# Neorealism and International Subsystems of Small States: Insights from Sub-Saharan African Countries' Interactions

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### Abstract

*The prevailing wisdom in IR debates finds that neorealism is "the powerful tool" predicting weak states' behaviour. It has been argued that systemic factors are more likely to explain foreign policy choices of small states if compared to domestic factors. This paper is an exploration of the structural realist hypotheses about small states' behaviour in the international system. It particularly questions the importance given by neorealism to structural explanations while analysing small states' behaviour, despite paying little attention to the relativity of smallness. However, the neo-realist hypotheses would become more consistent if tested on smaller states of subsystems crowded by countries considered small in global comparisons. By focusing on smaller states of the Sub-Saharan-African sub-system, this paper argues that neorealist expectations find very little empirical support.*

## Introduction

The prevailing wisdom in IR debates finds that neorealism is "the powerful tool" predicting weak states' behaviour. It has been argued that systemic factors are more likely to explain foreign policy choices of small states if compared to domestic factors (Wolfers 1962; Rosenau 1966; Jervis 1978; Waltz 1979; Walt 1987; Snyder 1991). This has been however a very partial way of looking at small states' foreign policies because the relativity of weakness and smallness has not been duly taken into account. Attention has been paid to small states in periods when their positions had certain implications for great powers. As such small states have been rarely studied. There was a vigorous theoretical debate in the late 1960s and 1970s about whether the foreign policy of 'small states' was generically different from that of large states (Keohane 1969). Two major events in that period were considered as big concerns for greater powers: the decolonization (and subsequent increase in number of legal international actors) and the oil crisis in which peripheral states were playing a significant role. After a period of lesser attention, the interest in the role of smaller powers in international politics has increased since the fall of the Berlin Wall and an increasing securitization of the concept of small states (Hey 2003; Ingebritsen et al. 2006). Small states have been often located in the international system without considering what happens in international subsystems crowded by weak states. The environment-led image of small states' foreign policy deserves further assessments in subsystems to provide a more comprehensive image of the phenomenon. This is the path this paper takes to investigate the root causes of sporadic and stable relationships between sub-Saharan African countries.

Weakness and smallness of states have been classically defined in terms of population, size (Vital 1967), national cohesion, military strength, geographic position, and monetary stability. More refined positions consider many other factors such as structural aid dependency, the leaders' conviction that their states

cannot affect the international system and the low margin of security (Rothstein 1968: 29). Eek (1971: 11-12) declared that "small states" is "a practical, conventional term useful as such but evades definition" and this is attributable to the questions raised by their status on the legal and political utility of statehood in the international system. Vukadinović (1971) explicated the link between small status, military and economic weakness, and an aspiration to democratize international relations. Keohane's (1988: 295-6) classification of states in the international system distinguishes between system-determining states, system affecting states and system ineffectual states. Small states are those that cannot affect the international system. Their survival depends on the will of greater powers. This definition fits most African countries that are still aid-dependent (Bräutingam 2000) and none of which can influence individually the international system.

To test the appropriateness of neorealism in explaining intra-African relationships, this paper aims at exploring the root causes of activeness in three major sectors of states' international life: diplomatic exchanges, bilateral agreements, and membership in regional organizations[1]. An empirical analysis of how African states shape their foreign policy choices in a regionalized context leads us to partially question the structural realist hypotheses about small state behaviour, while finding some support for alternative explanations.

## Foreign policy of small states in IR debates

Scholars largely agree that the international behaviour of small states can be accounted for by examining the effects of the international system. Since according to neorealism, weakness makes survival more difficult for

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[1]     For each country, we have been taken into account the total number of regional organizations it belongs to. The data have been collected from the United Nations program called Afrique Relance (http://www.un.org/french/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/). Look also at the CIA Factbook (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/). Activeness concerning membership in regional organizations has been measured looking at each country's share of the general regional number of frequencies of memberships in regional organizations:

$$ARM = \left( \frac{\sum CARM}{\sum SSARM} \right) \div j \times 100$$

where ARM is activeness concerning regional membership, CARM is the number of regional organizations a country belongs to, and SSARM is the total number of frequencies of membership in regional organizations.

small states than for great powers, their foreign policy can be better explained by taking the international system as the preferred level of analysis. "Since weak states are typically faced with external threats to national survival, foreign policy will reflect attentiveness to the constraints of the international environment and foreign-policy goals will be less constrained by the domestic political process" (Elman 1995: 175). This environment-led image of small states can be found in Waltz (1979) especially when he maintains that small states' security and foreign policy will be dependent on structural constraints, such as the degree of great powers' competition. These external constraints tend to be more restrictive for small states due to their "narrower margin for error" (Waltz 1979: 184-5, 195).

Wolfer's metaphor of the "burning house" follows the same reasoning, when he argues that even though all states are concerned with risks for their survival, not all of them are concerned to the same extent. Since behaviour of states according structural models is proportional to their proximity to complete compulsion, domestic variables are more relevant for the foreign policy of great powers, since they are less affected by environmental constraints (Wolfers 1962: 13-16). Compared to them, small states are more exposed to the influence of systemic factors, and Rosenau (1966: 47-48) finds that small states are also those that, most of the time, adopt acquiescent policies.

