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VIEWS OF THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:  
REACTIONS TO RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE

MA Thesis

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*Authorship Declaration*

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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*Nicholas James Redic, 10 May 2023*

## ***Abstract***

This thesis explores why and how sub-Saharan African states respond to revisionist challenges to, or contestation of, liberal international order (LIO). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine since February 2022 represents a clear challenge to the norms established in the post-World War II and post-Cold War periods, as well as an attempt to mobilize global actors in opposition to LIO. In this thesis, I research three sub-Saharan African states' responses to Russia's actions by first determining my cases' respective positions and fit within liberal international order and then observe how this leads to either condemnation, ambivalence or sympathy for contestation of LIO. Since I am looking at both Russia's attempts to influence the international and the sub-Saharan African states' responses to this, I incorporate power politics into my analysis. This approach enables me to explore the diverse set of methods and techniques that global actors use to both project various forms of influence internationally and to respond to such projection. Based on my analysis of three sub-Saharan states, Kenya, Senegal and South Africa, I conclude that fit within liberal international order, or lack thereof, does play a role in whether or not a state will demonstrate sympathy for the contestatory practices of a revisionist power.

Keywords: Contestation, Liberal International Order, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, Power Politics

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to understand why and how sub-Saharan African states view and respond to revisionist challenges to, or contestation of, liberal international order (LIO). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine since February 24, 2022 represents a clear challenge to the norms established in the post-World War II and post-Cold War periods, which are often referred to as the liberal international order. Russia's actions in Ukraine, including its unilateral annexation of Ukrainian territory, go against international laws governing use of force between states<sup>1</sup> and the principle of state sovereignty and inviolability of borders (*International Crisis Group* 2022). In the days, weeks and months since the war broke out, the responses of sub-Saharan African nations have ranged from condemnation of Russia's attack on another country's sovereignty to ambivalence to condemnation of the West for its hypocrisy and history of colonialism (Nyabola 2022). Stemming from the observed variations in responses to Russia's actions in Ukraine, my research question is, what might explain sub-Saharan African states' responses to Russia's violation of the liberal international order? Or, formulated a different way, why have sub-Saharan African states responded in the way that they have to Russia's war in Ukraine?

Leading up to the full-scale invasion, Russia's actions in Ukraine and elsewhere have represented contestation of LIO (Bettiza and Lewis 2020). Since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there has been debate over whether or not it is appropriate to continue to consider Russia as a mere contestant of LIO or whether this unprecedented rupture moves Russia beyond contestation to a place entirely in opposition to the order (Morozov, 2024). This is important to consider, but from the standpoint of investigating reactions of sub-Saharan African states to Russia's actions, I am still able to gauge my cases' positions within LIO, and how this in turn may influence their reactions to contestation. It has become increasingly clear over the past several years that Russia is a revisionist state seeking to "politically, culturally and militarily resist the West" (Krastev 2014), "to revise or even upend the existing order" (Götz and Merlen 2019, 134), with "... a commitment to creating a "post-West" global order..." (Stent 2020). Specifically, the global order that I refer to is the liberal international order, and when I say that Russia is a revisionist state, I mean that it is seeking to "revise" what it considers to be a Western-built and Western-led international society in the form of LIO.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, 1 Units XVI, available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-1> [accessed 21 January 2023]

Russia's contestation of liberal international order also represents an international battle for influence and attempts at collective mobilization of global actors in opposition to LIO. At the same time, actors' responses to contestation are also part of this international power struggle. Therefore, I have chosen to bring power politics into my analysis. Since most of the focus of the contestation literature is on larger powers, such as Russia and China, comparatively less attention has been paid to smaller states, how they position themselves within the international order, and how their "fit" within the order can influence their responses to contestation. This is the main research puzzle that I have chosen to focus on.

My research is based on testing this idea of "fit within liberal international order" and performing a qualitative analysis that looks at the relationship between two variables: a state's fit within liberal international order and sympathy which that state may develop towards the contestatory practices of a revisionist power. This "fit" is based on my cases' preexisting attitudes towards LIO. In other words, my initial hypothesis is the more a state's government does not fit within the liberal international order structure, the more that state will develop sympathy for another state's revisionist actions.

This research is relevant due to contemporary challenges and changes related to the global order. We are currently living through a period of shifting global dynamics in an increasingly multipolar world. The liberal international order, which although not encompassing the totality of international society, has enjoyed widespread acceptance for decades. And although much attention has been placed on the rise of major non-Western powers, sub-Saharan African states tend not to be the focus of analysis with regard to their own attempts to influence international order.

In my analysis, I focus on three sub-Saharan African states: Kenya, Senegal and South Africa. I have chosen a small-n qualitative analysis that will allow me to look at a few unique states that have responded in different ways to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. One explanation for African states' responses has focused on Russia's own influence campaigns in Africa. Though Russia's influence in Africa has grown stronger in recent years, I have chosen cases that are independent actors and not simply targets of Russian influence. This is why I have decided not to examine cases such as Mali or the Central African Republic, which are less likely to be considered independent actors due to Russia's extensive presence in these countries.

The goal of this thesis is to test my initial hypothesis, as well as to bring the power political approach, which focuses on states' pursuit of international influence, to a new context. Through my research, guided by my hypothesis and approach, I develop explanations for my states' responses to Russian aggression. By doing this, I contribute to academic knowledge of why and how states respond to contestation of liberal international order. My research explores sympathy for contestatory practices and reasons for this based on a state's fit within liberal international order.

As I stated above, I use qualitative techniques to analyze my variables. Primarily, I focus on both primary and secondary sources that describe how my cases have positioned themselves within international society prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and how they have responded to the invasion since February 2022. In my analysis, I focus on historical developments, as well as on documents pertaining to my cases' foreign policies in order to determine these states' fit within liberal international order. For both variables, I focus on primary sources from key political figures in each case, as well as official foreign policy documents. I also supplement these with academic literature related to the historical political developments in each country, especially developments related to my cases' respective position within liberal international order. I measure fit using three broad, interrelated criteria: 1. States' views of liberal international order, especially related to failures associated with the order or Western hypocrisy, etc., 2. States' participation in LIO, particularly in relation to liberal international institutions, 3. Anti-(neo)colonialism, which looks at rhetoric that identifies LIO as an order that propagates the exploitation of poorer states by the West, as well as historical traumas related to (neo)colonialism that continue to play a role in sub-Saharan Africa. Though I have three criteria, I have kept them purposefully broad, and there is a great deal of overlap between them. Essentially, they are three interrelated ways to measure the same thing, which is fit within liberal international order, or lack thereof. My dependent variable is based on UN resolution voting results related to Russia's war in Ukraine from my three unique cases, as well as stated explanations for how my cases have responded to Russia's war in Ukraine since February 2022.

This thesis is meant to apply the power political approach to a less-studied part of the world. It is also meant to expand knowledge into norm contestation through analysis of cases in a specific context (i.e. responses to Russia's actions in Ukraine in sub-Saharan Africa), and how a state's position within international society might influence a state's responses to contestation of the

liberal international order. As I stated above, this thesis is not meant to be an examination of Russian influence in Africa, although I do describe ways in which Russia has sought influence in each of my cases. Instead, my purpose is to focus on African states as independent actors who are positioning themselves as part of international society, and not simply as targets of Russian influence.

The rest of my thesis is organized as followed: In the following chapter, I give an overview of the relevant theoretical literature related to liberal international order, power politics (which draws from and complements a number of IR theories, such as realism, liberalism and constructivism), and contestation in order to give background into my approach for my analysis. In the same chapter, I also describe my contribution to the academic literature. In the next chapter, I discuss how my study compares with other related empirical studies. In the chapter after that, I detail my research design and methods, including the elements that are included in how I determine “fit within liberal international order”, as well as my measurements for both of my variables and how the power political approach aligns with my research. In the same chapter I also give an explanation for my case selection, as well as potential limitations for my research. In the following chapter, I perform a qualitative analysis of my cases, individually, including an analysis of my independent and dependent variables, as well as a discussion of my cases from a power political perspective. Each case offers its own context in how they have positioned themselves within the liberal international order and how this relates to their responses to Russia’s war in Ukraine. I then conclude my thesis with an overview of my analysis, my contribution to academic knowledge, possible alternate explanations, as well as a few suggestions for future research.

## 2. Liberal International Order, Power Politics and Contestation

Liberal international order is not a set concept. Though the order is often described as U.S.- / West-led, it is less straightforward in practice; other parts of the world, such as South America and Africa, have contributed to building some of LIO's principles (Lake et al. 2021, 226-34). At the same time, prominent liberal IR scholar G. John Ikenberry raises questions over how durable the order actually is given the relative decline of the U.S. and its Western partners in the face of other ascendant powers. But he acknowledges that despite the challenges facing LIO (e.g. democratic backsliding and rising authoritarianism), it remains pervasive throughout much of the world and is an indispensable element in the international arena (Ikenberry 2018, 7-8). According to David A. Lake, Lisa L. Martin, and Thomas Risse, "LIO is a dynamic order exhibiting different features across time and space" (Lake et al. 2021, 227). Therefore, states and other global actors continuously interact within LIO to shape and to contest it in a variety of ways.

The liberal international order first arose in the wake of the Second World War and developed further in the decades since the end of the Cold War. Tanja A. Börzel and Michael Zürn characterize LIO's initial stage as "rule-based multilateralism" (2021, 282), in which global institutions (notably the United Nations) were established in order to promote liberal economic outcomes. Börzel and Zürn describe this period up to the end of the Cold War as "weakly liberal but quite effective" (2021, 283). However, the liberal international order shifted in the 1990s when international institutions gained strength and members, and liberal ideas began to have a more widespread and deeper impact on societies around the world. Börzel and Zürn call this period "postnational liberalism (LIO II)" because it goes "beyond the nation-state" (2021, 283). This new stage has also witnessed an increasing backlash against LIO, which can manifest itself in various forms of contestation against the order. For example, LIO has been openly criticized for serving the West's interests above the interests of non-Western states. At the same time, non-Western actors accuse the West of being hypocritical on a number of issues and for setting a double standard for the rest of the world (2021, 283-84). In this sense, the order is criticized for allowing the West to maintain its global hegemony at the expense of non-Western states.

For the purpose of my analysis, I take the view that the liberal international order is the hegemonic order that exists in international relations, but though international society is largely based on LIO, it is also broader. This thesis is not intended to use a narrow understanding of LIO or international society. Rather, my work takes a much broader view of LIO and international

society. LIO has its beginnings in the U.S.- and West-dominated post-World War II years, and its architects have not always lived up to its ideals, the system of international law and principles, enshrined in the UN Charter, provide a broad basis for rules and norms for actors in international society to function. Numerous institutions and international organizations have also been established over the years that correspond with the needs and contexts of their times. I do not claim that LIO is or can be a static concept, nor can it mean the same thing for all actors at any given time. Nevertheless, it is a hegemonic order that all international actors position themselves in relation to in one way or another. Certainly there are distinctions between the West and the international system, even if many non-Western states believe that the international system is dominated by the West at the expense of non-Western states.

In an article published in 2011, Ikenberry defends the idea that LIO is a durable order by saying that possible challengers to LIO have benefited from the order and that, “alternatives to an open and rule-based order have yet to crystallize” (58). The liberal international order is being challenged both within the Western states that helped to establish it, and in non-Western states (Ikenberry 2011; Ikenberry 2018). This does not mean that the order is coming to an end, but it could be evidence of shifting norms. However, since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, some scholars, such as Lucan Ahmad Way (2022), have observed how Western governments have remained united in doing what they can to preserve the order. Nevertheless, it is also important in LIO scholarship to observe how, why and where the order may be challenged and contested, including in sub-Saharan Africa.

In terms of the Liberal International Order’s conceptual development, it is a concept that is strongly connected to liberal IR scholarship. (Neo)liberal academics such as Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye write about institutions and international interdependence, which are seen as key to the liberal order. What Keohane and Nye call “complex interdependence” in their book *Power and Interdependence* is defined as, “an ideal type of international system, deliberately constructed to contrast with a “realist” ideal type [I will look more at realism below]... [it] refers to a situation among a number of countries in which multiple channels of contact connect societies (that is, states do not monopolize these contacts); there is no hierarchy of issues; and military force is not used by governments toward one another” (1989, 249). It is due to this interdependence that Keohane and Nye argue international organizations and institutions can play a key part in responding to international problems, writing, “[international institutions] help set the international

agenda, and act as catalysts for coalition-formation and as arenas for political initiatives and linkage by weak states” (1989, 35). In particular, an international organization such as the UN is intended and designed to allow all states, even the non-great powers, an equal voice internationally, at least theoretically (1989, 36). It is this equality principle that shows why UN votes are important to pay attention to. The international political system is often viewed as both anarchic and hierarchical. I describe this in more detail below, but briefly, the international system is anarchic in the sense that there is no centralized governing structure managing interstate relations, but there are also international inequalities that play out as hierarchical arrangements between states. At the same time however, liberal institutions can attempt to create equality structures internationally.

In order to study views of contestation of liberal international order in Africa, I draw on the power political approach. Gregorio Bettiza and David Lewis write that, “A power political perspective conceptualizes norm contestation as the expression of battles for influence in world politics that take place at the ideational level and through symbolic instruments. It understands these struggles as occurring in the context of an international system profoundly marked by conflicting interests, cultural pluralism, hierarchical structures, and power asymmetries” (2020, 559). Russia and China, for example, are contesting the norms of LIO in a number of ways and at various intensities. As my case countries position themselves in international society in a particular way, they are also influencing and being influenced by various other actors in the global international system. I have chosen to use this approach as a way of looking at how my cases’ responses to Russia’s war in Ukraine align with their own power political foreign policies. As I stated in my introduction, Russia’s actions to challenge the liberal international order and my cases’ responses to this are attempts to collectively mobilize other international actors according to each state’s preferred vision for international society.

A focus on power in international politics is not a new approach. According to Keohane and Nye, power in conditions of interdependence between states can be observed through “sensitivity” (how responsive an actor is to a new development in another state, for example) and “vulnerability” (how easily can an actor adjust to changes) (1989, 12-13). Since the news of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine represented a major change in the international environment, responses to it can demonstrate power relationships of interdependence between my sub-Saharan African cases and outside powers in the West and non-West and expose an actor’s sensitivity and vulnerability to international contestatory developments.

