular policy fields. These qualitative features need to be combined with quantitative variables - such as population, territorial size, gross domestic product (GDP) and military capacity - that are normally used in International Relations. As for the first criterion, it is arguable Liberia's prolonged absence from the UNSC since 1961 raises legitimate concerns about the knowledge of the workings of the UNSC. The time it will take to fully grasp a conceptual understanding of the workings of the UNCS may consume half of the time spent in the UNSC. Even Liberia's influence at the UNGA is another factor that deserves attention. It is not only about voting. It is also about lobbying power, which has been another challenge.

In all fairness void of patriotic consciousness, Liberia is far from the second criterion. This is evidenced by Liberia occupying the 8<sup>th</sup> position of the poorest countries in the world (Ventura, 2024). Its GDP is estimated to be 14 billion dollars by World Economics for 2023 - 60% larger than official estimates. Interestingly, the table affixed "E" to Liberia meaning "extremely poor" (World Economic, 2023). Liberia is positioned at 140 GPF annual ranking with a military power index score of 3.7262.

On the issue of perceived neutrality which has been a challenge for most countries because of vested interests, Liberia is no exception. It is believed that given its historic ties to the United States, Liberia has voted with the US on many issues in national forums in the past, even without being asked. For instance, in 2022, Liberia voted in favor of a UN resolution that condemned China's human rights violations against Uyghurs and other Muslims. Human rights groups have accused the Chinese government of genocide because of the well-documented oppression of Uyghur and other minorities in Xinjiang province (Stephens, 2022).

What about the strength of Liberia's diplomacy which is also measured by its economy? Inarguably, as one of the poorest countries in the world, Liberia's diplomacy since its political independence has been characterized by the recipient of foreign aid, especially in its transition to democracy. For example, between 2010 and 2017, Liberia obtained \$776 million in aid per year which accounted for anywhere from 40% to 25% of its GDP during that same period (Eise & Connaughton, 2019). Fully aware that foreign aid also is used to achieve a country's diplomatic goals, enabling it to gain



diplomatic recognition, to garner support for its positions in international organizations which speaks to influence, how is it possible for Liberia which has no history of foreign aid diplomacy?

Next is the Loprespub concept of influence which also complement Thorhallsson's concept. The author argues that countries that enter the council well-prepared, with a good understanding of council working methods and a clear and reasonable set of priorities can make meaningful contributions on a range of issues while advancing the topics of greatest importance to them (Loprespub, 2020). This speaks to practical experience in the UN system beginning from active participation in the UNGA. For Liberia, it seems difficult if not impossible. The Representative of Liberia's Permanent Mission to the UN Madam Sarah Safyn Fyneah, resigned on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2024 (Dodoo, 2024). Her resignation creates a critical vacuum, especially when Liberia is lobbying for election as UNSC NPM. This means that whoever is replacing her must not be a newcomer or novice to the UN system but an experienced diplomat who is at least knowledgeable about the UN system, precisely the rules of procedures and working methods contained in the UN Security Council Handbook. Liberia's prolonged absence since 1961 from the UNSC poses a significant challenge for the new diplomat to leverage Liberia's influence at the UNSC.

Finally, let's see how the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute concept apply to Liberia. The authors claim that small powers could successfully influence the Security Council by building coalitions, organizing special events, and taking the penholder role. Again, Liberia's prolonged absence since 1961 creates too many grounds to question the possibility of Liberia's influence. As a reminder, the duration is two years which could consume all of the time. Arguably, it takes too much time to build coalitions that align with states' interests. Organizing special events such as private meetings, informal interactive dialogue, Arria-formula meetings, debates, etc. requires diplomatic maneuvering skills that also align with states' interests. The penholder is another crucial factor that speaks to knowledge and skills. It refers to a Council member who leads the negotiation and drafting of resolutions on a Council agenda item. Having a member take the lead in drafting outcomes has been consistent practice since the Council was created, but the penholder "system" is a more recent development (UN Security Council Handbook, 2019). Arguably, this factor seems difficult for Liberia which could be justifiable by its prolonged absence. As far as history is concerned, Liberia's experience through its Permanent Representative Mission at the UN has been confined only to the UNGA. For example, in 2019, the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Liberia to the UN in collaboration with partners namely the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the International Institute for Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), and the African Platform on Access to Information (APAI) convened a Coordination Meeting with UN Member States to build support for the proposed resolution entitled "Proclamation of September 28 as the International Day for the Universal Access to Information". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

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#### 4. Conclusion

Conceptually, this article has assessed the influence Liberia will project on the global stage if elected as an NPM of the UNSC. Based on the conceptualization of how small states can leverage their influence articulated in this article by the different authors, this paper holds an extreme skepticism about how Liberia will leverage its influence on the global stage if elected as an NPM of the UNSC. This skepticism stems from Liberia's prolonged absence from the UNSC since 1961 which is so critical to understanding the methods of working and procedures at the UNSC. More importantly, Liberia's peripheral position in the international system is another reason supporting the skepticism. Nevertheless, this paper opines that similar to Sierra Leone, and other African countries, Liberia if elected to the UNSC, and the privilege to hold the UNSC presidency that is rotational will be a mere ceremonial history.

To leverage its influence, this paper recommends that based on the concept of small states that cited Estonia and Lithuania as examples in the article, Liberia could take a cue from their experiences. Both countries went with a well-defined or clear distinctive initiative or agenda strategic to the interests of their respective foreign policies. Each of their permanent representatives leveraged their influence to achieve their agenda that impacted the working of the UNSC. Inarguably, the achievement would not have been possible without building coalitions, organizing special events, and taking the penholder role. More importantly, their diplomats went to the UNSC with a solid understanding of the methods and working procedures.

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