Thinking of foreign policy as an adaptive form of behaviour, Rosenau (1970a and 1970b) introduced the concept of adaptation into the lexicon of foreign policy analysis. He identified four possible types of adaptive foreign policy behaviour, depending on how foreign affairs officials typically respond to demands and changes coming from the international and domestic environment: 1) acquiescent, where external demands and changes are mainly responded to; 2) intransigent, where domestic demands and changes are mainly responded to; 3) promotive, wherein most changes and demands from both environments may be ignored because they cancel each other out, because they are weak, or because of the effective political isolation of the decisions makers; 4) preservative, where demands and changes from both environments are responded to in making foreign policy. The typical aims of policy toward each environment are defined accordingly: 1) acquiescent policies aim to modify domestic structures to agree with external demands; 2) intransigent policies seek to change the international environ-

ment to agree with domestic structure; 3) promotive policies aim at a new equilibrium between domestic and international demands by changing both environments; 4) preservative policies, which are classical status quo policies, seek to maintain given external balance by aiming at no international and domestic change (McGowan and Gottwald 1975: 474). Consequently, their foreign policy can be better accounted for by looking at the international environment.

In addition, small states are particularly affected by the security dilemma, because the cost of being cheated is much less tolerable to them and no "safety net" can guarantee against the consequences of foreign-policy mistakes. "Defensible borders, large size, and protection against sudden attack not only aid the state, but facilitate cooperation that can benefit all states", making more states more vulnerable to anarchy than big states (Jervis 1978: 172-3). Thus, due to their extreme vulnerability, they are supposed to prefer an alliance with a dominant power rather than risking an immediate attack (Walt 1987: 21-31).

Over the years, scholarly agreement on small state behaviour has even grown(Snyder 1991: 20; Nincic 1992: 16).While in great powers "domestic pressures often outweigh international ones" (Snyder 1991: 62), "system-oriented" (Labs 1992: 385-6) small states' are more responsive to demands from the external environment, making systemic explanations more probable (Snyder 1991: 317-18). Thus, "structural realism is inadequate to explain the behaviour of states in the core but is relevant for understanding regional security systems in the periphery" (Goldgeier and McFaul 1992: 475-6).

Considering states in the international system as animals in the jungle, Schweller argues that the "balance of interests" accounts not only for "lions" (states that are kings of the international jungle) and "lambs" (the weak prey, safe for the time being) whose interests lie in maintaining the status quo. He also mentions "jackals" (states that bandwagon to eat the crumbs of other parties) and most importantly, "wolves" (states powerful enough to be dissatisfied with the status quo and to do something about it). He concludes observing that rather than being susceptible to domestic level influences, weak states' (lambs) foreign policy and military behaviours depend on "extreme systemic constraints" (Schweller 1992: 267).

Scarce discordant voices (David 1991; Ayoob 1991; Hey's 2003) against the prevailing literature on small states foreign policy argue that "questions of le-

gitimacy, authority, and national identification remain unsettled" (Rothstein 1977: 35). Taking into consideration three levels of analysis—individual, national and international—the aspects of leadership (Mora 2003; Sanchez 2003; Braveboy-Wagner 2008) the position of a country in the sub-regional system (Mora 2003), and quality of bureaucracy (Braveboy-Wagner 2008) are crucial in defining a small state's position in the international system.

These contributions suggest that constructivism, the internal structure approach, and geopolitics should be dully taken into account when looking at the root causes of the behaviour of small states. Instead of looking for rational explanations of states' behaviour, constructivists consider that choices can be made following the logic of appropriateness. They maintain that international choices of countries are also based on the link between interest and identity (Wendt 1992; Ruggie 1998).  On the other hand, the internal structure approach considers internal structure of countries as good explanations of their behaviour. The regime, the quality of bureaucracy, and the quality of state-society nexus affect countries' choices on the international scene (Katzenstein 1976; Risse-Kappen 1991, Evangelista 1988). Geopolitics instead gives more weight to factors linked to geographical position and to physical opportunities of countries (Spykman 1944; Jean 2008).

## Structural realism and African countries?

However, both neorealism and the mentioned discordant authors have studied small states in broader contexts, without exploring the relativity of smallness and weakness. For instance, if the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) can be regarded as small in comparison to the United States of America and is expected to behave according to its relative weight in the international system, the results of the DRC's behaviour out of big states context is yet to be explored. If neo-realists are right, their explanation should include "smaller" states' behaviours in subsystems. What happens if the relationships between small states are separated from the big states (relativizing the concept of smallness)? Applied to African countries, this question can be reformulated as follows: how powerful is the neo-realist theory in accounting for intra-African interactions?