At this point, however, I pivot away from liberalism in favor of giving a background on realism and other conceptualizations of power. This is in order to give a more complete understanding of power politics, which shares certain similarities with, as well as some modification of realism. First, the liberal ideas of interdependence that I mentioned above have been challenged by realist scholars, such as John J. Mearsheimer who writes, “my view is that economic interdependence does not have a significant effect on geopolitics one way or another” when looking at China’s rise and pushback against the United States’ global hegemony (2010, 393). Another realist, Hans Morgenthau, describes the ways in which power is inseparable from political issues. Morgenthau defines political power as “the mutual relations of control among the holders of public authority and between the latter and the people at large” (1960, 26), which he distinguishes from force, which is “the actual exercise of physical violence” (1960, 26). Another key element of power is the balance of power, about which Morgenthau also writes “The aspiration for power on the part of several nations, each trying either to maintain or to overthrow the status quo, leads of necessity to a configuration that is called the balance of power and to policies that aim at preserving it” (1960, 155). For Morgenthau, such a state of affairs leads to stability in the international system or “equilibrium” (1960, 156). For neorealist Kenneth Waltz, balance of power “is a theory about the results produced by the uncoordinated actions of states” (1979, 122). This theory is about making general predictions related to the actions of states (1979, 121-28). Though the predictability of states’ actions is limited, the balance of power can nevertheless create a certain degree of order in international politics.

Morgenthau does not claim that the state of international politics and balance of powers describes a simple (meaning non-complex) global system. Rather, there are many interrelated systems with their own power balances and relations among each other (Morgenthau 1960, 179). How can we then conceptualize the international system(s)? Waltz writes that “structure defines arrangement, or the ordering of the parts of a system” (1979, 81). As opposed to the formally defined, hierarchical arrangement of a domestic political system, “international systems are decentralized and anarchic” (1979, 88). Systems therefore arise through interactions of like units, such as states (1979, 91).

Hedley Bull, one of the founders of the English School of international relations, developed the idea that despite international anarchy, international societies can also arise between states. According to Bull, a “system of states” describes an arrangement of sovereign states that interact

to a degree where states must take into account the actions of other states in the system (1995, 8-9). Bull contends that the Grotian or “internationalist” tradition in IR, which stands in contrast to both the Hobbesian “state of war of all against all” (1995, 23) and the Kantian “universalist” tradition, which views humanity as pursuing universal goals (1995, 24), describes “neither complete conflict of interest between states nor complete identity of interest; it resembles a game that is partly distributive but also partly productive” (1995, 25). Though international anarchy exists, Bull contends that today’s international system is not exactly like the Hobbesian idea of “state of nature” (1995, 44), but rather communities can and do exist based on certain common interests and identity (1995, 46).

Bull, who authored *The Anarchical Society*<sup>2</sup>, is primarily concerned with “order in world politics” (Bull 1995, xv). For Bull, international order describes “a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states” (1995, 8), and “a society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions” (1995, 13). One of the ways in which order is maintained is through the balance of power, which can protect smaller states from the influence of larger states, and it can provide an environment for international institutions to function (1995, 102). For Bull, states provide the primary function of making international rules “effective” in international anarchy (1995, 68). He also places relatively less importance on the role of international organizations, such as the UN, and on international law, which Bull considers to be an institution in international society. However, these are nevertheless important and ultimately integrally related to international order (1995, xvii, 136-7). It is also necessary to mention that order in international society is not universally approved by all actors within the order. Orders, such as the liberal international order, are never perfect, and there are often states that prefer a different state of affairs (Bull 1995, 49-50). This can arise due to international rules being based on special interests, especially the interests of stronger actors within international society, which may not take into consideration the interests of weaker members of society (1995, 53). For example, Bull mentions differing orders that could replace, at least in part, the current order, one of these being “regionalism”, which can potentially reorient or reestablish order based on regional interests (particularly in what Bull refers

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<sup>2</sup> First edition published in 1977; second edition published in 1995.

to as the “third world”), rather than the great power dominated world order (1995, 294-299). This idea is of particular interest to me and my research as I examine the sub-Saharan African region and how its interests are communicated, though I don’t claim that regional orders will soon replace the hegemonic global order.

Waltz juxtaposes international anarchy with hierarchy and describes the potential costs and benefits associated with each, such as the tradeoff between freedom and security of states in an international system, for example. For Waltz, anarchy and hierarchy<sup>3</sup> are two opposite ends of a spectrum. The international political system is primarily anarchic, though ultimately, any description of the international reality must admit a complex mixture between the two (Waltz 1979, 111-16). More recently, however, more scholarly attention has been paid to “hierarchical arrangements within the formally anarchic international system” (Mattern and Zarakol 2016, 627). This is a discussion that has brought in voices from various IR backgrounds. Janice Bially Mattern and Ayse Zarakol describe ways to conceptualize hierarchy according to either narrow or broad understandings. In line with a more liberal IR scholarship and narrow conceptualization, hierarchy arises, and actors find their position in the international system through bargaining and a “logic of trade-offs” (2016, 634). This narrower conceptualization emphasizes agents (2016, 634), whereas broader conceptualizations focus on structures, which influence actors. These later two logics focus on where the actor is “positioned” in a hierarchy structure, i.e. the “logic of positionality” (2016, 637), and the “logic of productivity” (2016, 640), which refers to hierarchy producing “both the actors and the space of world politics in which they act” (2016, 641). Where hierarchy applies to my paper is primarily related to the broader conceptualizations, which pertain to structural inequality in the international hierarchical order, even if such hierarchy is not formally established. Though I am not focused on hierarchy and inequality, these ideas are nevertheless vital to bear in mind when discussing international orders and contestation.

I have now discussed realism and the English school, which provide a necessary background to power and influence in international relations. Though states are often described as like units, they differ in their capacity to act, which, in comparison with one another, allows researchers to observe differences in their respective power. Generally, research pertaining to the international political system is focused on the great powers of any given historical period (Waltz 1979, 97-8). Waltz enumerates numerous benefits for powerful states including “maintaining one’s

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<sup>3</sup> Waltz defines hierarchy here as “the presence of a legitimate and competent government” (1979, 114).

autonomy”, allowing a state to act in the way it sees fit, affording it to take greater risks, and “great power gives its possessors a big stake in their system” (1979, 194-5). However, since my focus is on smaller states, I am taking a more (neo)liberal track. This is in line with the power political approach, which, with its focus on battles of influence in the international, allows research into all actors that play a role in shaping the international system through responding to and positioning oneself in LIO. This is not to say that realism has no part in the power political approach, however, as we will soon see.

As I stated earlier, from a power political perspective, both Russia and China are seeking global influence through their contestation of the liberal international order (Bettiza and Lewis 2020). However, a power political approach can also help us to understand how and why African states might respond to Russian contestation of the liberal international order. Stacie E. Goddard and Daniel H. Nexon treat power politics, not as part of “structural-realist theoretical frameworks or the putatively anarchical character of world politics”, but rather it is, “an object of analysis in its own right... it takes for granted that actors deploy multiple resources and modalities of power in their pursuit of influence. What binds this diverse research program together is its focus on *realpolitik* as the politics of collective mobilization in the context of the struggle for influence among political communities, broadly understood”<sup>4</sup> (2016, 4). Goddard and Nexon contend that *realpolitik* and power politics do not equal realism. Rather it is “*post-realist*” in that it takes many of realism’s basic assumptions but deviates from it in the following ways: First, states are not necessarily the primary actors in power politics. States are important because they have the ability to act and interact with other states in ways that other actors often cannot, but other actors also have the capabilities to pursue power internationally. Second, power politics acknowledges that military force is not the only tool available in international politics (2016, 5-6). States “often utilize propaganda, norms and diplomacy to undercut or facilitate military power – whether their own or that of their friends and rivals. Much of the struggle for influence takes place short of force and the threat of force” (2016, 6). Third, power politics rejects the contention that anarchy is the main driver of international politics. Rather, “international organizations, international law, norms, rules, and other favorite topics of liberals and constructivists” matter, despite the absence of a world government (2016, 6). Here again we can recall Mattern and Zarakol’s article about hierarchy in anarchy, as well as structures and structural inequalities in the international system

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<sup>4</sup> All italics in citations are original, unless otherwise noted.

(2016), and how the power political approach acknowledges hierarchy in its various, and oftentimes informal existence.

Goddard and Nexon are also interested in collective mobilization and write that “collective mobilization lies at the root of *all* politics” (2016, 7). Collective mobilization relies on two logics: integration, or “efforts to maintain and expand joint action” (Goddard and Nexon 2016, 8), and fragmentation, or “efforts to disrupt or prevent joint action” (2016, 8). Bettiza and Lewis add a dimension of variations in intensity to these two logics and describe four different practices of contestation (2020, 566), which refers to tearing down or building up ideational norms. However, they acknowledge that further research can be made into other potential practical models, and since they focus on “major authoritarian powers” (Bettiza and Lewis 2020, 572), my own research into a range of smaller states with differing systems of government can help to expand the power political approach into new territory. Goddard and Nexon propose that “the study of the dynamics of power politics should embrace a healthy, but not unlimited, agnosticism about which actors matter in global power politics” (2016, 9), which can include both small states, who potentially have “much to gain at the expense of the dominant” and non-state actors (2016, 10).

Goddard and Nexon describe several “power political instruments: military, economic, diplomatic, cultural and symbolic” (2016, 11) that can be used by actors in collective mobilization. These instruments can take a variety of forms and actors can combine them in whatever way they see fit, but Goddard and Nexon also write that, “variation in global structures creates both opportunities and obstacles for collective mobilization” (2016, 11). The form and content of the structure, as well as the position that actors take within the structure, can influence what an actor can or cannot do (Goddard and Nexon 2016, 11-12). The power political approach allows the researcher to view the complexity of the global system, with its multitude of actors and structures, for the purpose of determining how actors pursue their interests and make sense of the global system.

The power politics approach is useful in studying norms and their contestation. Antje Wiener, who specializes in research of norms and contestation, argues that norms have a “dual quality: that is, they are both structuring and socially constructed through interaction in a context. While stable over particular periods, they always remain flexible by definition” (Wiener 2007, 49). In other words, international norms are stable in the sense that contestation of norms can destabilize and reconstruct them. Wiener also looks at two perspectives on how norms work. The behavioralist

perspective treats norms as a structure and looks at how behavior responds to norms (Wiener 2007, 48). The societal perspective, however, is based on a “logic of contestedness” (Wiener 2007, 47). While under this latter logic, “norms may be considered as valid and just under conditions of interaction in one cultural context [however,] that perception cannot be generalized” (Wiener 2007, 55). The key point here is how context effects the validity and justness of norms. Wiener writes that norms are constructed socially in different contexts, and as constructs, “norms are contested by default” (2007, 55). Therefore, although the liberal international order is built upon a hierarchy of norms, one cannot research norms or their contestation without also understanding the discursive context surrounding them.

As we can see, the power political approach builds upon Constructivist theory, particularly related to norm contestation due to its focus on “discourses and practices” related to norms (Bettiza and Lewis 2020, 560). However, although Constructivism does not ignore power, the power political approach emphasizes it in research over norm contestation. Bettiza and Lewis state that “power needs to be placed more centrally and explicitly in the analysis for us to better explain key dynamics of norm contestation taking place in the international system at the present historical juncture” (2020, 561).

Small states, just like large states, pursue influence internationally in a variety of ways (see Goddard and Nexon’s instruments above), and their pursuit of influence is related to the structure and constraints of the liberal international order. An emphasis on power is important for my research because it brings attention to how small states influence the international, as well as how they respond to the influence of other states and actors. Since collective mobilization is a key part of the power political approach, it is not necessary to only look at how my cases mobilize themselves internally or among their peer states, but my research also recognizes that my cases respond to outside (meaning non-sub-Saharan African) attempts at collective mobilization in response to Russia’s war in Ukraine. Obviously, I am referring to Western efforts to mobilize African states to condemn the war and uphold the LIO status quo, as well as Russian influence campaigns in Africa (Meldrum and Magome 2022). In this thesis the power political approach is meant to help analyze sub-Saharan African states’ responses to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine with the view that Russia’s actions are a power play at international influence and political collective mobilization, as are the responses from African states. Since I am focused on small states as actors in their attempts to influence, as well as to respond to the international order, the power political

approach allows for a holistic focus on power that can help to understand African state's responses to Russia's aggression in Ukraine based on their overriding views of LIO. Their views of and position within LIO therefore influence their responses to another state's constestatory practices. Furthermore, my research is intended to go beyond my dependent variable of "fit within liberal international order". Of course, LIO is a narrower understanding of international society, and it is not sufficient in describing how all states approach the international. In this sense, the power political approach continues to be useful through its broad appreciation of the ways in which actors vie for influence internationally.

One theory that could be used to explore why African states have not joined with the West in universal condemnation of Russia's actions is postcolonial theory. On the one hand, Russia's actions in Ukraine (both before and since February 2022) are reminiscent of European colonialism and neocolonial influence in Africa. From this standpoint, one might expect African nations to condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine. On the other hand, past and present grievances related to colonialism from Western countries who are currently supporting Ukraine remain and may help to explain why African states are hesitant to condemn Russia (Nyabola 2022). In *Politics Among Nations*<sup>5</sup> Morgenthau describes the battle for influence between the West, led by the United States, and the Communist bloc, led by the Soviet Union in post-colonial Africa and elsewhere (Morgenthau 1954, 334). For Morgenthau, these "uncommitted nations" would be key in the unfolding balance of power (1954, 327). A power political approach acknowledges postcolonial power imbalances, including in the normative realm. However, postcolonial theory doesn't necessarily explain the variations in official reaction from post-colonial African states. Therefore, by focusing on the power practice of actors in Africa, this approach moves beyond the limitations of analyzing the postcolonial imbalances in order to focus on how actors actually respond to and contest LIO in different ways.

Another angle to approach the research question from is in regard to security. Bettiza and Lewis focus on Russia and China, which are both illiberal authoritarian powers who may be motivated by physical, regime or ontological insecurities. Since democratic norms are a central aspect of LIO, and democracy can be seen as a threat to "regime security" (Bettiza and Lewis 2020, 565), both of these states may want to contest the democratic norms of LIO, for example. African states, too, can experience a range of insecurities from physical threats such as terrorism,

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<sup>5</sup> Originally published in 1948; second edition published in 1954

to threats to the idea of “self” (Bettiza and Lewis 2020, 565), which can relate to a history of colonial subjugation.

Promoting, protecting and preserving ontological security, which can be defined as “having a consistent sense of ‘self’, and having that sense affirmed by others” (Zarakol 2017, 48), can be a motivating factor for states as they navigate a world of uncertainty, even when protecting a state’s ontological security is at odds with protecting its physical security (Mitzen, 2006). For former colonies, the “ontological security approach... is uniquely able to capture conceptually the psychological insecurity/anxiety experienced by a set of states whose postindependence identity was fundamentally marked by the traumatic legacies of colonialism...” (Vieira 2016, 292). These traumas remain in many former colonies, which, as Marco Vieira claims, motivates many such states to pursue foreign policies of non-alignment (2016, 292). In terms of my independent variable of a state’s fit within liberal international order, I acknowledge the role that protecting a state’s ontological security plays in a post-colonial state’s view of hegemony in the international system.

