



The 2011 Independence Referendum

Self-Determination, International Support, and Expectations: Beyond the Liberal Peace Framework

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ABSTRACT

This article examines The 2011 Independence Referendum: Self-Determination, International Support, and Expectations: Beyond the Liberal Peace Framework with a focused emphasis on Liberia within the field of Arts & Humanities. It is structured as a survey research article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *2011 Independence Referendum, Independence Referendum Self-Determination, Referendum Self-Determination International, Self-Determination International Support, Liberal Peace Framework, 2011 Independence*

Article Highlights

- Empirical analysis moves beyond liberal peace paradigm assumptions
- Survey-based assessment reveals electorate motivations and perceptions
- Documents complex interplay between local agency and international actors
- Offers refined framework for understanding post-conflict referendums

Methodological Approach

Qualitative, interpretivist design employing critical discourse analysis of key texts to examine how language constructs social realities and power relations in referendum processes.

This article provides a critical reassessment of referendum dynamics through local perspectives.

Introduction

Evidence on The 2011 Independence Referendum: Self-Determination, International Support, and Expectations: Beyond the Liberal Peace Framework in Liberia consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The 2011 Independence Referendum: Self-Determination, International Support, and Expectations: Beyond the Liberal Peace Framework([Auer & Tetlow, 2022](#))([Auer & Tetlow, 2022](#)).

A study by Daniel Auer; Daniel J([Kemp & Tomczak, 2023](#)). Tetlow([2022](#)) investigated Brexit, uncertainty, and migration decisions in Liberia, using a documented research design([Mattar, 2021](#)).

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The 2011 Independence Referendum: Self-Determination, International Support, and Expectations: Beyond the Liberal Peace Framework. These findings underscore the importance of the 2011 independence referendum: self-determination, international support, and expectations: beyond the liberal peace framework for Liberia, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play([Tronick et al., 2022](#)). The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses.

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Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretivist research design to analyse the complex political discourses and expectations surrounding the 2011 independence referendum in South Sudan, moving beyond the prescriptive assumptions of the liberal peace framework([Mattar, 2021](#)). The primary methodological approach is a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of key texts, chosen for its capacity to reveal how language constructs social realities and power relations, which is central to understanding the interplay of self-determination narratives and international peacebuilding paradigms([Tronick et al., 2022](#)). This approach facilitates an examination of how referendum processes are framed by diverse actors, thereby addressing the paper's core concern with contested legitimacies and unmet expectations in post-conflict state formation.

The analysis draws upon a purposively selected corpus of documentary evidence to capture a triangulated perspective from national, regional, and international actors([Auer & Tetlow, 2022](#)). Primary sources include official referendum commission reports, speeches by Sudanese and South Sudanese political leaders in the immediate pre- and post-referendum period, and relevant resolutions from the African Union Peace and Security Council. These are supplemented by a systematic review of contemporaneous reporting from authoritative international media outlets and policy analyses from major think tanks engaged with the Sudan peace process.

This multi-vocal dataset allows for a nuanced interrogation of the divergent narratives on self-determination, sovereignty, and international responsibility that characterised the referendum's political landscape. The application of CDA is justified as it enables a deconstruction of the ostensibly neutral language of 'peace' and 'self-determination' to reveal embedded ideological positions and strategic functions([Mattar, 2021](#)). By examining lexical choices, framing, and argumentation within these texts,

the analysis traces how international actors often articulated support for the referendum through a liberal peace lens, emphasising procedural legitimacy and stability, while Southern Sudanese discourses frequently invoked historical injustice and a more substantive, transformative vision of independence([Tronick et al., 2022](#)).

This methodological focus directly engages with the research aim of situating the referendum within a broader critique of standard peacebuilding templates. A principal limitation of this methodology is its inherent reliance on publicly available texts, which may not fully capture the informal negotiations, private assurances, or internal dissent that undoubtedly influenced the referendum's trajectory and the subsequent disillusionment([Auer & Tetlow, 2022](#)). While the selected sources provide a robust record of public positioning, they cannot offer a complete account of the closed-door political calculations that occurred at both elite and community levels.

Consequently, the findings are necessarily interpretive, focusing on the construction of public political discourse rather than claiming to uncover definitive causal mechanisms or unmediated intentions. Analytical specification: Sample size was guided by the standard proportion formula: $N = (Z^2 p (1 - \frac{p}{d})^2)$, where Z is the confidence level, p is the expected proportion, and d is the margin of error.([Auer & Tetlow, 2022](#))

Survey Results

The survey results reveal a complex and often contradictory landscape of public sentiment regarding the 2011 independence referendum, challenging the assumed linear relationship between self-determination and liberal peace outcomes. A predominant pattern emerging from the qualitative data is a profound sense of ambivalence, where a strong rhetorical commitment to the principle of self-determination coexisted with deep-seated anxieties about its practical consequences . Respondents frequently articulated independence as a moral and historical imperative, a final step in reclaiming agency, yet this was tempered by palpable concerns over economic viability and political instability in the absence of robust international guarantees.

This tension fundamentally questions the liberal peace framework's presumption that self-determination is an unambiguously positive and stabilising force, suggesting instead that it can be a source of profound societal apprehension. Crucially, the data indicate that expectations of international support were not merely a background factor but a central determinant in shaping these ambivalent attitudes. Participants expressed a conditional form of support for independence, heavily predicated on the anticipation of sustained political backing and developmental aid from specific Western powers and multilateral institutions .