Such a question is worth facing in such settings as

the African ones, where neorealism seems not to account properly for small states' behaviours. Empirical support to neorealism can be found when referring to the leading role played by Zaire in the African Great-Lake region thanks to its connections (foreign aid and military support) with extra-African relevant powers during the Cold War. Being the most active in the region (Young and Turner 1985; Bustin 1987; Wamba dia Wamba 2007), Zaire took initiatives in building regional organizations  and opened embassies in all neighbouring countries. The leading role of Zaire together with the levels of its activeness changed with the end of the Cold War, providing more space to Uganda and Rwanda. The leading roles and the primacy in activeness of these two countries have been linked to their better connections with extra-African powers (Cross and Misser 2006; Braeckman 1999; Williame 1991). Neo-realists will be right as long as these countries are considered as located in the global system. For instance, most of the countries regarded as wolves or lions did not participate in the recent war in the DRC. In the Congolese case, could one argue that Zimbabwe
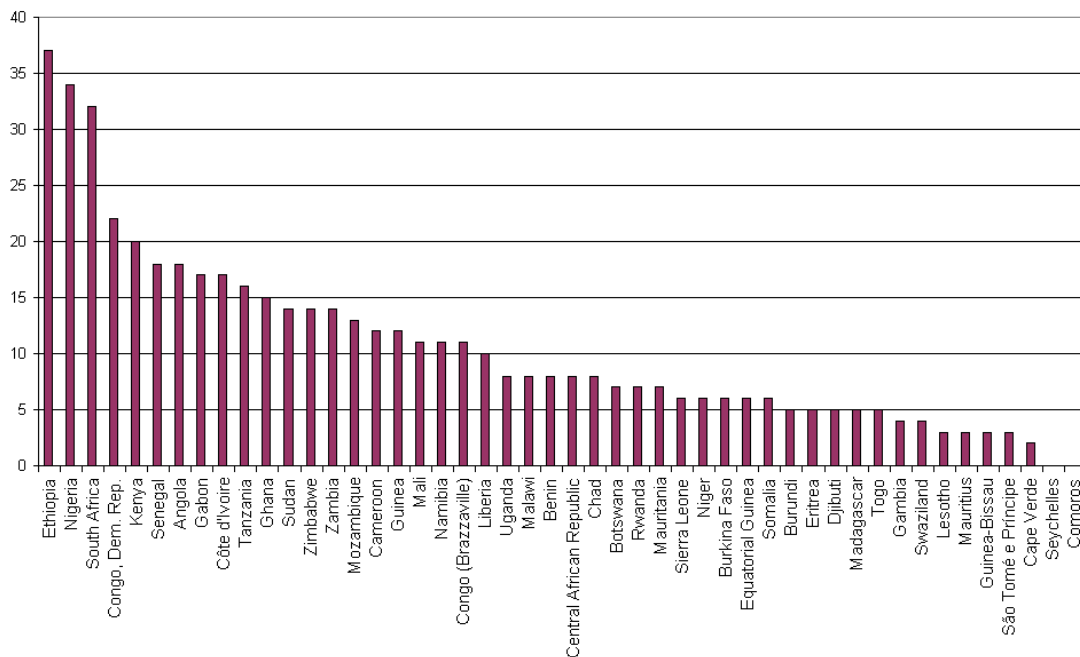
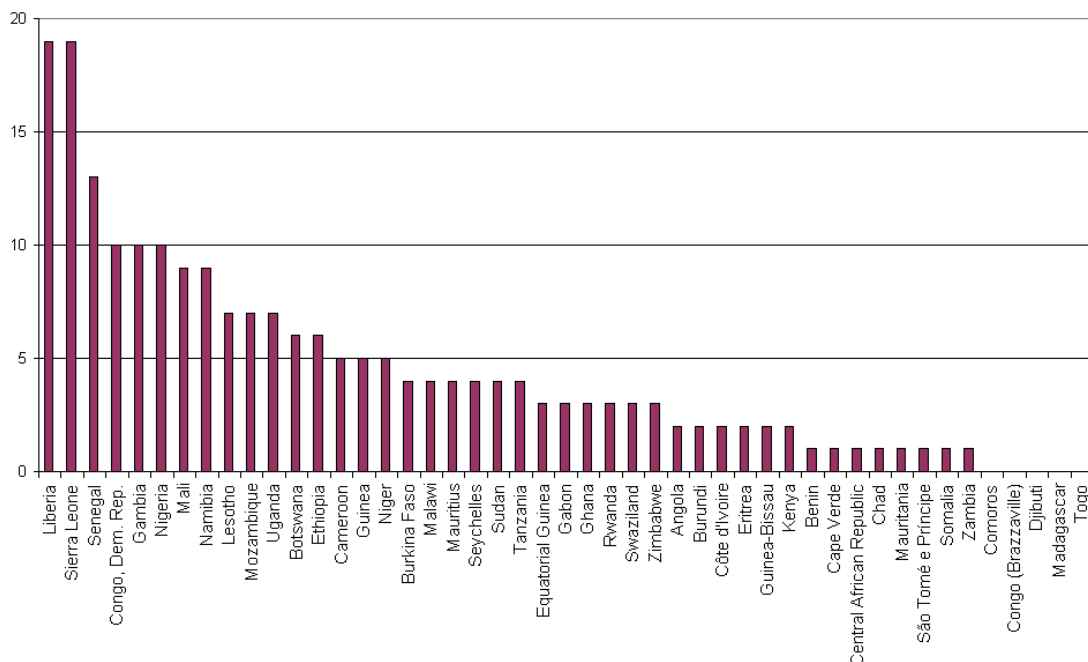*Figure 1. Intra-African diplomatic exchanges*



*Figure 2. Intra-African registered bilateral agreement (South Africa = 87, excluded for readability reasons)*

was a lion, Uganda and Rwanda were the wolves, small rebel groups were the jackals or lambs, and the DRC was the big lamb seeking not to be ripped in pieces? This is not clear for traditional structural realists.

Structural realism would find it hard to account for the appointment of Chief mediators in African conflicts where age, personality and political position play a role in the choice of peacemakers. From a purely neorealist point of view, negotiators could have been chosen among personalities from internationally influential countries. This has not been necessarily true for African countries as cases of Guinea-Conakry, Côte d'Ivoire, and Liberia show. Here, as well as in other examples provided by recent African history[2], it makes sense to ask the question of to what extent structural realism's predictions fit African cases.

An analysis of three major sectors of states' international life—diplomatic exchanges[3], bilateral agreements, and membership in regional organizations— tests the appropriateness of neorealism in explaining intra-African relationships. Diplomatic exchanges rep-

2        Realism might also fail to explain African leaders' support to Robert Mugabe, heavily pressed by Western powers. At the second Euro-African summit in 2003, the UK strongly opposed the presence of Mugabe (Jeune Afrique, August 2000). The summit was postponed sine die because African leaders refused to attend without Mugabe. None of them still feared sanctions. Even if most of them recognized the worrying situation of Zimbabwe, through their support for Mugabe they meant to resist Western pressures. Mugabe was a kind of symbol of such a resistance to neo-colonial practices (Le Monde diplomatique, October 2001).