Bettiza and Lewis write that when the norms of LIO create insecurities, “such a state of affairs is generating multiple practices of ideational counterbalancing and power political maneuvers in the form of norm contestation” (2020, 565). With power politics’ focus on collective mobilization, the logics of fragmentation and integration play a key role in state security. Therefore, issues related to security are important to understand in terms of why a state may contest LIO, and it complements the power political approach.

Another theoretical perspective that one can take to understand contestation is based on the “Clash of Civilizations” idea developed by Samuel Huntington in 1993 which postulated that “the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural” (22). In terms of power politics, one of the contestation “modes” that Bettiza and Lewis discuss in their article is “civilizational essentialization” (2020, 568). They write that, “Civilizational essentialization involves the articulation of particular types of domestic and regional identities, constituted by a set of cultural and normative features, which are presented as “other” to and mobilized to contest the universal validity of liberal norms and identities” (2020, 568). In some ways, the power political approach relates to, but doesn’t fully accept, Huntington’s theory since it acknowledges the role that ideas of civilization play in contestation, especially with constructed identities distinct from the “Western civilization” identity often associated with LIO. For example, there is a popular idea that both the Russian World and China form civilization-states (Bettiza and

Lewis 2020, 568-69). This idea about civilization also relates to ontological security, as I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, and it can be a useful aspect of the power political approach in researching contestation in Africa. Of course, “civilization” as a concept of analysis is not a specific concept and is considered by some to be meaningless (Orsi 2018). However, it can be useful when looking at how societies construct ideas of “self” and “other” with respect to the LIO.

Finally, research into Africa’s responses to Russia’s actions in Ukraine cannot ignore Russia’s foreign policy efforts to shape opinion in Africa. Before and after February 24, 2022, Russian agents have utilized a propaganda and misinformation campaign in Africa (Blankenship and Ordu 2022; Sild 2022), which appears to have had some influence on Africa’s leaders (Cotterill 2023). According to Joseph Siegle, Russia is “challenging democratic norms and the principles of a rules-based international system... the Russian strategy appears to be aimed at smearing the perception that democracy offers a more effective, equitable, transparent, or inclusive form of governance” (2021, 81). Many other scholars have also written on aspects of Russia’s foreign policy, e.g., “authoritarian diffusion” (Ambrosio 2010) and Russian attempts to build a “bloc of pro-Russian [African] states over which it has lasting political-economic, and even military leverage” (Blank 2020, 75) at the expense of the West (Blank 2018). Russia has also provided physical security support to several African nations and regimes, often through the Wagner Group private military company (Fasanotti 2022).

However, although Russian influence in Africa cannot be ignored, my research is primarily focused on African states as independent actors within LIO. Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Karen Philippa Larsen critique the “vacuum logic” that Russia’s increasing influence in certain parts of Africa can be explained due to decreased Western presence in those same areas (such as the recent French pull-out of Mali). Rather, Jacobsen and Larsen argue that this logic ignores “African agency, liberal shortcomings and cases of liberal actors coexisting with Russia in Africa” (2023, 260). The authors analyze the Malian case and demonstrate that the Malian government used its own agency to kick out the French and invite in the Russian Wagner Group (2023, 274-276). Though I do not believe that Mali is an appropriate case for analysis in the context of my research (see discussion over case selection in the following section), the power political approach facilitates research into normative and ideational contestation in Africa, notwithstanding Russian influence, due to this approach’s focus on the individual agency of my cases.

It is important to examine normative contestation of all actors. However, most research focuses on larger powers such as Russia and China and pays relatively little attention to smaller states. According to Antje Wiener, “While global norms affect all, engagement with these norms takes place on local sites and is shaped by distinct conditions. Studying affected stakeholders’ objections to breaches of norms [or lack of objections] therefore presents an invaluable prism through which the project of exploring perspectives for a better understanding of the local-global co-constitution of normative change may be advanced.” (Wiener 2018, 1). Therefore, I believe that research into African responses to Russian aggression is vital for gaining a more complete picture of normative construction and contestation. The analysis of my thesis first establishes the local context (fit within liberal international order), followed by my cases’ view of Russia’s actions in Ukraine. Research into contestation tends to focus on obvious examples from large states. However, my research looks at small states that are *responding* to contestation. Based on my analysis, we see how responses to contestation can relate to contestation, itself. African states are stakeholders of the liberal international order, and they position themselves in a certain way within the order. My thesis can contribute to contestation literature through analyzing if and how a state’s attitudes to and position within LIO influence a state’s response to contestation. It is useful to study these cases and the plurality of relevant actors in their responses to Russia’s actions in Ukraine, even if their ability to engage with and influence the international system is often less noticed in academic literature.

As I have stated, I have chosen to incorporate power politics into my analysis because Russia’s actions to challenge the liberal international order and my cases’ responses to this are attempts to collectively mobilize other international actors according to each state’s preferred vision for international society. I believe that the power political approach, which draws from and complements constructivist, realist and other theoretical perspectives, is a useful approach for gaining insight into my research question. Power politics focuses on *realpolitik*, but although it does not deny the existence of international anarchy, it allows room for a discussion of international hierarchy and systems of norms that influence, support and/or constrain actor behavior and allow for collective mobilization. Power politics also allows for research into smaller states and how they are situated in liberal international order. I have briefly highlighted other relevant theories and approaches, which can all offer something of value, and their value should not be ignored. As Bettiza and Lewis write, LIO is “an international system profoundly marked by

conflicting interests, cultural pluralism, hierarchical structures, and power asymmetries” (2020, 559). Therefore, the power political approach takes a broad view of the international order and contestation, though it is specific in its view of the centrality of power for there to be meaningful research.

In the next chapter, I discuss and compare similar research to my own.

### 3. Empirical Literature Discussion

I do not draw a great deal of distinction between the theory behind the power political approach and related empirical methods. This is because there is a relatively small distance between the theory and its practical application. The power political approach is a way to look at the diverse set of techniques and practices of actors as they seek to influence the international. For example, in Gregorio Bettiza and David Lewis's article, they take a power political approach to identifying and illustrating practices of norm contestation in China and Russia (2020, 560 & 566). They discuss four different "modes of contestation" that vary in both intensity and power political logic. First, in terms of contestation intensity, they suggest that there are three categories of intensity: applicatory, meaning and validity (2020, 563). Applicatory contestation, which Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann describe as contestation that "questions the application of a norm, not its validity" (2020, 57), is considered by Bettiza and Lewis as low intensity contestation (2020, 564), whereas validity contestation described by Deitelhoff and Zimmermann questions "the righteousness of the claims a norm makes" (2020, 52), which Bettiza and Lewis consider to be high intensity contestation. Bettiza and Lewis also place meaning contestation, which entails "conflicts over the meaning and interpretation of a given norm" (2020, 563), in between the other two.

The other aspect to Bettiza and Lewis' modes of contestation is power political logic, which as we have discussed earlier, involves a logic either of fragmentation or of integration (2020, 564; see also Goddard and Nexon 2016). Combining intensity with logic, Bettiza and Lewis come up with four modes of contestation and show how various Chinese and Russian contestation practices fit within each mode. First, liberal performance is low intensity (applicatory) contestation and fragmenting at the global level. China and Russia have used this mode to perform in an apparently liberal way in order to condemn the West for violating their own liberal rules (2020, 566). Second, liberal mimicry is medium intensity (meaning) contestation and primarily fragmenting at the global level, though also integrative at the domestic/regional level. For example, Bettiza and Lewis identify Russia's use of the liberal idea "Responsibility to Protect" as a rationale for becoming directly involved in neighboring countries in a way that is non-liberal (2020, 567). Third, civilizational essentialization is high intensity (validity) contestation and primarily integrative at the domestic/regional level, though also fragmenting at the global level. This mode is heavily ideational in creating boundaries between "us" and "them", and it relies on promoting values that

are unique and even opposed to liberal Western values (2020, 568). Fourth, counter-norm entrepreneurship is high intensity (validity) contestation and primarily integrative at the global level, though also may be fragmenting. According to Bettiza and Lewis, this mode “involves articulating and advancing globally a set of non-liberal (1) social and political norms and (2) visions of international order” (2020, 569).

At the end of their article, Bettiza and Lewis state that there are other modes of contestation that may be worth exploring, but they admit the difficulty in finding empirical certainty about the “effects and outcomes” of these contestation modes of international norms (2020, 572). Similarly, I recognize that there may be some empirical uncertainty inherent within my own research in regard to establishing the context of fit within liberal international order and in drawing a clear line to my dependent variable. However, the power political approach is nevertheless a consistent tool for looking at the diverse ways in which states and other international actors pursue their interests internationally. I maintain that by keeping my approach consistent across cases, my research into responses to Russian aggression in Ukraine yields insights into both how my cases position themselves within LIO / international society and how this influences their responses to challenges to the liberal international order.

There are numerous ways to approach understanding African states’ responses to Russian aggression in Ukraine. Rajen Harshé frames African responses in terms of the West versus Russia/non-West. Russia does not carry the historical “baggage” that former colonial and imperial powers do, and Russia has worked to expand its influence in Africa in recent years through the Wagner Group, summits, increased business and economic ties (especially in countries with a large amount of natural resources) and misinformation campaigns. In light of this, Harshé writes that African countries have tried to balance the two sides. Harshé says “The nuanced positions of African states could be better understood through the prism of imperialism. Though in the past, to counter western imperialism, the former Soviet Russia had supported the anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles in Africa, ironically, Putin’s Russia has now emerged as one of the expansionist powers in Africa with imperialist tendencies” (2022). In other words, African states, as diverse as they are, appear to be pragmatically balancing without fully committing to either side. This article doesn’t go deeply into specific cases, whereas in my thesis, I do concentrate more deeply on specific cases.

Olayinka Ajala, writing in the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, researches African responses to Russian aggression in a similar way to how I measure my dependent variable. Ajala looks at UN General Assembly and Security Council voting results on resolutions pertaining to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as "direct statements issued by representatives of African countries" (2022, 133). Ajala does a broader study of African states and their UN votes than I do. Also, in terms of suggesting an explanation for many African states' apparent ambivalence in condemning Russia, Ajala discusses the presence of Western neo-imperialism and the history of Soviet and contemporary Russian partnership with the continent writing that "For decades, Russia has portrayed itself politically as a reliable alternative to the liberal, neo-colonial West" (2022, 145). Ajala doesn't specifically mention LIO, but he does talk about an increasingly multipolar international order that may give African states a greater variety of options that may lead to "more flexible and unpredictable alignments" (2022, 146) in the international arena. Other explanations analyzed by Ajala include the portrayal of NATO as the instigator of the war in Ukraine, a reliance on Russia for security support, economic relations, "perceived neglect by the West" (2022, 150) such as perceived vaccine hoarding during the COVID-19 pandemic, and avoidance of getting involved in a "proxy war" between European powers (2022, 152).

Ajala touches on many of the themes that I do in my research. It is clear that there is a wide variety of possible explanations for actor behavior, and these are not in any way mutually exclusive. Ajala's approach takes a continent-wide view, and his research stays correspondingly broad. Although it is likely that many of the factors that he discusses contributed to abstentions in UN votes and policies of neutrality vis-à-vis Russia's invasion of Ukraine, his analysis lacks a clear empirically based connection between his proposed explanations and African states' responses. This is a potential weakness in my own research and analysis, however, since I have a clear and specific approach related to fit within the international system, I believe that my research can be based on a more empirically-driven analysis, as opposed to more observation-based descriptions. Ajala's research also stems more from what I have defined as my dependent variable. He builds broad context, but since I am focused on three cases, I can afford to go much deeper into context-building based on my independent variable.

Discussing the war's implications for the international system, with particular focus on the UN, Jeffrey Feltman discusses how the international community has responded since February 2022. Much of the world has managed to stay united in passing resolutions related to Russia's

aggression and in practical matters such as the Black Sea Grain Initiative, IAEA inspections of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, and other humanitarian related issues. Feltman references the speech [see more in my analysis section] that Kenya’s ambassador to the UN gave about the importance of respecting the reality of modern-day borders, however imperfect they may be, in order to avoid bloodshed. At the same time, Feltman writes that “nearly 75% of the U.N.’s membership rejected Russia’s annexation of Ukrainian territory. But the 25% or so that did not – most abstained – account for about 50% of the world’s population, including states like India and South Africa” (2023).

For Feltman, this does not mean that these states approve of the invasion. India, for example, may want to play a role as a mediator in the future. However, he contends that for most of these abstentions, these states are in some way upset with the current international order. He writes, “These countries are annoyed at being badgered to choose sides in a European war that they do not see as posing a threat to themselves. And part of Russia’s message probably sounds compelling: that the current, U.S.-dominated international order has not delivered sufficient results for the Global South. That it is skewed toward ‘the West’ rather than providing equivalent benefits for ‘the rest’” (2023). I have included Feltman in this section because he discusses the UN’s role in the international order before and since February 2022.

Before February 2022, a number of researchers have written about both Russia’s engagement with Africa and how Africa engages with the world and the international order. This in particular pertains to my independent variable in terms of building context for my cases. Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine represents such a cataclysmic event in the post-Cold War era, at least in the West’s eyes, my view is that responses to contestation before and after February 2022 are dependent at least partially on whether African state’s view Russia’s actions as either being truly cataclysmic, or merely as another contestatory challenge of the liberal international order. Again, I believe that this is directly related to a state’s view of and position within the liberal international order.

There have been other articles and studies of how sub-Saharan African states (and other non-Western regional powers or small states) position themselves within the liberal international order (see Khadiagala 2014; Efstathopoulos 2021; Wilén 2022). All of these are useful, especially for building context for my cases and when I can build on existing research. However, my research adds to the literature on how developing countries position themselves within LIO, through the

power political approach to contestation at a time when the current international order is being challenged in an unprecedented way through Russia's war in Ukraine. Also, since my hypothesis is an initial guide to my research, I take a holistic, open-minded tack designed to develop a set of possible explanations to my research question that in turn can form the basis for future research.

In the next chapter, I discuss my research design, my research methods and compare my research to other studies.

## 4. Research Design and Methods

In this thesis, I conduct a qualitative comparative study of the policies of three sub-Saharan African states that have all responded differently to Russia's invasion of Ukraine: Kenya, Senegal and South Africa. In my research, I look at unique factors in each case that relate to my research question and my preliminary explanatory variable of "fit within liberal international order". My hypothesis is primarily meant to guide my initial research and help to determine a possible set of contributing factors, not necessarily to claim a straightforward causal relationship. In this sense, my research is grounded in the power political approach, with its focus on how states are influencing the international. Therefore, after further detailed examination of my cases with a conceptual background in power politics, I go beyond this initial hypothesis and generate new concepts and hypotheses for future research.