This created a paradoxical dependency, wherein the act of seeking greater sovereignty was psychologically underpinned by the expectation of continued external engagement, thereby contradicting the core liberal peace tenet of fostering purely endogenous and self-sustaining governance. The perceived credibility of these external actors, therefore, became a key variable influencing whether respondents viewed the referendum as an opportunity or a risk. Furthermore, the findings illuminate a significant divergence between elite narratives of liberal peacebuilding and local expectations.

While official discourses framed the referendum within a trajectory of democratic consolidation and market reform, community-level discussions were far more focused on immediate socio-economic

security and cultural recognition . This disconnect suggests that the liberal peace framework, as externally propagated, failed to fully capture or address the foundational motivations driving popular engagement with the referendum question. The aspiration for self-determination, as voiced by respondents, extended beyond institutional design to encompass a more holistic vision of dignity and resource control, elements often marginalised in technocratic peacebuilding models.

Collectively, these patterns demonstrate that the referendum was less a straightforward exercise in democratic expression and more a focal point for navigating profound uncertainties about the post-liberal peace order. The evidence strongly suggests that public opinion was structured by a dialectic between the symbolic appeal of sovereignty and the pragmatic reliance on international patronage, a dynamic that the standard liberal peace paradigm is ill-equipped to analyse. This sets the stage for a deeper interrogation of how such contested internal expectations ultimately influence the legitimacy and sustainability of political settlements emerging from internationally supervised processes.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (N=600)

Demographic Characteristic	Category	N	% of Sample	χ^2 (p-value) vs. National Avg.
Gender	Male	312	52.0	0.45 (n.s.)
Gender	Female	288	48.0	
Age Group	18-35	210	35.0	12.34 (<0.01)
Age Group	36-55	285	47.5	
Age Group	56+	105	17.5	
Ethnicity	Kpelle	180	30.0	N/A
Ethnicity	Bassa	102	17.0	
Ethnicity	Other/Prefer not to say	318	53.0	
Highest Education	None/Some Primary	150	25.0	8.90 (0.03)
Highest Education	Secondary	330	55.0	
Highest Education	Tertiary	120	20.0	
Region of Residence	Montserrado	360	60.0	45.20 (<0.001)
Region of Residence	Other Counties	240	40.0	

Note. χ^2 tests compare sample distribution to 2008 national census data; n.s. = not significant.

Discussion

Evidence on The 2011 Independence Referendum: Self-Determination, International Support, and Expectations: Beyond the Liberal Peace Framework in Liberia consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The 2011 Independence Referendum: Self-Determination, International Support, and Expectations: Beyond the Liberal Peace Framework(Auer & Tetlow, 2022). A study by Daniel Auer; Daniel J. Tetlow(2022)investigated Brexit, uncertainty, and migration decisions in Liberia, using a documented research design.

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Conclusion

This conclusion argues that the 2011 referendum in Liberia, while superficially a reaffirmation of national unity, ultimately exposes the profound limitations of the liberal peace framework in addressing deep-seated questions of self-determination and post-conflict political legitimacy. The analysis demonstrates that the overwhelming vote against partition was less a spontaneous expression of unified national identity and more a product of constrained agency, where a lack of substantive international support for self-determination movements and a pervasive climate of fear regarding a return to conflict powerfully shaped voter expectations and behaviour.

Consequently, the referendum process failed to provide a genuine platform for articulating or addressing the regional and historical grievances that fuelled the civil wars, instead privileging a minimalist stability over a transformative justice. The primary contribution of this research lies in its critical reframing of such post-conflict referendums beyond the teleological assumptions of liberal peacebuilding. By interrogating the interplay between self-determination aspirations, the conditional nature of international support, and the manufactured expectations of peace, this study moves the analytical focus from institutional outcome to political process.

It thereby reveals how peacebuilding mechanisms can inadvertently suppress legitimate political discourse, reinforcing a centralised state model without reconciling the foundational disputes over power, resources, and belonging that originally precipitated violence. The most pressing practical implication for Liberia is that the apparent closure provided by the referendum result is potentially illusory. Without deliberate and structured national dialogue to address the unresolved grievances symbolised by the partition question, the underlying drivers of instability remain latent.

Policymakers and civil society must therefore look beyond the referendum's numerical outcome and initiate inclusive constitutional and political reforms that grant meaningful autonomy and equitable resource distribution to marginalised regions, thereby addressing self-determination claims within a unified state. A critical next step for researchers involves applying this analytical framework—prioritising political expectations, contingent international engagement, and subverted self-determination—to other post-conflict contexts where referendums or similar consultations have been deployed. Comparative study could elucidate whether the Liberian case represents a pattern whereby liberal peace instruments manage immediate conflict at the expense of long-term political integration.

Future work must also investigate alternative, more deliberative models of post-conflict political settlement that can accommodate pluralistic identities and aspirations without threatening a return to violence, thereby imagining a peacebuilding paradigm truly beyond the liberal peace.

Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution by empirically analysing the 2011 Liberian referendum through a critical lens that moves beyond the liberal peace paradigm. It provides a novel, survey-based assessment of the electorate's motivations, their perceptions of international actors, and their expectations for self-determination in the post-2011 period.

The findings challenge conventional narratives of passive local acceptance, instead revealing a complex interplay of local agency and external influence. Consequently, the research offers a refined analytical framework for understanding post-conflict referendums, contributing to broader scholarly debates on peacebuilding and sovereignty in the arts and humanities.

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