3        For each country, the number of other African states with which an exchange of diplomatic representations exists (at least one side being represented in the other side), regardless for their level (chargé d'affaires, minister, or ambassador). The data, referring to 2005, have been processed from the Correlates of War Diplomatic Exchange Data Set (Bayer 2006). Activeness in diplomatic exchanges has been measured looking at each country's share of the general regional number of registered (considered) diplomatic exchanges:

$$ADE = \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{\sum CDE}{\sum SSADE} \right) \times 100$$

where ADE is the activeness in diplomatic exchanges, CDE is the number of diplomatic exchanges of the country, and SSADE is the total number of frequencies of diplomatic exchanges of SSA countries considered as a whole. Every single country's Activeness in diplomatic exchange has been operationalized dividing the total number of its diplomatic exchange by the number of the total exchanges registered in the subsystem. This result had to be divided by 2 in order to avoid repetitions because every single observation has been registered twice (diplomatic exchanges concerns two countries). However, the related graph (as well as those relating to bilateral agreements and regional membership) reports absolute numbers in order to facilitate the reader's comprehension.

resent stable bilateral relationships while bilateral agreements represent sporadic ones. Regional membership speaks instead of engagement in multilateral relations. Considering these three aspects of interstate relations allows being comprehensive because the main dimensions of the nature of states' interactions have been considered. The specific question this research is concerned with is therefore about what explains the variability among SSA states on these three aspects of interstate relations.

Looking at the above mentioned domain of states' interactions an image of African interactions emerges that might challenge the neo-realist explanations. From a purely neo-realist point of view, greater activeness in international relations should be registered among small states seeking survival in a dangerous environment. However, the activeness in diplomatic exchanges2 of SSA countries (figure 1) shows that the only states having more than 20 diplomatic partners are Ethiopia (37 missions), Nigeria (34 missions), South Africa (32 missions) and the DRC (22 missions). These four states have been usually regarded as the reference countries of their respective geographic areas: Eastern, Western, Southern and Central Africa. At the other side of the graph, those with the lowest level of diplomatic exchange are small island-states (Seychelles, Comoros, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe and Mauritius) and two small states on the dry land (Lesotho and Guinea-Bissau).

The picture is mixed (figure 2) for the activeness in bilateral agreements[4].

Higher activeness is registered among "weaker" and in-

4        For each country, the total number of bilateral agreements stipulated with other African states since independence and registered with the Secretariat of the United Nations. The data have been collected from the United Nations Treaty Collection (UNTC) and are updated to January 2010. Activeness in bilateral agreements has been measured looking at each country's share of the general regional number of frequencies of bilateral agreements performing the following calculus:

$$ABA = \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{\sum CBA}{\sum SSABA} \right) \times 100$$

where ABA is activeness in bilateral agreements, CBA is the country's number of bilateral agreements, and SSABA is the total number of registered bilateral agreements in the SSA. Every single country's Activeness in bilateral agreements has been operationalized dividing the total number of its registered agreements by the number of the total bilateral agreements of countries of the subsystem. This result had to be divided by 2 in order to avoid repetitions because every single observation has been registered twice (bilateral agreements concern two countries).

secure states as well as in "stronger" and more secure ones. The most striking observation here is the exceptional position of South Africa as an outlier, with its 87 agreements: it has agreements with virtually all other African states. It is however followed by Liberia and Sierra Leone: 19 agreements (all between the two states). Senegal follows with 13 agreements, while Nigeria, Gambia and the DRC have ten and Mali and Namibia have nine each. At the other end of the continuum are the Comoros, Congo (Brazzaville), Djibouti, Madagascar, and Togo with no agreements, and another group with only one agreement (Benin, Cape Verde, Chad, Mauritania, Central African Republic, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia and Zambia). The average number of agreements is about six, but the median value is 3: 24 countries out of a population of 48 are located at or below this value. This picture of African bilateral agreements suggests

that "normally" smaller states engage less in bilateral agreements than bigger ones especially when they are not directly threatened by the environment (cases of war: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the DRC). This partially indicates the validity of structural realism for the SSA region. However, it remains hard to explain higher levels of activeness of relatively peaceful and strong states like South Africa, Mali, and Namibia.

The activeness in regional organizations,[4] shows that the number of organizations, in which states participate, ranges from two (Mauritania) to seven (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Togo). In addition African States can be split in five groups (figure 3): a group of five countries register the highest number of regional organizations they belong to (seven); the following level is composed by seven states being members of six regional organizations. Up to the second group, it