My independent variable is "fit within liberal international order (LIO)". My approach has three interrelated parts or aspects for measuring such an arrangement:

First: State's views of failures, hypocrisy and structural, hierarchical inequality in liberal international order. Specifically, I determine from speeches and other statements about the West/international order by leading political and societal figures in each of my cases. For example, these statements may refer to the West's interests as being opposed to *our* interests, the West is hypocritical and has double standards, or the West has failed in its missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, etc...

Second: Participation in liberal international order. This can be measured by the presence of sanctions from international institutions, whether a state participates actively in international institutions, statements of support or skepticism for international institutions, the degree to which these states rely on the international order, and the perceived benefits of their participation. I believe that this aspect can also draw upon how my cases pursue their interests and influence internationally either within or apart from institutions, for example. Is there any evidence of integration or fragmentation or of other forms of collective mobilization? Of course, even the states that have heavily influenced the creation of the liberal international order do not always participate fully. As an example, the United States is not a member of the International Criminal Court (*Human Rights Watch* 2020).

Third: Anti-(neo)colonialism. This means looking at rhetoric from African states that identifies LIO as a structure in which neocolonialism propagates the exploitation of poorer states

by the West. This is similar to the first aspect, but it draws specific attention to colonial traumas and the threat that this can pose to a state's ontological security, which I discussed briefly in my contribution to theoretical literature chapter. These three elements, in combination or independently, contribute to a state's disharmony or a lack of fitting within LIO. In other words, they are three interrelated ways of measuring and observing the same thing. In building the context for my independent variable in my three cases, I focus on the domestic political situation in each case and find qualitative evidence for fit within liberal international order. Specifically, I look at political statements made in the years leading up to February 24, 2022 and other assessments that pertain to attitudes towards LIO, which I outlined above. In my analysis, I walk through each case's political history and foreign policy development in order to identify these aspects of my independent variable.

My dependent variable is "sympathy for a revisionist power", specifically sympathy for the revisionist power's contestatory practices related to liberal international order. This is observed in states either supporting or refusing to outright condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the various UN resolution votes that have taken place pertaining to Russia's actions in Ukraine. For my dependent variable, I focus on the voting results of the UN General Assembly's 11<sup>th</sup> Emergency Session's Resolutions that were passed in the first year of the full-scale war. Sympathy does not require full support for the revisionist's actions. However, when there is a major revisionist shock to the international system, sympathy for the revisionist state can be expressed through refusal to condemn that state for its actions, such as in a United Nations vote. According to Aanu Adeoye, the UN "has become the stage to platform every member nation's position" on Russia's invasion of Ukraine (2022). I have also chosen the UN vote because it essentially gives every state an equal voice internationally, though as I have discussed above, there may be hierarchical and structural constraints to this. Nevertheless, due to the starkness and widespread impact of Russia's actions, it appears unlikely that the choice to abstain can be truly motivated by indifference. In addition to these votes, I will look at any official statements from my case countries connected with why they voted the way they did. This is not meant to compare statements between cases, but rather to give rationale for the votes.

It may seem like circular reasoning to look at speeches and official statements for both of my variables. However, my independent variable is general and meant to build context, whereas my dependent variable is based on a specific event. This allows me to compare general attitudes

toward the liberal international order with responses to a specific event that challenges the order. For both variables, I pay attention to ideas of structural hierarchy and inequality, attempts to influence the international through collective mobilization, securitization, logics of integration or fragmentation, etc., and civilizational and ontological identity of “self” and “other”.

After I discuss my independent and dependent variables, I summarize and analyze my findings for each case in a way that ties my findings back to a focus on power politics.

I have chosen my three cases based on the following conditions: 1. They present a range of reactions to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, both in terms of UN votes, as well as official statements, and 2. There are enough sources readily available to make investigation into any given case meaningful. More specifically, Kenya has voted in Ukraine’s favor of four out of the five first resolutions that have been introduced to the General Assembly in the first year of war, Senegal has voted in favor twice, abstained twice (and was absent once), and South Africa has abstained for each vote. (See a breakdown of the UNGA’s eleventh emergency special session votes and results for cases in Table 1 on page 36).

Perhaps counterintuitively, South Africa scores highest (rated 7.05 out of 10) on the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index 2022 and is considered by the index to be a “flawed democracy”, whereas Kenya scores the lowest (5.05), and it and Senegal (5.72) are both labeled as “hybrid regimes” (2023, 8-9). Without placing too much emphasis on a single index, and given the fact that democracy is intrinsically connected with the liberal international order, I find these results to be somewhat ironic, i.e., the country with the weakest rated democracy appears to support the liberal international order (at least in terms of my dependent variable being responses to Russia’s actions in Ukraine) and vice versa in the South African case. This is interesting to note, but having a relatively weaker democratic system does not necessarily preclude a state from taking a positive view of LIO and the state’s position within it (and again vice versa in the South African case). In other words, my cases are not necessarily representative of a particular political system, but rather, they are examples of attitudes towards LIO.

Each of my cases are unique, but they each give an example of a state navigating and positioning itself within international society, and they each have unique influence in Africa and around the world. South Africa is special given its status as a member of the BRICS, alongside Brazil, Russia, India and China. For over a decade, this set of non-Western countries has developed its own institutions, such as the New Development Bank, as a way of moving beyond the Western

LIO institutions. However, the group is not always united, and there were internal tensions even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Ayres 2017). However, South Africa's inclusion within the group does show that it carries weight internationally beyond the West. From a power political perspective, this makes South Africa a key player for collective mobilization and influence in sub-Saharan Africa.

Writing in 2010, Eduard Jordaan writes that in the years since the fall of apartheid, "South Africa turned out to be a peace-maker, a keen multilateralist and a spokesperson for Africa and the developing world" (2010, 82). However, Jordaan also recognizes that South Africa had already started a slide away from liberal democracy toward what he calls a "liberationist" identity (2010, 82). Among the factors that distinguish a liberal democracy from a liberationist one are that in the latter, "national sovereignty trumps universal human rights", and "a liberationist is anti-Western, [who] wants to counter-balance the West and strongly identifies with the developing world... Liberationists desire a radically different order" (2010, 82-3). Writing eleven years later, Jordaan continues to contend that South Africa maintains a similar attitude toward human rights. He lists a number of examples in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when South Africa was a member of the UN Human Rights Council but failed to protect human rights. He also describes instances when South Africa aligned with authoritarian states like China and Russia against a resolution in 2014, which defended "the right to peaceful protest" (2021). I will describe more about the South African context in my analysis section, but it remains an interesting case as a relatively influential country that also has a mixed history as a member of LIO and international society.

My two other cases may not have the same regional impact as South Africa, but they are important in other ways. Kenya plays a key role in East Africa as the region's largest economy, and it is considered to be a business gateway for the region thanks to relatively stable business and political environment (*Business Council for International Understanding* 2023). Nairobi has also hosted the only United Nations Office (or headquarters) in Africa since 1996, in addition to numerous other UN agencies (*United Nations Office at Nairobi*). Although having a United Nations Office does not automatically make Kenya a regional power or leader, it does elevate Kenya's international attractiveness as a place for business or for other international organizations doing work in the region (Mwaura 2020). These elements combined give Kenya a certain prestigious status in eastern Africa.

I should note that although Kenya hosts a United Nations Office, this does not mean that Kenya has given up its sovereign will or ability to make decisions internationally or to vote for UN resolutions in accordance with its own interests. Many African states receive support from various international organizations and other states, which may compel recipients of support not to want to upset the international order<sup>6</sup>. However, since it is highly unlikely that states would be sanctioned in any way based on a UNGA resolution vote, Kenya's support for resolutions pertaining to Russia's invasion of Ukraine are unlikely to be motivated by fear of losing outside support, which also pertains to my other cases.

My third case is Senegal. In terms of UN votes, Senegal falls somewhere in-between Kenya and South Africa, but Senegal is an interesting case in and of itself. First, the President of Senegal, Macky Sall was also chosen as the Chairperson of the African Union for 2022 (*African Union* 2022), which gave him a unique position as not only the president of my case country, but also as representative for the African continent. These roles are distinct, but Macky Sall's statements and responses in his roles are not inseparable, either. In my analysis, I give more detail about how I go about analyzing Macky Sall's unique position. In building context for my independent variable, I focus on Senegal's domestic context, but it is also important to recognize the two hats of President/Chairperson Sall. Olayinka Ajala writes "There was certainly considerable Western suspicion when President Macky Sall along with the African Union Commission Chair, Moussa Faki Mahamat, visited Moscow on 3 June 2022 at a time when Russia appeared to be increasingly isolated. While not presenting a united African [U]nion position, the visit of the two top chiefs of the AU suggested that much of Africa was not in any mood to abandon Russia" (2022, 141). As stated previously, I give more information about how to view Sall and Senegal's response in my analysis below.

Originally, I planned to include Mali as one of my cases. However, since I focus on African states as independent actors, the high degree of Russian influence in Mali, including the regime's reliance on Russia and the Wagner Group's support, makes it less doable as a case. Of course, foreign influence remains an issue for most, if not all, African countries, but my chosen cases have demonstrated their independence, sovereignty and ability to navigate internationally. In addition,

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<sup>6</sup> Although it is not part of my thesis, it may be worthwhile to make a study of state vulnerability as a factor influencing how a state may respond to contestation of the liberal international order. In other words, how easily can a state adapt to the consequences of being seen as supporting another state that is a contestant of or antagonistic to LIO?

none of my cases are international pariahs, and they all have functioning democracies (to differing degrees of health). As I have discussed briefly and will go into further detail in my analysis, my cases do offer differing contexts as to how they position themselves within the liberal international order, which is the focus of my thesis.

Throughout Africa, the most direct effects of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine are related to economic, as well as security, matters. According to a 2022 report from the United Nations Development Programme, the cost of grain and oil skyrocketed, and "the crisis appears to be a harbinger of a Cold War redux, which could undermine democratization across Africa and fuel political instability" (2022, i). It is clear that the war is having a negative effect on Africa in a number of ways (Sen 2022), and yet, African states have not universally condemned Russian aggression. Therefore, I do not believe that the variations in response to the war can be explained by looking at practical considerations, such as economic well-being. Rather, I do believe that the variations in responses stem from a broader view of the liberal international order on the part of African states.

In terms of limitations of my research, with greater time and resources, perhaps a large-n study might be useful, or even a study that takes into consideration a greater diversity of cases and actors from around the world could be beneficial. The reason I focus on sub-Saharan Africa, exclusively, is in order to look at cases that are reasonably comparable, meaning that they are all small, post-colonial states, with perhaps the exception of South Africa being a regional power. Nevertheless, each has its own context (including unique insecurities and foreign policy goals), which is important to acknowledge and build into my research. This is partially why I have not chosen a most similar systems design. Instead, with a focus on power, and without an inflexible hypothesis and conceptual foundation, I believe that a straightforward qualitative study of three individual cases brings insights that are on their own valuable for, if not making tentative conclusions, at least suitable for suggesting areas for further research.

For my independent variable, it is essential to establish context, which is what the three aspects or parts that I mentioned above are meant to do. Perceptions of the liberal international order and global norms and "fit" within the international system are very much context dependent. For example, a global norm may be viewed positively in a context where the norm can advance a state's interests internationally, but the same norm may be viewed negatively in a different context when the norm constrains a state's action. This does not mean that measuring attitudes towards

and positions within liberal international order are impossible to define. Rather, it requires care not to oversimplify my findings. Related to building context, and although it is not the focus of my thesis, I nevertheless consider Russian involvement or influence before or since February 24 in each of my cases. Specifically, Russian involvement is likely to have a greater effect and impact in a state that already has a lack of fit within the liberal international order.

My dependent variable is more straightforward. The tricky part is in drawing definitive conclusions. Therefore, in addition to the UN votes, it is important to pay attention to official statements explaining why a state voted a certain way. Looking at such statements, it is equally vital to pay attention to what is said, as well as to what is unsaid. Are Russia's actions condemned fully, partially, conditionally, not at all?

In summary, I have now discussed my hypothesis, including greater details about my independent and dependent variables. I have also given rationale for my selection of cases. My research is limited to three cases, whereas a large-n case study of sub-Saharan African states could also be beneficial. Nevertheless, my cases present a variety of responses to Russian aggression in Ukraine, and they each allow me to analyze their respective fits within liberal international order. My research may also be limited due to my assumption that liberal international order that I am studying is broadly similar to international society. Therefore, it is necessary for me to remain conscious of the fact that my cases' fit within the liberal international order is not necessarily the same as their fit within international society, however this may be constructed.

In the next chapter I analyze my three cases individually. Finally, I conclude with a summary of my findings and suggestions for further research and conceptual development.

## 5. Analysis

Before I truly begin my analysis, I present a table (Table 1) summarizing the resolutions passed by the United Nations General Assembly Eleventh Emergency Session, along with the resolution's title and the date it was passed. Also in the table, I have summarized how each of my case countries have voted, with a "Yes" vote being in favor of Ukraine. Following the table, I analyze each of my cases by discussing the independent and dependent variables and a brief analytical summary, with a focus on power politics, for each case.

*Table 1: General Assembly 11th Emergency Session Resolutions and Case Voting Summary*

<b>Resolution</b>	<b>Kenya</b>	<b>Senegal</b>	<b>South Africa</b>
<b>ES-11/1</b> Aggression against Ukraine (2 March 2022) <sup>7</sup>	Yes	Abstain	Abstain
<b>ES-11/2</b> Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine (24 March 2022) <sup>8</sup>	Yes	Yes	Abstain
<b>ES-11/3</b> Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council (7 April 2022) <sup>9</sup>	Abstain	Abstain	Abstain
<b>ES-11/4</b> Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations (12 October 2022) <sup>10</sup>	Yes	Yes	Abstain
<b>ES-11/5</b> Furtherance of remedy and repatriation for aggression against Ukraine (14 November 2022) <sup>11</sup>	Yes	(absent)	Abstain

<sup>7</sup> General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1, *Aggression against Ukraine*, A/RES/ES-11/1 (2 March 2022), available from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/293/36/PDF/N2229336.pdf?OpenElement> ; Voting summary: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3959039?ln=en>

<sup>8</sup> General Assembly Resolution ES-11/2, *Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine*, A/RES/ES-11/2 (24 March 2022), available from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/301/67/PDF/N2230167.pdf?OpenElement> ; Voting summary: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3965954?ln=en>

<sup>9</sup> General Assembly Resolution ES-11/3, *Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council*, A/RES/ES-11/3 (7 April 2022), Available from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/312/47/PDF/N2231247.pdf?OpenElement> ; Voting summary: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3967778?ln=en>

<sup>10</sup> General Assembly Resolution ES-11/4, *Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations*, A/RES/ES-11/4 (12 October 2022), Available from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/630/66/PDF/N2263066.pdf?OpenElement> ; Voting summary: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3990400?ln=en>

<sup>11</sup> General Assembly Resolution ES-11/5, *Furtherance of remedy and reparation for aggression against Ukraine*, A/RES/ES-11/5 (14 November 2022), available from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/693/55/PDF/N2269355.pdf?OpenElement> ; Voting summary: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3994052?ln=en>

## 5.1 Kenya

### 5.1.1 Kenya: Independent Variable

First, I establish historical political context for my case. Kenya has emerged in recent years as a key economic and political player in East Africa. In contrast to many of its neighbors, it has largely managed to evade prolonged internal conflicts in recent years, though this has not always been the case due to its colonial history and certain periods of domestic discord (*Oxford Business Group*, 2018). Kenya was colonized by Great Britain, which drew the borders that exist to this day. As was typical, colonial borders did not take into consideration local realities pertaining to people, ethnic groups, pre-colonial economic systems, social transactions, etc. Colonial rule was also marked by “genocide and forced migrations of people”, as well as “loss of sovereignty as colonial rules replaced indigenous leaders” (Ndege 2009, 3). A few years after the end of the Mau Mau rebellion, Kenya became independent in 1963, and Jomo Kenyatta became prime minister and then president until his death in 1978. Kenya then became a one-party state until 1991. Since the 90s, Kenya has experienced difficulties with terrorist attacks and insurgencies, as well as periods of political instability. Several of the most recent elections have been in some way contested or disputed, including violence after the 2007 election in which over 1,500 people died<sup>12</sup> (*BBC* 2022).

In recent years Kenya has taken steps to increase the liberal character of its governing structure, though there have been difficulties along the way. A new constitution in 2010 limited presidential powers, devolved powers to Kenya’s regions (*BBC* 2022), and increased the rights of “minorities and marginalized groups, notably women. It enshrined equality in law and led to the establishment of key institutions aimed at promoting and protecting minorities” (Kimani 2020, 1), but after a decade, it does not appear to have fully achieved its intended purpose (Kimani 2020). In 2013, Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Jomo Kenyatta, became president. Kenyatta’s<sup>13</sup> presidency has been marked by several high-profile al-Shabab attacks on Kenya. Kenyatta had also been charged by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in connection to the post-election violence in 2007 (*BBC* 2022). It was at this time that Kenya’s government did contest the ICC arrest warrant because it targeted the sovereignty of Kenya and other African states. The ICC is often accused of being an arm of the West that targets African leaders, and the African Union tends to support

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<sup>12</sup> According to one estimate.

<sup>13</sup> All further references to Kenyatta refer to Uhuru Kenyatta, unless otherwise specified.

African leaders and states vis-à-vis the Court, even establishing Africa's own African Court of Justice and Human Rights (ACJHR) (Deitelhoff 2020). Charges were dropped in 2015 due to lack of evidence, and Kenyatta was reelected in 2017. Due to term limits, Kenyatta was ineligible to run in the August 2022 election, and his deputy president, William Ruto, became the current president by defeating rival Raila Odinga (BBC 2022). This recent history shows that steps were taken to enshrine liberal values into Kenya's constitution, even though the ICC is often identified as an institution that treats African states and leaders unfairly.

The violence in Kenya in 2007 disrupted the country's self-promoted image as a "model of democratic governance" (Schneider 2010). According to Mark Schneider, "The flagrantly flawed presidential election in Kenya in December 2007... produced not only [Kenya's] worst political crisis since independence, but waves of ethnic violence across the capital Nairobi, the rural Rift Valley and other regions of the country" (2010). This turbulent time in Kenya's recent history is also notable for the international response. Mark Schneider describes how representatives from Ghana, South Africa and Tanzania were instrumental in leading the initiative to bring peace to Kenya through mediating during the crisis. They of course received help from the UN, EU, the United States and the African Union, but it is important to note that finding a solution to the crisis did not come exclusively from the West. Ultimately, the disputing political factions agreed to various reforms that saw the creation of a Prime Minister position, election reforms, as well as the new constitution that I described above. This conflict resolution example shows how the international community was able to help Kenya move past this period of violence in a way that was acceptable to Kenya. Peaceful conflict resolution is a tenet of the liberal international order, and Kenya's acceptance of this showed its willingness to participate in the order.

President Kenyatta's first term saw the development of what he called the first "written foreign policy" (Kenyatta 2014, 5) in Kenya's history since independence. Kenyatta writes in the foreword to this foreign policy document that:

Kenya seeks to promote and safeguard national, region and international peace and security and protect our sovereignty and territorial integrity. As a country, we will continue to support the work of regional, international and multilateral organizations in finding lasting solutions to conflict and terrorism activities for a free and secure world. In pursuing the country's socio-economic and political interests, Kenya will seek to promote sub-regional and regional integration and cooperation emphasizing intra-African trade as the cornerstone for Africa's socio-economic and political unity (2014, 5).

The president's foreward to this foreign policy document appears to be in-line with what many would consider to be fundamental aspects of the liberal international order, namely the protection of peace, sovereignty and territorial integrity, support for international institutions and organizations and a desire to cooperate internationally. The document is also Kenya and Africa-focused, but it is not insular (Kenyatta 2014). The document goes on to say that "Kenya's long struggle for national liberation from colonialism set a strong foundation for its foreign policy orientation. The architects of our Republic underscored the inextricable link between national independence and humanity's larger freedom, equity and the inalienable right to a shared heritage" (*Republic of Kenya* 2014, 14). In this later sense, Kenya is not using its colonial past to criticize LIO. Rather, it is citing its own struggle for independence as the bedrock on which its foreign policy is based.

The document also describes how Kenya navigated between the global divisions of the Cold War:

Even though Kenya's liberation struggle enhanced the country's international image and stature, paradoxically, this heroic history also risked playing into the East-West ideological divide. In order to strategically place the country in the international arena, the architects of Kenya's foreign policy charted a pragmatic approach... This approach has ensured that Kenya successfully forges mutually beneficial alliances with the West while constructively engaging the East through its policy of positive economic and political non-alignment (*Republic of Kenya* 2014, 15).

Kenya's foreign policy goals fits within the liberal international order, but this document does not claim that this order is exclusive to the West. Kenya takes a non-aligned approach to international engagement, as well as a position that is clearly at ease within LIO.

In addition to multiple regional and global institutions that the foreign policy document mentions as important<sup>14</sup>, it also states that "Kenya will continue to promote the principles of the United Nations (UN) Charter and play its rightful role in supporting the work of the United Nations system in the promotion of international peace and security, trade, human rights and democracy, refugees, sustainable development and the reform of the UN system" (*Republic of Kenya* 2014, 31). The foreign policy document does not mention the United Nations Office in Nairobi,

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<sup>14</sup> Including the East African Community (EAC), the Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the African Union (AU).

specifically, but as I discussed briefly in my case selection discussion, being the only host of a UN office in Africa does elevate Kenya's status in the sub-Saharan region to a certain degree.

The document does not speak a great deal about international order, specifically, except to say that in a world of increasing multipolarity, "emerging economies" like Kenya have a greater voice on the global stage (*Republic of Kenya* 2014, 14). This acknowledgment of a multipolar world in which smaller states can play a part in the international order implies that the current international order is suitable for states like Kenya to act. Also, this document appears to have held up over the past decade. The 2014 document listed five "pillars of diplomacy": economic, peace, environmental, cultural, and diaspora, which are maintained by the current Ministry of Foreign & Diaspora Affairs (*Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs* 2023b).

As far as Kenya's participation in liberal international order is concerned, currently Kenya is not under international sanctions, and Kenya participates actively in a variety of regional and global organizations (*Republic of Kenya* 2014; *Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs* 2023a). Kenya contested the justness and jurisdiction of the ICC's arrest warrant for Kenyatta, but this was a limited case and did not reflect a deeper and/or wider discontent with the liberal international order. Kenya's recent governments clearly see their country's interests as intertwined with the current liberal global order. The colonial legacy affects Kenya, like all post-colonial states, but I have found no evidence that Kenya's leaders equate the liberal international order with a Western, neocolonial hegemonic system that oppresses Kenya. Kenya is considered to be a "hybrid regime", which puts it at odds with international liberal ideals for democracy. Popular discontent with the government is not uncommon in Kenya, but Kenya's "electoral institutions... proved resilient in 2020 as they were tested against a backdrop of heightened public discontent and anti-incumbent backlash... The peaceful and clear-cut conclusion to the Kenyan presidential election... bodes well for Kenya's institutional strengthening and political stability" (*Economist Intelligence Unit* 2023, 59-60). Overall, Kenya appears to be at ease with its international role and position within liberal international order.

As far as non-Western foreign influence in Kenya is concerned, China appears to have a much greater footprint in Kenya than Russia does (*Africanews* 2023a). Apart from an identified disinformation campaign in 2021 that targeted Kenya's judicial integrity and potential plans to establish an RT office in Nairobi, Russia's footprint is relatively light in Kenya compared with

many other sub-Saharan African states (*Africa Center for Strategic Studies* 2022). Therefore, I would say that Russian influence is negligible for the purposes of my research into Kenya.

#### 5.1.2 Kenya: Dependent Variable

For my dependent variable, I focus on the voting results of the UN General Assembly's 11<sup>th</sup> Emergency Session's Resolutions that were passed in the first year of the full-scale war. As we can see from Table 1, these five resolutions were passed at different dates during the year 2022 in response to Russia's war in Ukraine and to specific events, such as "reports of gross and systematic violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law committed by the Russian Federation during its aggression against Ukraine" (ES-11/3<sup>15</sup>) and after the illegal referendums in several regions of Ukraine (ES-11/4<sup>16</sup>).

Kenya voted in favor of each resolution except for ES-11/3, for which it abstained. ES-11/3 pertained to suspending Russia from Human Rights Council membership. This resolution passed, but it received less support from Africa, as a whole, in comparison with other resolutions. In reference to the vote, Kenya's ambassador to the United Nations, Martin Kimani stated that it was "premature" to suspend Russia before the crimes committed in Ukraine could be independently investigated. He also said that that the HRC should not be "weaponized" (Kimutai 2022, quoting Ambassador Kimani). Asked again about Kenya's abstention for ES-11/3, Kimani stated that "this one had nothing to do with our thoughts or solidarity with Ukraine. It reflected our sense of discomfort at the idea that we would start throwing each other out of UN bodies..." (Goldberg 2022, interview with Ambassador Kimani in August).

As I said, apart from ES-11/3, Kenya has voted in favor of every resolution. Two days before the start of the full-scale war, after Russia recognized the Donetsk and Lugansk regions of Ukraine as independent states, Ambassador Kimani gave a speech about the importance of diplomacy and the maintenance of Ukraine's sovereignty:

The territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine stands breached. The Charter of the United Nations continues to wilt under the relentless assault of the powerful. In one moment, it is invoked with reverence by the very same countries who then turn their backs

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<sup>15</sup> General Assembly Resolution ES-11/3, *Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council*, A/RES/ES-11/3 (7 April 2022), Available from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/312/47/PDF/N2231247.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>16</sup> General Assembly Resolution ES-11/4, *Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations*, A/RES/ES-11/4 (12 October 2022), Available from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/630/66/PDF/N2263066.pdf?OpenElement>

on it in pursuit of objectives diametrically opposed to international peace and security... We do not deny that there may be serious security concerns in these regions. But they cannot justify today's recognition of these regions as independent states – not when there are multiple diplomatic tracks available and underway that have the ability to offer peaceful solutions (2022).

It is clear by Kimani's invocation of the UN Charter and the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty that these elements of the liberal international order are essential for Kenya to maintain. He also points to the hypocrisy of larger states (in this case Russia) who use these principles in ways that distort their liberal character. Russia using a liberal principle, such as Responsibility to Protect, in an illiberal way is what Gregorio Bettiza and David Lewis point to as "Liberal Mimicry" (2020, 567), which we discussed in a previous section. Ambassador Kimani continues:

This situation echoes our history. Kenya and almost every African country was birthed by the ending of empire. Our borders were not of our own drawing. They were drawn in the distant colonial metropolises of London, Paris, and Lisbon, with no regard for the ancient nations that they cleaved apart. Today, across the border of every single African country, live our countrymen with whom we share deep historical, cultural, and linguistic bonds. At independence, had we chosen to pursue states on the basis of ethnic, racial, or religious homogeneity, we would still be waging bloody wars these many decades later. Instead, we agreed that we would settle for the borders that we inherited, but we would still pursue continental political, economic, and legal integration. Rather than form nations that looked ever backwards into history with dangerous nostalgia, we chose to look forward to a greatness none of our many nations and peoples had ever known. We chose to follow the rules of the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations charter, not because our borders satisfied us, but because we wanted something greater, forged in peace... Multilateralism lies on its deathbed tonight. It has been assaulted today as it has been by other powerful states in the recent past (2022).

Here, the Ambassador draws parallels between Africa's history of colonialism and what Russia is doing in Ukraine. He acknowledges the ills of colonialism in all forms and contexts. Kimani recognizes that peace, built upon liberal international principles, such as diplomacy and multilateralism, is better than an alternative order based on irredentism and violence.

Kenya's new president (elected August 2022), William Ruto, has maintained Kenya's stance in support of Ukraine and its territorial integrity saying in October 2022 "Kenya will continue to be a responsible player on the global stage, we believe the internationally recognized instruments that call for the respect of boundaries of countries as the bare minimum we must all live by" (Kipkemoi 2022, quoting President Ruto in October 2022). According to an analysis by

Maria Nzomo and Winnie Rugutt for the Australian Institute of International Affairs, “Kenya’s foreign policy going forward, is unlikely to radically deviate from the objectives outlined in the 2014 foreign policy document” (2022). Therefore, it is likely that Kenya’s position within LIO will remain stable for some time, which should in turn influence how Kenya responds to challenges to and contestation of the liberal international order.

Kenya has taken one of Africa’s strongest positions in defense of the liberal international order’s principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, diplomacy and multilateralism. Kenya has expressed no sympathy with Russia in its actions vis-à-vis Ukraine or in regards to the liberal international order. Its voting record on UN resolutions is consistent with the context I built for my independent variable showing that Kenya has positioned itself as a defender of LIO principles in its foreign policy.

#### 5.1.3 Kenya: Analysis and Power Political Discussion

As I determined, Kenya has good fit within liberal international order, and it has demonstrated that it has no sympathy for Russia’s actions in its UN votes and in related official statements. Kenya has condemned Russia’s contestation of the liberal international order in clear terms. From a power political perspective, Kenya has used its influence to defend the norms and principles of the order. Kenya has invoked its own history of colonialism in its condemnation of Russia’s breaches of Ukraine’s territorial integrity. Although Kenya contested the ICC’s arrest warrant for Kenyatta, this did not represent a break from broader acceptance of Kenya’s place within LIO. Kenya’s foreign policy document from 2014 demonstrated that Kenya seeks to engage internationally and participate actively in international institutions. Kenya has a history of engaging with the West, although Kenya has also balanced this with engagement elsewhere both during and since the Cold War. Lastly, I have determined that Russia has negligible influence in Kenya.