*Figure 1. Intra-African diplomatic exchanges*
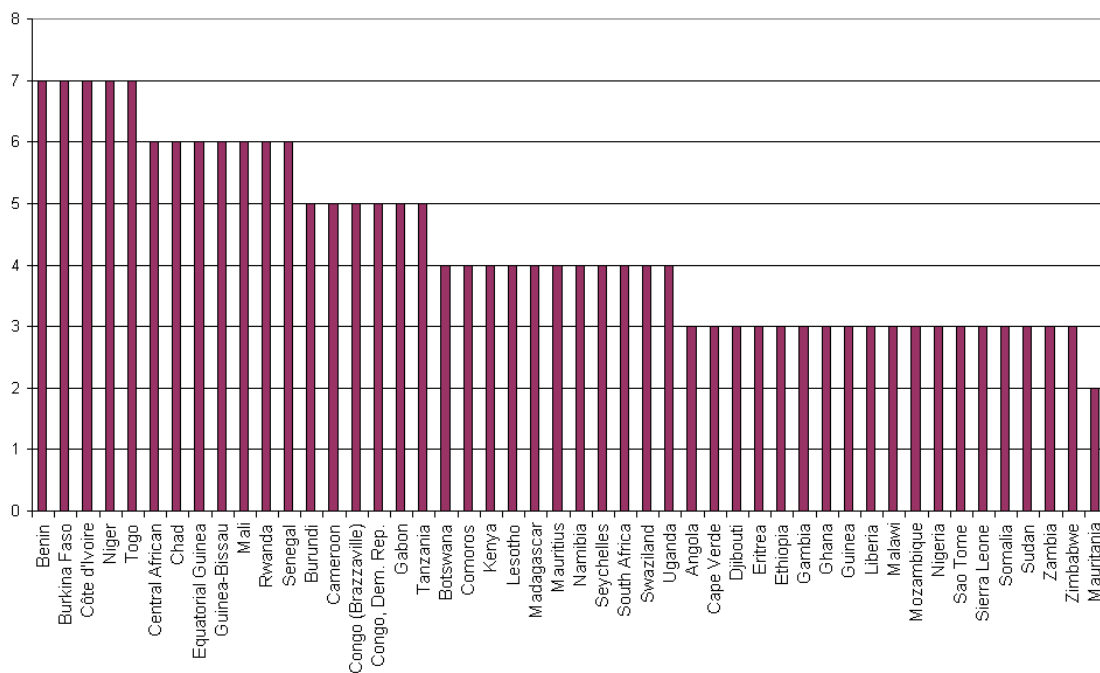


seems that smaller states are more active when considering regional membership.

However, from the third group onwards this picture changes radically because countries registering membership in only four regional organizations are also those that are better off politically and economically (Botswana, South Africa, Mauritius, Seychelles etc.). In the very last group with states registering membership in only three regional organizations, some of them are relatively strong states in the sub-system (Ghana, Nigeria), others are very weak or failing (Sudan, Somalia). The question of the reliability of neo-realists hypotheses, thus, becomes more appropriate. Theory and methods

## a) Theory

The structural realist hypotheses generally suggest expecting higher levels of each dimension of power (economic, military, or political) to correspond with lower engagement in interstate relations for the weaker sensitivity to the environment. Weaker subjects will engage more for their survival. From a pure neo-realist point of view, African smaller states economic, political, and military weakness will determine their behaviours. Conversely, better outcomes in economic, military and political sectors will negatively influence the international activeness of states. This rea-

soning can be represented by the following function:

$$Y = \alpha - \beta_1 \chi e - \beta_2 \chi m - \beta_3 \chi p + \varepsilon$$

where Y is activeness in intra-African relations;
βs represent the average decrease the dependent variable;
e is economic power (Human Development);
m military power (Composite Index of National Capabilities);
p is political power (Failed States Index).

The above displayed explanation does not apply the same way to the different aspects of states interactions. Indeed, as far as neorealism can account for all of them, their different nature suggests thinking about more specific explanations. In this article, the equation representing the neo-realist hypotheses can generally be used for bilateral agreements and diplomatic exchanges because they have been considered as general numbers without linking them to any particular policy area. What can make the difference between them are the contingency of the first and the stability of the second ones.

To be considered differently is membership in regional organizations. Most African regional organizations have been founded with the aim of strengthening local economies and united handling of peace matters (Nkrumah 1964; Diop 1987; Amoako 2002). Furthermore, the same organizations have been commonly conceived as places where autocrats meet to get support from other autocrats (Sylla 2003). Finally, African regional organizations have been commonly presented as initiatives of countries assuming regional leadership (Decraene 1964: 84; Bach and Vallée 1990). The first idea of African regionalism leads to unchanged general explanations assigned to activeness by structural realism: smaller African countries will join regional organizations due to their weaker economic and political conditions. However, when other characteristics show that in a pure neo-realist perspective, the explanations to be taken into account are not generic aspects of power but very specific ones. If some join to get support from other autocrats, internal elite factionalization can be considered as a proxy measure of the weakness that leads governments to join regional organizations. If regional organizations are initiatives of stronger countries, the proximity to such countries speaks of the vulnerability in the environment that should lead smaller countries to bandwagon.

## b) Methods

Since this article aims to assess the validity of neo-realist provisions on smaller states of subsystems, it compares neo-realist hypothesis to alternative explanations provided by its critics. It takes into consideration the contributions from three other theoretical families explaining state behaviour: constructivism, in-

ternal structure approach, and geopolitics. These theories suggest intervening variables previously overlooked by neo-realists. Social constructivists advise looking not only at rational choices but also at choices made following the logic of appropriateness because international choices of countries are also based on the link between interest and identity (Wendt 1992; Ruggie 1998). The internal structure approach considers that a country's behaviour and interests are mediated by its internal structure—regime, bureaucracy, and the state-society nexus (Katzenstein 1976; Risse-Kappen 1991; Evangelista 1988). Geopolitics suggests looking at geographical position; and physical opportunities of a single country (Spykman 1944; Jean 2008) as intervening variables.