Although the violence following the 2007 likely damaged Kenya’s international credibility as a democratic state, Kenya appears to have since worked to improve its international reputation through a new constitution in 2010 and promising democratic developments in recent years. Though my thesis does not measure the effects of Kenya’s attempts at collective mobilization, Ambassador Kimani’s speech two days before the full-scale invasion and subsequent statements

by Kenyan officials have demonstrated that Kenya is upholding the basic tenets of the liberal international order, which likely does present a clear pro-LIO example in sub-Saharan Africa.

## 5.2 Senegal

### 5.2.1 Senegal: Independent Variable

I begin with a brief overview of Senegal's political history. Since its independence, Senegal has had a relatively long history as both "one of the most established democracies on the continent" and as an ally of the West (Ajala 2022, 138). Senegal achieved independence from France in 1960 and established a semi-presidential political system modeled on the French Fifth Republic. After a failed coup attempt in 1962 led by the then Prime Minister, executive power was consolidated by the president, Leopold Senghor. Senghor established a one-party state, although he later allowed for a three-party system in the late 1970s (*International IDEA*; Camara et al. 2023). Senghor's chosen successor, Abdou Diouf, became president in 1982 and stayed in power until 2000. In 1991, the post of Prime Minister was restored so that executive powers would be less concentrated with the President. Diouf was defeated by the leader of the opposition, Abdoulaye Wade, in the election of 2000 (*International IDEA*). In the 2012 election, Wade lost to the current holder of the presidency, Macky Sall (Camara et al, 2023). Senegal has seen several peaceful democratic transitions of power, which make it something of an outlier in the region.

More recently, however, Sall's administration has been marked both by ambitious development projects, as well as accusations that he has stifled dissent and the political opposition (Camara et al. 2023). For example, Sall's primary political rival, Ousmane Sonko "is currently facing two court cases that could threaten his eligibility for the [2024 presidential] election. Sonko claims that the charges are part of a plot to torpedo his chances. In 2021, the firebrand politician was summoned to court in an alleged rape case, triggering the most serious riots in years in Senegal, a country reputed to be a rare island of stability in troubled West Africa (*Africanews* 2023b). In addition, Sall is considering running for a third conservative term, which many claim would be unconstitutional (*Africanews* 2023b). In terms of democratic trends, the Economist Intelligence Unit has rated Senegal as a "hybrid regime", which is lower than the "flawed democracy" rating it received as recently as 2018. Senegal reversed its downward democratic trend

slightly in 2022 after successful parliamentary elections, which witnessed “an anti-incumbent backlash... [which] indicated citizens’ desire for greater political accountability in the face of rising socioeconomic challenges and lack of representation” (*Economist Intelligence Unit* 2023, 59).

In order to understand Senegal’s relationship with the liberal international order, we must first inspect its relationship with the former colonial power, France. The first president of Senegal, Leopold Senghor, maintained very close relations with France. According to Tony Chafer, “Senghor was an enthusiastic Francophile... he earned a reputation as an enlightened African leader who bequeathed to his country stability, a relatively open society with a vigorous free press, and a functioning democracy... [yet for many Senegalese] he remained a distant figure, part of a political elite that, literally, rarely spoke their language... many Senegalese knew him above all as *l’homme de la France* (the man of France)” (2003, 155-6). By the time of his death in 2001, however, Chafer writes that the time came for many in Senegalese society to reevaluate their country’s traditionally close and privileged status with France among former French colonies in Africa. When Abdoulaye Wade became president in 2000, he tried to “diversify Senegal’s foreign relations away from the Francophone focus of his predecessors” (Chafer 2003, 164), though without straying far from the West. Wade’s presidency also saw a pivot towards Pan-Africanism and to smaller, rising powers (Sall 2013, no relation to President Sall). It is difficult to evaluate’s Senegal’s specific attitudes towards the liberal international order, but from its traditional place as a close ally of France and relatively strong democratic tradition, Senegal’s foreign policy has largely aligned closely with its Western partners.

The election of Macky Sall in 2012 and peaceful transfer of power was hailed as a democratic success in a part of the world that has become better known for coups d’état (Abrams 2012). Ironically, Wade’s defeat was likely due in part to his plans for an unconstitutional third term, which the Senegalese electorate punished him for (Chapbell 2012). (We may see if Sall suffers the same fate in 2024 if he chooses to run.) After his election, President Sall’s official website stated, “in terms of foreign policy, the new President is working to renew its traditional alliances and to recover Senegal’s diplomatic role in Africa<sup>17</sup>” (*Présidence du Sénégal*). Macky Sall began his presidency by reestablishing Senegal’s privileged relationship with France, which

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<sup>17</sup> My translation. French original: “En matière de politique étrangère, le nouveau Président s’attèle à renouer les alliances traditionnelles et à faire recouvrer au Sénégal son rôle diplomatique en Afrique.”

had diminished somewhat under Wade. Nevertheless, Sall has preserved the diversity of international relations that were expanded under his predecessor (Bayram 2019).

The current Senegalese Foreign Minister, Aïssata Tall Sall (no relation to President Sall), describes Senegal's foreign policy on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website:

Senegal has established its international renown on its democratic tradition, its political stability, its republican institutions and the professionalism of its army. It is therefore very natural that, since gaining independence in 1960, its foreign policy be oriented toward finding peace, especially in good neighborliness, African integration, economic cooperation, the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as the management and promotion of its diaspora<sup>18</sup> (Tall Sall).

Similar to Kenya's foreign policy development since independence, Senegal's has been based on the pursuit of liberal international principles, which makes Senegal a good fit within the liberal international order.

In the same communiqué Tall Sall writes that participation in international organizations, such as the UN, the AU, CEDEAO (Economic Community of West African States), the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and the Non-Aligned Movement are part of how Senegal achieves its foreign policy objectives. According to the Foreign Minister, Senegal values multilateralism and participates actively in various initiatives around the world. Tall Sall concludes by writing "Thanks to the above, Senegal continues to benefit from the international community's support, as is evidenced by its brilliant elections to the Security Council in 2015 and to the Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2017 by the United Nation's General Assembly<sup>19</sup>" (Tall Sall). Again, Senegal's active participation in liberal international institutions also contributes to its good fit within LIO.

Based on these statements, Macky Sall's government is drawing on Senegal's decades of relative success as a stable democracy and placing this reality at the center of its foreign policy. Sall has diversified Senegal's international relationships, but it has also maintained a special relationship with France under his watch. However, in March 2021, anti-French anger erupted on

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<sup>18</sup> My translation. French original: "Le Sénégal a fondé sa renommée internationale sur sa tradition démocratique, sa stabilité politique, ses institutions républicaines et le professionnalisme de son armée. C'est donc tout naturellement que sa politique étrangère fut orientée depuis son accession à l'indépendance en 1960, vers la recherche de la paix, notamment le bon voisinage, l'intégration africaine, la coopération économique, la promotion et la protection des droits de l'homme ainsi que la gestion et la promotion de la diaspora."

<sup>19</sup> My translation. French original: "C'est fort de ce qui précède que le Sénégal continue de bénéficier du soutien de la communauté internationale comme en atteste ses brillantes élections, par l'Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies, au Conseil de Sécurité en 2015 et au Conseil des Droits de l'Homme (CDH) en 2017."

the streets of Dakar at the same time when Ousmane Sonko, the opposition leader, was being arrested. *Le Monde* reports from these events: “Painted on a wall in Dakar, the graffiti is without nuance. We see the president, Macky Sall, pistol in his fist, slaughter a protester in cold blood. The sleeve of his suit is in the colors of France<sup>20</sup>” (Bensimon 2021). Sonko has expressed anti-French opinions, which have resonated with certain elements of the Senegalese population. It is likely that many in Senegal see Sall’s government as too closely aligned with the former colonial power. I mention this because rising anti-French sentiment in Senegal, as well as Sonko’s apparent popularity, especially with the youth (Gavin 2021), could play a part in Sall’s own future political calculations. Whether or not Sall might feel pressured to distance himself from France goes beyond the scope of my research, but it is nevertheless important to consider his political motivations and how this could possibly have an effect on his response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. However, even if Senegal’s foreign policy takes a more distant turn from France, it is unlikely that Senegal’s established liberal foreign policy approach will change.

I mentioned in my case selection that in 2022 Macky Sall was also the Chairperson of the African Union (*African Union 2022*) and was one of the major faces in managing Africa’s response to the multitude of challenges that Africa faced in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This makes my independent variable analysis somewhat more intricate, since Sall was wearing two hats, so to speak, at the time of the invasion. Nevertheless, his two roles were not necessarily in opposition. Based on my analysis so far, Senegal appears to have reasonably good fit within the liberal international order. Likewise, the African Union is also a relatively liberal international organization (meaning closely aligned with principles of LIO). According to the Constitutive Act of the African Union and the Protocol on Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union, some of the AU’s primary objectives are as follows:

- Defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States,
- Accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent,
- Encourage international cooperation,
- Promote peace, security, and stability on the continent,

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<sup>20</sup> My translation. French original: “Peint sur un mur de Dakar, le graffiti est sans nuance. On y voit le président Macky Sall, pistolet au poing, abattre de sang-froid un manifestant. La manche de son costume est aux couleurs de la France.”

- Promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance,
- Promote and protect human and peoples' rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and other relevant human rights instruments,
- Ensure the effective participation of women in decision-making, particularly in the political, economic and socio-cultural areas,
- And others (*African Union – About the African Union*).

In light of Senegal's history as a stable democracy, its expressed willingness to participate actively in institutions of LIO and Macky Sall's election as Chairperson of the African Union in 2022, I would say that Senegal has good fit within liberal international order, and it has positioned itself in this way in order to achieve its international objectives. There is no evidence that Senegal has actively criticized the liberal international order, nor does it view LIO as a system that propagates the exploitation of power states by the West. Senegal's foreign policy has primarily pursued a logic of integration (as opposed to fragmentation), particularly in Africa. Apart from domestic anti-French sentiments, there does not appear to be popular or elite anger directed at Western hegemonic dominance, generally.

In recent years, Russia has expanded its influence in Africa, including to several of Senegal's neighbors, such as Mali and Burkina Faso. However, apart from economic ties, Russia has not targeted Senegal to the same extent. In Mali, Burkina Faso and elsewhere in Africa, Russia presents itself as anti-colonial, which tends to resonate in many of France's former colonies (Atanesian 2023). However, despite Senegal's home-grown anti-French sentiments, Russian influence does not appear to have gained the same hold in Senegal.

### 5.2.2 Senegal: Dependent Variable

For the five UNGA votes that I am analyzing, Senegal abstained twice (ES-11/1 and ES-11-11/3), voted 'yes' twice (ES-11/2 and ES-11/4) and was absent once (ES-11/5) (see Table 1). First, however, we should look at Senegal's recent history of voting in a similar context. In 2014, after Russia's annexation of Crimea, Senegal abstained. Commenting on Senegal's abstention in 2014 and how Senegal's abstention in the ES-11/1 vote corresponds with Senegal's recent response to the war, the current Foreign Minister states, "The natural role of our country in the

world is to work for peace and the rapprochement of societies. That is why we abstain. It is a prudent posture but also a wise one. If you want to play the mediator between two conflicting parties, you can't condemn one over the other. In order to be credible, you have to be neutral" (Boko 2022, quoting Foreign Minister Tall Sall).

Also, in explaining how President Sall's AU Chairpersonship has constrained Senegal's response in the wake of Russia's February 2022 invasion, Tall Sall explains "[the AU mandate] does not allow [President Sall] to take too strong a position. This Senegalese position is well thought out. It is not *carte blanche* for anyone" (Boko 2022, quoting Foreign Minister Tall Sall). However, in a separate vote on the Human Rights Council on March 4<sup>th</sup> (two days after the ES-11/1 vote), Senegal did condemn Russia (Boko 2022). According to Olayinka Ajala, Senegal's positions both in 2014 and in 2022 have come down to Senegal's historical position of neutrality. Ajala also raises questions of if and how Sall's position as Chairperson can make Senegal's position be seen as representative of Africa's position, overall. He determines that Senegal's votes reflect Senegal's history of neutrality, but he also writes that when Sall and African Union Commission Chair, Moussa Faki Mahamat, visited President Putin in Russia in early June 2022, "the visit of the top two chiefs of the AU suggested that much of Africa was not in any mood to abandon Russia" (Ajala 2022). The AU had given Sall a mandate to travel to Russia in order to speak to the Russian leader about the war's effects on Africa (*Al Jazeera* 2022), in particular the war's effects on grain exports from Ukraine and Russia (Trevelyan 2022). The trip received criticism that Sall was falling for Putin's narrative and Russian propaganda about Western sanctions being the primary reason for the disruption to Ukraine's exports, rather than Russia's blockade of Ukraine's ports<sup>21</sup> (Wax 2022). However, Sall did call for an end to the war while in Moscow, and after President Zelensky virtually addressed the African Union later in June, Sall stated "Africa remains committed to respecting the rules of international law, the peaceful resolution of conflicts and freedom of trade" (Ndiaye 2022, quoting President Sall). In a continent where the main effect of the war has been economic (Ndiaye 2022), Sall's focus on practical matters of trade makes sense, whereas in the wealthy West, which can afford to take a principled stand, such practical matters may not have resonated as strongly. In short, it appears that Sall has been constrained by his position as chairperson of the AU to lead the continent during the difficult time.

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<sup>21</sup> This was before Ukraine and Russia agreed to the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2022 (*BBC* 2023).

In September 2022, at the 77<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly Chairperson Sall also expressed concern that Africa risked becoming a battleground for influence in a new Cold War:

[The African Union] call[s] for de-escalation and a cessation of hostilities in Ukraine, as well as a negotiated solution to avoid the catastrophic risk of a potentially global conflict... I have come to say that Africa has suffered enough of the burden of history; that it does not want to be the breeding ground of a new cold war, but rather a pole of stability and opportunity open to all its partners, on a mutually beneficial basis... We want a multilateralism that is open and respectful of our differences; because the United Nations system, born out of the ashes of war, can only win the support of all on the basis of shared ideals, not local values erected as universal norms. It is by working together, respecting our differences, that we will restore the strength and vitality of the United Nations' *raison d'être*: to save the present and future generations the scourge of war, to advance the peaceful coexistence of peoples, and to foster progress by creating better living conditions for all (Sall 2022).

Sall here was speaking on behalf of the African Union, and he points to a number of issues, such as climate change, where he sees African nations unfairly bearing the brunt of the costs. He extols the values of multilateralism and respect for the “shared ideals” of the UN, while at the same time he criticizes the perceived universalization of “local values”, which is likely a reference to the West. In other words, he is not criticizing the liberal international order, but rather the West’s hegemony and unfair treatment of Africa, both in the past and present (Sall 2022). Sall’s position as AU Chairperson in 2022 can help to explain why Senegal has taken a neutral position on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, but what explains Senegal’s two ‘yes’ votes?

Senegal voted in favor of UNGA Resolutions ES-11/2 and ES-11/4, concerning the war’s humanitarian toll and the territorial integrity of Ukraine, respectively. In responding to ES-11/2 (voted on March 28, 2022), President Sall declared that he was preoccupied by what was occurring in Ukraine, but he also reaffirmed Senegal’s commitment to the principles of non-alignment and a peaceful resolution to the conflict (Aliou 2022).

Overall, Senegal has taken a measured approach that likely reflects the constraints of the AU chairpersonship on President Sall. Sall has been critical of Western hegemony, especially in areas where he sees the West not doing enough to help Africa, such as with climate change. However, his and Senegal’s responses to Russia’s invasion have also been based on respecting the liberal international order and international law.

### 5.2.3 Senegal: Analysis and Power Political Discussion

Although Senegal fits within liberal international order, there is the possibility that my analysis of Senegal's response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine is influenced by President Sall's concurrent position as Chairperson of the AU. Though the AU is fundamentally a liberal international organization, its focus is naturally to protect the interests of Africa. President's Sall's reactions have focused on the more immediate concerns for the African continent, namely the spike in grain prices due Russia's invasion. From a power political perspective, Sall's measured response likely reflects the multitude of competing interests across Africa, especially related to the practical matter of grain imports. As Chairperson of the AU, it is likely that his room for maneuvering was limited. Of course, as one of the AU's top representatives at the time of the invasion, Sall could have placed more pressure on Russia than he actually did. It is unclear how successful this would have been, however. Also, since Senegal abstained in 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea, Sall's government may have abstained regardless of Sall's AU position. Therefore, it is much more difficult to draw a direct connection between my two variables in this case.

In terms of future research, it could be valuable to look at how Senegal's response to Russian aggression is influenced by observing recent coups d'états in its neighbors. Senegal is not Mali or Burkina Faso, however, and its democratic institutions are much stronger. Though the West does not have an untarnished record in sponsoring coups, it is likely that a state like Senegal would be more wary of Russian influence. Russia has already shown that it can capitalize on anti-French sentiments and political instability in a country in order to expand its own presence. Nevertheless, Sall must balance between appearing overly friendly to France and cracking down too hard on anti-French protests, or else he risks fanning flames of domestic discontent.

As President of Senegal and Chairperson of the African Union at the time of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Macky Sall was in a key position to use his influence to mobilize other African countries in taking a common stance on Ukraine. However, his primary concern was to help Africa weather the storm and address the continent's more pressing needs. At the same time, Sall did use his position to bring the West's attention to the challenges that Africa is facing, including climate change. Overall, Sall has worked to uphold UN ideals, but even if he had tried to unite Africa in opposition to Russia, there is a good chance that he would not have been successful.

## 5.3 South Africa

### 5.3.1 South Africa: Independent Variable

As I mentioned in my case selection discussion, South Africa is often considered to be one of the most powerful and influential countries in Africa, and certainly of my three cases. South Africa has the second largest GDP in sub-Saharan Africa, just behind Nigeria (*The World Bank*), and it is a member of the BRICS (Ayres 2017). BRICS originally became a way to refer to five quickly growing emerging economies at the beginning of the millennium, but now Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa “are setting themselves up as an alternative to existing international financial and political forums... [They] are trying to position themselves as representatives of the Global South” (Prange 2023) and by extension, as alternatives to Western hegemony. There have also been discussions of expanding BRICS to other non-Western countries in the Middle East, South America, Africa and elsewhere. Expansion is likely to be a theme of the upcoming BRICS summit in August 2023 (Prange 2023). Within the BRICS, there is an internal democratic-authoritarian divide (Ayres 2017): Brazil, India and South America are categorized as flawed democracies (along with the United States and several EU member states), whereas Russia and China are considered to be authoritarian states (*Economist Intelligence Unit* 2023). There is also great diversity in terms of GDP and population among the five states (Ayres 2017). This begs the question of whether or not BRICS and its non-Western affiliates can be considered part of the liberal world order or part the wider non-Western international society. Of course, being non-Western does not mean that BRICS is non-liberal. However, if BRICS is presenting itself as an alternative to Western hegemony, and if it has two influential authoritarian members, can the BRICS version of international order be considered liberal?

South Africa’s experience with the white-minority governing system known as apartheid, which only came to an end in 1994, sets South Africa apart from my other cases. According to former president Jacob Zuma, South Africa’s ability to become a member of the BRICS allowed the country to move past its apartheid status as a “pariah” toward becoming a leader for Africa and the global south (Zuma 2013). Similarly, current President Ramaphosa has written in 2022 about the importance of being a member of BRICS:

The value of South Africa's membership of BRICS has grown substantially since we joined this group of emerging economies 12 years ago. As we work to rebuild our country in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is much to be gained from our participation in BRICS and the relationship we have established with other member countries. At the outset, BRICS countries identified the strengthening of economic and financial ties as one of the key pillars of its cooperation... Through the reform of the multilateral system, including the United Nations, and by refocusing the attention and resources of the global community on the sustainable development agenda, the BRICS group can support a sustained and equitable global recovery. The BRICS Leaders' Summit is a valuable platform for South Africa to strengthen ties with its partner countries in support of our own growth and employment creation. More than that, the summit is our opportunity to contribute to a better world, in which all countries have a better chance to recover from this pandemic and to flourish (Ramaphosa 2022).

BRICS is obviously an important organization for South Africa to be a member of, and its membership defines much about South Africa's foreign policy and its view of its place in the world. I will discuss South Africa's membership in BRICS more below, but before I do, let us turn to South Africa's recent political history since the fall of apartheid.

Since the beginnings of its modern democracy in 1994, South Africa's foreign policy has undergone a number of changes (Neethling 2017). As apartheid was ending, and South Africa was looking to find its place in the post-Cold War world. Nelson Mandela writes in *Foreign Affairs*:

The pillars upon which our foreign policy will rest are the following beliefs: that issues of human rights are central to international relations and an understanding that they extend beyond the political, embracing the economic, social and environmental; that just and lasting solutions to the problems of humankind can only come through the promotion of democracy worldwide; that considerations of justice and respect for international law should guide the relations between nations; that peace is the goal for which all nations should strive, and where this breaks down, internationally agreed and nonviolent mechanisms, including effective arms-control regimes, must be employed; that the concerns and interests of the continent of Africa should be reflected in our foreign-policy choices; that economic development depends on growing regional and international economic cooperation in an interdependent world (Mandela 1993, 87).

Here, the future South African President clearly states his vision for a South African foreign policy that aligns with the liberal international order. He also envisions a policy that is both Africa-centered and fully part of international society. In the same article Mandela also writes "South Africa cannot escape its African destiny... Like the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity [now the African Union] needs to be attuned to the changes at work throughout the world... The time has come for South Africa to take up its rightful and responsible place in the community of nations" (1993, 89 & 97).

Mandela, who was clearly setting out a vision for a foreign policy based liberal norms, wrote these words as the leader of the African National Congress (ANC) political party (Barber 2005), which has won every election in South Africa since 1994 (Campbell 2019). In terms of the ANC's foreign policy alignment with the West, Mandela's successor, Mbeki "rejected the notion that [Mandela's principles] were particular to the West" (Barber 2005, 1079) or even particular to Mandela. Rather, the ANC derived its foreign policy from the Freedom Charter of 1955, namely a concern about global inequality, the importance of international organizations such as the UN and the OAU/AU, demilitarization and a focus on "peacemaking and peacekeeping" and a recognition that "South Africa's destiny lay in Africa" (Barber 2005, 1079-80). In other words, Mbeki drew a universalized characterization of the liberal principles of the international order as one that was not unique to the West.

The transition from apartheid to democracy was closely connected with world geopolitics and the end of the Cold War. During apartheid, the ANC was banned from South Africa, had a left-wing orientation, and was supported both diplomatically and militarily by the Soviet Union. However, Frederik Willem de Klerk, the final President during white minority rule, saw that "by the 1990s the international tide was indeed turning... Socialism was in retreat; the ANC found itself operating in a western-dominated global setting. De Klerk saw this as an opportunity for his government" (Barber 2005, 1081). De Klerk was not a liberal reformer; he merely identified that the West no longer needed an anti-Soviet regime in southern Africa and that the regime's days were numbered due to the costs of international sanctions and increasing popular opposition, including from apartheid's Afrikaner political base (Van der Westhuizen 2021). As we can see from Mandela's words and the ANC's foreign policy principles in the 1990s, the ANC was no longer the militant left-wing liberation movement that it had been in previous decades, but rather a mainstream political party that needed to adjust and adapt to liberal democratic developments and realities in South Africa (Barber 2005; See also Ottaway 1991).

In the six years from 1990 to 1996, South Africa went from having 30 diplomatic missions around the world to 124. During the same time, South Africa was joining various international organizations and partnering with a variety of states to accomplish humanitarian objectives. South Africa was also presenting itself as "a bridge between the developed and the developing worlds" (Barber 2005, 1082-3; quote of former South African Minister of Trade and Industry Alec Erwin). However, this was not always an easy balancing act due to various competing interests both inside

and outside of the country. So much hope and expectations were placed on the new ANC government, that it became difficult, if not impossible, to please everyone (Barber 2005).

Whereas Mandela's foreign policy was marked by idealism, his successor, Thabo Mbeki, came to exemplify "pragmatism and moderation [as] South Africa recast its role in a manner more commensurate with its size and resources" (Alden and le Pere 2004, 283). Mandela's foreign policy placed human rights at center stage, but under Mbeki there was "a gradual retrenchment of human rights concerns... the preference being that support for human rights should occur through relevant multilateral institutions and quiet bilateral diplomacy" (Alden and le Pere 2004, 288). The pillars of Mbeki's foreign policy focused on democracy, Africa and anti-imperialism, and if there was ever a conflict between them, democracy would cease to be a priority (Nathan 2005). However, "the transformist idealism that was espoused by Mandela was continued, albeit in somewhat different form, through its incorporation into Mbeki's reformist programme for African and multilateral institutions" (Alden and le Pere 2004, 295). This turn to pragmatism, as opposed to idealism, of course did not exclude South Africa from being a member of liberal international society, but it did show a shift towards being more realistic about domestic capabilities and foreign policy goals.

In 2009, Jacob Zuma became South Africa's president. Notably, he led South Africa to join the BRICS in 2011. As I mentioned, South Africa, along with Brazil and India are democracies, but South Africa's enthusiastic participation in the grouping, alongside authoritarian states Russia and China, has diminished its willingness or ability to promote democracy in its own spheres of influence. As far as human rights are concerned, Zuma has a mixed record, including a deadly quelling of a mineworker's protest in 2012. Zuma continued South Africa's focus on Africa, multilateral dialogue and involvement in various international institutions, but he also brought the country much closer to China (Mpungose 2018). Although most other international organizations that I have mentioned in previous sections of my analysis are broadly liberal in character, BRICS is not, which comes primarily from the membership of Russia and China. As I mentioned previously, BRICS has become an attractive non-Western alternative. Again being non-Western does not automatically mean that the organization is non-liberal. However, it is clear the BRICS, as an organization, presents a non-Western alternative international grouping that may extend beyond liberal international order.

It is also worth mentioning that after Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, South Africa abstained from condemning Russia's actions. According to a policy brief from the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center, this was likely due to the appearance of the West acting unilaterally (Sidiropoulos 2014, 1). It is clear that by this time, with South Africa's participation and de facto representation of Africa in a multitude of international organizations, South Africa was having a large impact on the world stage. That is despite numerous domestic problems, such as xenophobia and economic inequality, which may undercut its ability to be a leader in Africa and the world (Ogunnubi and Amao 2016). Again, we see how South Africa has struggled to balance the pressures of ideology and domestic realism.

Current South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa was elected in 2018, and due to his predecessor's unpopularity, he was expected to deviate from Zuma's policies (Fraiooli 2021). According to Charalampos Efstathopoulos:

The current Cyril Ramaphosa administration has sought to restore South Africa's image as a progressive state... [Ramaphosa] has sought to restore the country's standing as a supporter of liberal values, with a renewed commitment to justice, democracy and human rights that reconnects with Nelson Mandela's humanitarian internationalism (1994-1999) This approach has exemplified the continuities in South Africa's foreign policy, including its sense of exceptionalism and its propensity to act as mediator, bridge-builder and leader in Africa. The approach has, however, been constrained by anti-Western factions within the African National Congress (ANC); and the realities of maintaining South Africa's position in institutions such as [the] African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the BRICS, none of which have endorsed human rights. The country's image has also been tarnished by xenophobia" (2021).

Ramaphosa has chosen "a more pragmatic approach to international issues than either of his predecessors, who sided reflexively with China and Russia. This stance is more consistent with South Africa's traditional non-aligned position, but it is still a long way from the policy under Mandela, when the country was a global leader on human-rights issues" (*The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, ed. Paul Fraiooli 2021).

Over the past three decades, South Africa has experienced a transformation from apartheid pariah, to idealistic humanitarian state, to emergent power. The ambiguity of its role internationally creates difficulties in analyzing South Africa's position within liberal international order. Despite the consistency of the ANC's electoral success, South Africa's position within the liberal international order has changed as it has sought a role for itself that corresponds with its internal capabilities. Its active membership in international organizations, particularly in BRICS, appears

to have had the greatest influence on South Africa's fit within international society, though it has also aligned with the ANC's traditional West-skepticism. I classify South Africa to have ambivalent fit within liberal international order, at least before February 24, 2022. Despite a wariness of the West, there has also been an understanding of South Africa's place within LIO and international society, despite Western hegemony. South Africa's BRICS membership, in particular, allows it to play a key role internationally, while at the same time, this organization allows its members to present an alternative to the *Western-dominated* global system.

South Africa's membership in BRICS allows for growing Russian influence in the country, even though their bilateral economic ties are meagre. However, the ANC's history of friendly ties with the Soviet Union stretches back to a time when the United States still considered the ANC to be a terrorist group, and the Soviet Union was giving military training to the ANC and various other revolutionary groups in Africa (Eligon 2023; Gottschalk 2022). Although South Africa has a relatively stable democratic government and healthy civil society, Russian anti-colonial/anti-imperial propaganda can and does still resonate with certain segments of the population<sup>22</sup> (Sild 2022). That is not to say that Russia has a monopoly of influence in the country or that South Africa is unable to make independent decisions. In polls and studies since the invasion, most South Africans appear to have favorable views of the West, but there are also sizeable pro-Russian elements, especially on social media. (*City Press*, 2023; Mpako and Moosa 2022; SAIIA 2022). Though South Africa is an independent actor, it is impossible to ignore Russia's influence in the country and the presence of pro-Russian elements in South African society. In light of this, I would continue to consider that South Africa has ambivalent fit within the liberal international order.