Criticizing neo-realist propositions, constructivists multiply the number of hypotheses to be checked for they regard a country's self-perception as an intervening variable between capabilities and activeness. As a result, mediated by self-perception and the propensity to act coherently with the self-assigned status, capabilities will lead to high or low activeness. This reasoning leads to the following transformation of the neo-realist function:

$$Y = \left( \frac{1}{\alpha \pm \beta_1 \chi e \pm \beta_2 \chi m \pm \beta_3 \chi p} \right) (ODA + rL)$$

where Y is activeness in intra-African relations;
βs represent the average increase or decrease of the dependent variable;
ODA is the Official Development Assistance[5];
rL is regional leadership[6]

The internal structure approach maintains that regime, the quality of bureaucracy and the nature of the state–society nexus are intervening variables between realist

5    Official Development Assistance leads countries to perceive themselves as being better connected and more important in a context crowded by aid-dependent countries (Brautingam). Indeed African countries that have assumed regional leadership are also those who have received more ODA (r > 0.6).

6    Regional leadership has been measured assigning 1 to those countries that have assumed or have been assuming a leading position in political, economic or military terms. For the southern African region we assigned 1 to South Africa. In the Great lake region we assigned 1 to the DRC (during the cold war) and Uganda. In Central Africa, this mark has been assigned to Nigeria for obvious reasons. In Western Africa countries such as Burkina Faso (for the role Blaise Compaoré has been playing in the region), Côte d'Ivoire (when Houphouet Boigny was president), Senegal (during Senghor and to a certain extent up to know with Wade) have been assigned the 1. In the Horn of Africa a leading role is generally recognized to Ethiopia. All the other countries have been assigned 0.

variables and state behaviour outcomes. Thus, countries' capabilities will influence their activeness to the extent that they are influenced by the nature of the internal structure of countries. If the internal structure observations are reliable, the neo-realist functions should be transformed as follows:

$$Y = \left( \frac{1}{\alpha \pm \beta_1 \chi e \pm \beta_2 \chi m \pm \beta_3 \chi p} \right) (FH + GINI)$$

Here Y is once again activeness in intra-African relations; βs represent the average increase or decrease of the dependent variable;
FH (Freedom House) measures the levels of political and civil liberties;
GINI (Gini index) measures the levels of income inequality[7].
Scholars of geopolitics will suggest looking also at the geographical position of countries as a determinant of the variability of intra-African levels of interaction of SSA countries. A landlocked country is likely to behave differently from a country with maritime frontiers. The geographic position of a country will have either independent effects or act as an intervening variable. In the latter case, the neo-realist function will be modified as follows:

$$Y = \left( \frac{1}{\alpha + \beta_1 \chi e + \beta_2 \chi m + \beta_3 \chi p + \varepsilon} \right) (LL + LN + MF)$$

Here Y is once again activeness in intra-African relations; βs represent the average increase or decrease of the dependent variable;
LL represents the fact that a country is landlocked or not;
LN is the total number of land neighbors;
MF is the total number of maritime neighbors.
In all considered forms of international activeness in subsystems where all considered countries are different from one another, the most appropriate design is the MDSD. Since all considered dependent variables have been built as interval variables, the estimation of the effects of each group of variables that are suggested by the various theoretical families of the IR debates will be estimated through a linear regression analysis. Analysis will be performed separately for each aspect of the dependent variable. Diverse models will be run in order to make comparisons between competing explanations of SSA countries' behaviours in their sub-system.

The choice of the studied region is linked to the fact that the neo-realist hypothesis does not to fit the cases of smaller SSA countries in the African sub-system. In addition, the SSA countries represent a consistent number of nation-states, thus contributing to generalization.

The explanatory neo-realist variables to be considered relate to state capacity (economic, military and political). Military capacity is assessed though the Composite Index of National Capability[8], economic capacity through the Human Development Index, and political power through the Failed States Index[9]. When examining the determinants of membership in regional organizations, variables concerning proximity to a leading country and factionalized elites are introduced. Variables suggested by other aforementioned theoretical families are considered as control ones.

## Empirical assessments

Determinants of activeness in bilateral agreements
The examination of determinants of activeness in bilateral agreements in Africa, shows little support to the neo-realist explanations. The results of the OLS analysis (Table 1) suggest that the higher levels of state failure determine lower activeness in bilateral agreements. On the other hand, higher state capacity leads to higher levels of activeness in bilateral agreements. Most interestingly, putting into the model only variables suggested by the neo-realist prospective, they account for circa 50% of the variability of activeness in bilateral agreements (adjusted R square = 0.49). In addition, introducing variables from other theoretical families, the neorealist variables lose neither in strength nor in significance. Instead their strength increases as to give support to those theoretical families adding intervening variables to the pure neo-realist model. The introduction of constructivist variables generates an increase of the coefficient of the Failed States Index and the Composite Index of National Capability respectively from -0.37 to -0.47 and from 0.64 to 1.09. Furthermore, the total variance explained by the model also increases from 49% to 53%.

7        The Freedom House ratings speak of society and states are connected from a political point of view. The GINI index measuring income inequality accounts to a certain extent to the connection between society and economic elites (those having more economic means).

8        This is a composite measure of national power devised by David J. Singer for the Correlates of War project in 1963 (Singer, Bremer and Stuckey 1972; Singer 1987). The most recent available data refer to 2001. The index consists in a mean of each country's ratio (as a percentage of the world's total) of six components: total population, urban population, iron and steel production, primary energy consumption, military expenditure, and military personnel.
9        The Failed States Index built by the Fund for Peace (www.fundforpeace.org) assesses the stability and political risk of countries by focusing on key economic, social, and political indicators, including, as applicable, their relations with other countries in the region and local issues.

*Table 1. Activeness in bilateral agreements in SSA countries, a multiple OLS Analysis (N=48)*

| | Standardized beta coefficients | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Predictors* | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
| Failed States Index | -0.37(*) | -0.47(*) | -0.43(*) | -0.46(*) |
| Composite Index of National Capability | 0.64(**) | 1.09(**) | 1.07(**) | 1.14(**) |
| Human Development | -0.02 | -0.12 | -0.19 | -0.19 |
| Average ODA 1960-2008 | | -0.30 | -0.28 | 0.02 |
| Regional leadership (dummy) | | 0.10 | 0.11 | 0.08 |
| Activeness in diplomatic exchanges | | -0.32 | -0.31 | -0.57(*) |
| Freedom House average score 1990-1999 | | | -0.07 | -0.16 |
| Gini index 1992-2007 | | | 0.12 | 0.10 |
| Landlocked (dummy) | | | | -0.37 |
| No. of land border neighbors | | | | 0.57 |
| No. of maritime boundary neighbors | | | | -0.21 |
| Total no. of unique neighbors | | | | -0.63 |
| | | | | |
| *R Square* | 0.53 | 0.60 | 0.61 | 0.75 |
| *Adjusted R Square* | 0.49 | 0.53 | 0.52 | 0.64 |

(**) p < 0.01
(*)  p < 0.05

The same observation is enforced when introducing variables that are suggested by internal structure theorists and students of geopolitics. The latter deserve a particular mention since they enhance the explanation of variance. Introducing geopolitical variables, they add 10% to the explained variance obtained in previous estimations.

These descriptions do not fit into the results of the OLS analysis. The variables taken from other theoretical families do not register significant effects. However, this is due to the fact that they are intervening variables. Their effects have been reversed in significant neo-realist explanations. This is what is shown by an OLS analysis taking into account the composite state capacity as a dependent variable and all the variables suggested by constructivism, internal structure approach, and geopolitics (Table 2). In fact, they account for 76% of the variance (R square = 0.76) of state capacity in African countries. In addition, at least one variable per theoretical family registers significant effects (marked by asterisks). This analysis

*Table 2. State capacity in SSA countries, a multiple OLS analysis*

| | Standardized beta coefficients | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Predictors* | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
| Average ODA 1960-2008 | 1.832(*) | 1.867(*) | 2.641(**) |
| Regional leadership (dummy) | -0.487 | -0.451 | -0.738 |
| Activeness in diplomatic exchanges | 5.321(**) | 5.146(**) | 5.391(**) |
| Activeness in regional membership | -0.267 | -0.036 | 0.849 |
| Gini index 1992-2007 | -1.027 | 0.745 | 1.056 |
| Freedom House average score 1973-2009 | | 0.15 | 0.933 |
| Landlocked (dummy) | | | -1.163 |
| No. of land border neighbors | | | -2.354(**) |
| No. of maritime boundary neighbors | | | -1.864(*) |
| Total no. of unique neighbors | | | 1.307 |
| | | | |
| *R Square* | 0.761 | 0.766 | 0.823 |
| *Adjusted R Square* | 0.735 | 0.724 | 0.764 |

(**) p < 0.05
(*)  p < 0.1

provides support to constructivism and geopolitics. Engagement in bilateral agreements seems to be linked to country's strength, which is such for the role it plays and the geographical position it occupies in the sub-system. If internal structure variables do not serve as bridges between state capacity and activeness in bilateral agreements, they do work as bridges between state failure and bilateral agreements. An OLS with state failure as a dependent variable and the independent variables of constructivism, internal structure, and geopolitics support this claim (Table 3). Indeed, internal structure variables alone account for more than 45% of the variance in levels of state failure. Determinants of activeness in diplomatic exchanges

*Table 3. State failure in SSA countries, a multiple OLS analysis*

| Predictors | Standardized beta coefficients | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
| Average ODA 1960-2008 | -1.01 | -0.91 | -0.23 |
| Regional leadership (dummy) | 1.36 | 1.67 | 1.12 |
| Activeness in diplomatic exchanges | 0.24 | -0.33 | 0.11 |
| Activeness in regional membership | 0.62 | 0.04 | -0.12 |
| Gini index 1992-2007 | 1.91 | 0.54 | 0.40 |
| Freedom House average score 1973-2009 | | 5.30 (**) | 5.13 (**) |
| Landlocked (dummy) | | | -1.43 |
| No. of land border neighbors | | | -1.73 (*) |
| No. of maritime boundary neighbors | | | -2.24 (**) |
| Total no. of unique neighbors | | | 1.55 |
| | | | |
| R Square | 0.07 | 0.53 | 0.63 |
| Adjusted R Square | -0.03 | 0.45 | 0.50 |

(**) $p < 0.05$
(*)  $p < 0.1$

Structural realist expectations do not hold true when analysing the determinants of activeness in diplomatic exchanges. The results of a multiple OLS analysis (Table 4) witness that the greater the capacity of a state, the greater its activeness in diplomatic exchanges. The Composite Index of National Capability alone accounts for about 72% of the variance of activeness in diplomatic exchanges in SSA countries. Once again, even if variables of constructivism and internal structure may seemingly augment the level of explained variance once introduced in the model, they are not significant. However, this is due to the presence of other intervening variables.