### 5.3.2 South Africa: Dependent Variable

As we can see from Table 1, South Africa has abstained from every United Nations General Assembly vote that I am looking at. At first, South Africa did condemn Russia's aggression, and the South African Foreign Ministry declared that Russia should get out of Ukraine. However, this statement was soon retracted (Sidiropoulos 2022).

In a parliamentary debate in March 2022, several members of the ANC echoed the necessity of neutrality. Meanwhile, the leader of the opposition, John Steenhuisen of the

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<sup>22</sup> See also the Africa Center for Strategic Studies' detailed chart on Russian disinformation campaigns in Africa: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mapping-disinformation-in-africa/>

Democratic Alliance party, criticized the ANC for not joining much of the rest of the world in criticizing Putin and taking steps to isolate Russia. He claimed that the ANC, which once promoted liberation in South Africa and around the world, was now choosing the side of the oppressor. However, other members of parliament criticized Steenhuisen as being hypocritical in not condemning other instances of injustice in the world (Macupe 2022).

A few days later, President Ramaphosa blamed NATO for instigating the war saying, “The war could have been avoided if NATO had heeded the warnings from amongst its own leaders and officials over the years that its eastward expansion would lead to greater, not less, instability in the region”, however, he also stated that South Africa “cannot condone the use of force and violation of international law” (Cocks 2022). On another occasion in March, Ramaphosa expressed hope that through its neutrality, South Africa may be able to mediate in the conflict (Cocks 2022).

In August 2022, several months after Russia’s invasion, South Africa’s Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) published its National Interest Framework. It defines the country’s national interest as “The protection and promotion of its national sovereignty and constitutional order, the well-being, safety and prosperity of its citizens, and a better Africa and World” (*DIRCO* 2022, 9). The document goes on to recognize the important global role that South African can play, including in the “rules-based international order” stating:

One of the key tools for resolving a potential conflict of interests is through the development of regional, continental and global rules and values that will align with South Africa’s National Interest. The presence and active participation of South Africa, and South Africans, in key international organizations and agenda-setting formations should continue to be a priority of South Africa’s foreign policy. While the benefits of being a norm setter and developer do not deliver tangible benefits, they are critical for creating a conducive environment for South Africa to implement its National Interest. The more universal the interests, the easier it is to ensure that the various aspects of South Africa’s National Interest are protected and promoted. In the absence of global rules, practitioners need to assess the tools at their disposal to retain its independence and assert the country’s National Interest. Multi-stakeholder consultation is therefore important in the formulation and implementation of South Africa’s foreign policy (*DIRCO* 2022, 18).

Participation in international institutions is important for South Africa, but it also appears that there are hints of a desire for institutional reform, as well as for South Africa to be a “norm setter and developer” in the global order.

The document also mentions the “reassertion of Russian power projection”, as one of the major developments in the current “global context” (*DIRCO* 2022, 19), obviously avoiding the

term “war”. A term like “power projection” could refer to a number of things that a state can do internationally, well short of armed conflict, so this is an example of interesting terminology in the context of what the UN resolutions have frequently referred to as Russian “aggression” (see Table 1).

Referring to the “global order”, the document states that “broad notions of bipolarity and unipolarity... have given way to more complexity, an absence of global leadership and challenges to collective multilateralism”, which can be observed in new power centers, international hegemony and shifting global economic dynamics, for example. Interestingly, the Framework describes a changing order and the types of conflicts that the world is witnessing:

“Unlike the previous order, which was dominated by a single superpower, the emerging world is witnessing various centers of power. These actors are not likely to challenge the normative and institutional arrangements that have characterized the world order since after the Second World War. The fundamental crisis within the system was its biased character towards the developed countries at the expense of the developing world. Therefore, the emerging trend of multipolarity is an endeavor by the previously less privileged states to better position themselves in the hierarchy, which should lead to increased and effective participation in international rulemaking as opposed to becoming new world leaders... Traditional forms of hegemonic ambitions will manifest themselves through arms-building and seeking of territorial advantage at the regional and global levels. However, the strategic constraints of an all-out war, as witnessed during the Cold War, will continue to hold and deter direct confrontation. Military confrontations though proxy wars are used by some major powers to test their might, while advancing their National Interest. Regional conflicts are becoming more protracted by drawing in powerful countries, while highlighting the changing nature of conflicts, with few direct state-state confrontations and more intra-state and state versus non-state actor conflicts (*DIRCO* 2022, 20).

This section appears to imply that Russia is not “challenging the normative and institutional arrangements that have characterized the world order since after the Second World War”. Since this document was published several months after Russia’s initial full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it is striking that the document would ignore Russia’s challenge to the liberal international order. This section also implies that Russia’s War in Ukraine is not an “all-out war” or a “direct state-state confrontation”, but it is rather some sort of hybrid or “proxy” war. Perhaps the document does not recognize Russia as a “center of power”, but it does give the impression that Russia’s actions in Ukraine are not worth mentioning as anything substantial for the world order.

The document continues:

A rules-based international system favors smaller to middle-power states for the simple reason that it attempts to curtail the excesses of realpolitik underpinning major powers’

foreign policies. It allows for appeal to the notion of equality of nations in the international system, at least from a de jure standpoint... While international law has made significant strides, with the UN Charter as a cornerstone of this rules-based system, it has not inhibited powerful countries from flouting these laws... The rules and reliance on multilateralism do not usually suit larger powers operating in the international system, however, they use the rules when and if needed to pursue their National Interest. The desire for global dominance by powers such as the USA, has led to the gradual erosion of the global governance structure. The UN, the Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organization are the main multilateral institutions that still require substantial reforms to accommodate the diverse interests of the international community. The current status quo reflects the unrepresentative and biased nature of these institutions, as the interests of developing countries receive less positive attention. The irony is that it is some of the very architects of the post-Second World War global governance institutions that are questioning their effectiveness and impartiality (*DIRCO* 2022, 20-1).

The document states here the necessity of international reforms in order to reinforce the “rules-based international system”. This section implies that the US and other powerful states have flouted the rules for their own advantage and that the reestablishment of a rules-based order would benefit smaller and medium-sized states. Interestingly, this section calls out the United States for its pursuit of “global dominance”, but it does not draw attention to ways in which small, medium or non-Western states might also contravene South Africa’s conceptualization of the rules-based order.

Currently, South Africa is the chair of the BRICS and is scheduled to provide the location for this year’s annual gathering. President Ramaphosa has already spoken about his focus on Africa and emerging countries saying, “our continent was pillaged and ravaged and exploited by other countries and we therefore want to build the solidarity in BRICS to advance the interests, of course initially of our own country, but also of the continent as a whole” (Bartlett 2023).

Overall, South Africa has taken a critical line on the West since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and in some ways, it also appears to have grown closer to its BRICS partners and the non-West, global South, more generally. Russia even held well-publicized joint naval exercises with South Africa recently (Eligon 2023), which shows a stark unwillingness to condemn the Russian military for its actions in Ukraine. Both in official statements related to the war and in its recent National Interest Framework document, South Africa appears to be much more willing to place blame on NATO or on powerful states in the West, than it is to fault Russia.

### 5.3.3 South Africa: Analysis and Power Political Discussion

The continuity of ANC rule over the past three decades obscures the nuanced views and positions held between and within administrations, which makes South Africa a case that is especially ill-suited for hasty or broad conclusions. Emerging from apartheid, South Africa rejoined international society and the liberal international order filled with ideals, particularly concerning human rights. Over time, different administrations have tried to balance idealism with pragmatism, though overall, the ANC has remained committed to representing the global south in its participation within international society.

I have determined that South Africa has ambivalent fit within liberal international order. The ANC has maintained elements of its traditional anti-West tendencies, though South Africa has maintained a high degree of involvement in international society. Here it is important to point out once again the distinction between LIO and international society. South Africa has increasingly positioned itself within a non-Western or post-Western alignment, which is reflected in its active membership of BRICS. South Africa has also at times hinted at a non-Western alternative to global order that is focused on smaller states in the global South. In this alternative, the Western-created LIO institutions would not be replaced, but rather reformed so that they may be more fair to the global South and developing nations.

I have based my dependent variable on the assumption that Russia's invasion represents a major disruption in the liberal international order and that abstentions in voting for UN Resolutions condemning Russian aggression represent tacit sympathy for a revisionist power's contestatory actions. However, it is clear that South Africa has taken a different view than the West, calling Russia's war instead a "reassertion of Russian power projection". This reflects South Africa's extreme hesitancy or even refusal to condemn Russia for its aggression in Ukraine.

Has South Africa been able to influence and mobilize other developing nations? Has it managed to present a viable alternative order to the Western-hegemonic one? Post-apartheid South Africa had many idealized expectations placed upon it at the beginning, but it soon faced the limitations of what it could and could not do. South Africa's leaders had to learn to prioritize, which sometimes meant relegating human rights concerns in favor of economic factors, for example. South Africa has also struggled with continued problems due to xenophobia and wealth inequality, which can hurt South Africa's image abroad. From a power political perspective, these things can constrain a state's ability to influence other actors. However, South Africa does have

its status as one of the BRICS, which has become increasingly attractive for many states as an alternative model to Western international organizations. I would argue that this gives South Africa a great deal of international influence beyond the West. The extent to which South Africa is able to use this status to advance its interests could be interesting for further research from a power political perspective.

## 6. Conclusion

In this thesis, I endeavored to explore why and how sub-Saharan states view and respond to revisionist challenges to, or contestation of, the liberal international order. In other words, what might explain sub-Saharan states' responses to contestation of the liberal international order? Russia's contestation of liberal international order represents an international struggle for influence, as well as an attempt at collective mobilization of global actors in opposition to the West and liberal international order. At the same time, other global actors have responded to Russia's contestation of LIO, which is also part of the global power political struggle for influence. It was on this latter segment of smaller states that I focused my study on.

I examined various ways in which international actors use different techniques, instruments and logics to collectively mobilize other actors. The power political approach has been used to research large states and their contestatory practices, but my thesis has instead focused on how smaller states respond to contestation by looking at how they position themselves within LIO/international society. Smaller states tend to face greater constraints on their ability to influence the international, compared with larger states, but it is still valuable to observe how they do exercise power and influence internationally. Smaller states also tend to be the target of outside influence from larger states, which makes their ability to respond to this worth researching. My research has been based on examining a state's fit within liberal international order and how this might relate to a state expressing sympathy for a revisionist state's contestation of LIO. Additionally, I applied the power political approach to my research, which focuses on attempts to influence the international through various methods, often involving some form of collective mobilization and logics of integration and/or fragmentation. In terms of methodology, I used qualitative analysis to test both of my variables. I also concluded each individual case section with an analysis and discussion of how power politics relates to each case.

I have determined from building the context of my cases that Kenya and Senegal each fit within liberal international order, though the Senegalese president's concurrent chairmanship of the African Union at the beginning of the invasion was likely an important factor that remained outside of my initial hypothesis. I also determined that South Africa's position in relation to LIO is more ambivalent due in part to the African National Congress's history distrust of the West, as well as South Africa's increasing involvement with non-Western or post-Western organizations, namely BRICS. In accordance with my initial hypothesis, Kenya strongly condemned Russia's

violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity, and Kenya has been a leading voice in the pro-Ukraine camp of African states. The Senegalese case is more complex, primarily due to President Sall's leadership position in the AU, which likely constrained his ability to make strong statements concerning the war. Instead, his primary focus was on mitigating the war's adverse effects on the African continent. Senegal's UN resolution votes were split between two yes votes and two abstentions, which on the one hand demonstrates Senegal's preferences for non-alignment and peaceful conflict resolution, while on the other hand, the 'yes' votes likely reflect Senegal's commitment to international law and liberal international norms. Finally, I determined that South Africa has ambiguous fit within liberal international order, and this is reflected in its consistent abstentions during UN resolution votes related to the war, as well as its refusal to condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine. In terms of power politics, South Africa has positioned itself as an African leader of an increasingly post-Western, multipolar world. South Africa membership in BRICS has allowed it and its partners to create institutions for themselves and other states outside of the West. Though South Africa would prefer that the liberal international order's established institutions be reformed, South Africa has also aligned itself with states that are more actively seeking to upend the current hegemonic international system. In summary, based on my analysis of three cases, I have determined that lack of easy fit within the current liberal international order is likely to lead to sympathy for the contestatory practices of a revisionist state.

I could have also chosen to analyze other cases, such as Mali. Mali likely would not have had good fit within the international order, and therefore, its responses to Russian aggression would likely have aligned with my hypothesis. However, since I decided to focus exclusively on states that are fully independent actors, Mali does not appear to be able to act in this way. Rather, it is too heavily influenced by Russia currently.

Based on my case analyses, I have determined further possible explanations and avenues for further research into how sub-Saharan states respond to challenges to the liberal international order. Since my research was narrowly focused on three sub-Saharan African states, further study could expand the basic premise of my research and hypothesis to a large-n study or to other geographic regions of the world. Also, "fit" within liberal international order is not the same as having positive or negative views of the West and Western hegemony in the international system. States determine their interests and pursue their own goals based on practical, as well as ideological considerations. History plays a key role in in each of my cases. Each state had its own experience

with colonization and exploitation, and these histories inform present-day political discourses in each country. Further research into how post-colonial states have reckoned with their traumatic pasts could lead to further insights into how states view liberal international order and their place within it today. Based on my analysis, negative views of the West and Western hegemony also appear to have an impact on whether or not a state will condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, irrespective of that state's fit within LIO.

On a related note, how do states frame Russia's war in Ukraine? If political discourse of a state identifies Russia's actions in Ukraine as an aggression against a smaller neighbor or as a threat to the global order, then it is more likely that that state will condemn Russia's actions. Also, additional research into how small states influence and mobilize their peers would add to power political research, more broadly. As I have stated, the power political approach allows for broad analysis of the various factors that help or inhibit an actor from projecting its power and influence into the international arena, as well as how an actor responds to the influence of other actors. Russia has been active in many parts of Africa, and its influence has grown in many African countries over the past several years. States like Senegal can observe how anti-French sentiments in its neighbors have been exploited by Russia, and this observation can influence a state's response to Russia's actions. At the same time, other states may welcome outside influence if a state determines that such actions might benefit it. Additional explanations for my research include domestic considerations. My cases each have a democratic system of government and a government that is responsive to the electorate. Other domestic factors, such as economic concerns, also certainly play a role in political calculations.

In conclusion, my analysis of three sub-Saharan states has led me to conclude that fit within liberal international order, or lack thereof, does play a role in whether or not a state will demonstrate sympathy for the contestatory practices of a revisionist power.

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