*Table 4. Activeness in diplomatic exchanges in SSA, a multiple OLS analysis (N=48)*

| Predictors | Standardized beta coefficients | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
| Failed States Index | 0.00 | -0.08 | -0.08 | 0.06 |
| Composite Index of National Capability | 0.86 (**) | 0.79 (**) | 0.79 (**) | 0.87 (**) |
| Human Development | -0.03 | -0.03 | -0.04 | 0.07 |
| Average ODA 1960-2008 | | 0.13 | 0.12 | 0.11 |
| Regional Leadership (dummy) | | 0.16 | 0.16 | 0.09 |
| Activeness in bilateral agreements | | -0.16 | -0.16 | -0.28 (*) |
| Freedom House average score 1990-1999 | | | -0.01 | -0.17 |
| Gini index 1992-2007 | | | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Landlocked (dummy) | | | | 0.22 |
| No. of land border neighbors | | | | 1.11 (**) |
| No. of maritime boundary neighbors | | | | 0.68 (*) |
| Total no. of unique neighbors | | | | -1.00 (**) |
| | | | | |
| R Square | 0.74 | 0.79 | 0.79 | 0.88 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.72 | 0.76 | 0.74 | 0.82 |

(**) $p < 0.01$
(*) $p < 0.05$

*Table 5. Membership in regional organizations in SSA Countries, a multiple OLS analysis (N=48)*

| Predictors | *Standardized beta coefficients* | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
| Closeness to regional leader country | 1.87(*) | 2.33(**) | 1.67 | 0.44 |
| 2008 Factionalized Elites | 1.09 | 0.88 | 0.30 | 0.11 |
| 2009 Economic Decline | -0.34 | -0.52 | -0.65 | -1.77(*) |
| Regional leadership (dummy) | 1.92(*) | 1.03 | 1.22 | 0.66 |
| Activeness in diplomatic exchanges | | -0.80 | -1.12 | -1.52 |
| Activeness in bilateral agreements | | -0.11 | 0.10 | -0.89 |
| Average ODA 1960-2008 | | 0.91 | 0.89 | 1.68 |
| Freedom House average score 1973-2009 | | | 1.86(*) | 2.15(**) |
| Gini index 1992-2007 | | | 1.39 | 1.76(*) |
| Landlocked (dummy) | | | | -0.89 |
| No. of land border neighbors | | | | -0.20 |
| No. of maritime boundary neighbors | | | | -1.40 |
| Total no. of unique neighbors | | | | -0.05 |
| | | | | |
| *R Square* | 0.16 | 0.23 | 0.32 | 0.46 |
| *Adjusted R Square* | 0.09 | 0.07 | 0.12 | 0.20 |

(**) $p < 0.05$

(*)  $p < 0.1$

Such an observation applies only to constructivism for two reasons. First, internal structure variables, which should bridge the effects of state failure without a significant effect on the dependent variable, cannot be taken into account. Second, variables taken from geopolitics register direct effects on the dependent variable. Indeed, a high number of land neighbours is positively affected by the level of activeness. This is "good neighbour policy"[10]. As far as smaller states engage less in diplomatic exchanges, the neo-realist prediction has not found any support. The same can be stated for the internal structure approach. Instead, suggestions from constructivism and geopolitics should be taken into account, when determining root causes of SSA countries' levels of activeness in diplomatic exchanges are the.

Determinants of membership in regional organizations

If neorealism has failed in explaining sporadic and stable bilateral relationships of African countries, it seems to apply to the activeness of countries for what concerns membership in regional organizations. When considering only neo-realist-oriented vari-

ables, the proximity to a leading regional power has positive and significant effects on the activeness in regional membership. These effects are multiplied when adding explanations from the constructivist approach.

The neo-realist approach fits African realities until we introduce explanations from the internal structure approach which will prove to be the leading explanation of states' involvement in regional organizations. In fact, the introduction of such variables as political and civil liberties leads to a decrease of the effect of proximity to leading actors (β changes from 2.33 to 1.67). In addition the significance of its effects disappears. On the other hand, the geopolitical variables do not register direct significant effects because they are intervening variables between internal structure variables and country activeness in regional organizations.

Adding variables from the internal structure approach to the analysis makes some of the variables that neorealism could have taken into account change their sign and significance. This is the case with the variable of levels of economic decline that registers in the last model significant and negative effects on the dependent variable. This means that weaker and smaller states (those that are experiencing economic decline) are less likely to engage in regional organizations. Finally, considering only the internal structure explanations, we understand that those presenting

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10      The "Good Neighbour Policy" was the foreign policy of the administration of United States President Franklin Roosevelt toward the countries of Latin America. The United States wished to have good relations with its neighbors, especially at a time when conflicts were beginning to rise once again, and this policy was more or less intended to garner Latin American support.

African regionalism as spaces where autocrats meet to prop up one another find empirical support. Indeed, Table 5 shows that higher scores from Freedom House and higher levels of income inequality lead states to engage in more regional organizations (see the coefficients for the Freedom House score and the Gini index). Higher rates of activeness in regional organizations are registered among those countries with weaker connections between the state and society.

## Conclusions

This article has offered an analysis of the structural realist hypotheses about small states' behaviour in international system. Such an adventure finds justification in the observation that when neo-realism gives weight to structural explanations in explaining small states' behaviour, it pays little attention to the relativity of smallness. This article claims from the onset that the neo-realist hypotheses should have gained more consistency if they had been tested on small-

er states of subsystems crowded by countries considered small in global comparisons. Focusing on smaller states of the Sub-Saharan-African sub-system, the neo-realists expectations have been heavily challenged. To the extent that the presented analysis is reliable, SSA countries behaviour in intra-African interactions can be accounted for by looking at explanations close to constructivist views, internal structure approach and geopolitics. The first two explain countries' activeness in bilateral agreements better than neorealism. The third explains very specifically activeness in diplomatic exchanges (stable relations) to witness that African countries are keen on "good neighbour policy".

Although the vulnerability of small African states does not make them active in search for survival, it is clear that general comparisons conducted by this article need to be complemented by in-depth analyses of specific foreign policies in subsystems. Until then, neo-realist hypotheses should be treated with careful reservations, especially when applied to small states' behaviour in international relations.

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