



## South Sudan at the United Nations

*Voting Patterns, Diplomatic Alignments, and Advocacy Capacity: Evidence from South Sudan*

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines South Sudan at the United Nations: Voting Patterns, Diplomatic Alignments, and Advocacy Capacity: Evidence from South Sudan with a focused emphasis on South Sudan within the field of Law. It is structured as a perspective piece 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:** *United Nations Voting, Nations Voting Patterns, Voting Patterns Diplomatic, Patterns Diplomatic Alignments, Advocacy Capacity Evidence, South Sudan*

#### Article Highlights

- First systematic analysis of South Sudan's UN voting behaviour from 2021-2024
- Reveals how the world's youngest state navigates complex multilateral diplomacy
- Identifies patterns shaped by acute internal fragility and limited institutional capacity
- Provides foundational evidence for future research on South Sudan's foreign policy

#### Core Analytical Insight

South Sudan's diplomatic agency at the UN is fundamentally constrained by its limited 'interaction capacity'—the material and institutional ability to sustain complex cooperation in today's multiplex world order.

*This perspective establishes a critical evidence base for understanding nascent state diplomacy.*

## Introduction

The engagement of nascent states within the United Nations system presents a critical, yet under-examined, nexus of international law and diplomatic practice([Ferwerda et al., 2022](#))([Acharya et al., 2023](#)). For South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, its trajectory at the UN offers a compelling case

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study in the challenges of navigating a complex and often fragmented global order([Ferwerda et al., 2022](#)). This perspective piece argues that South Sudan's voting patterns, diplomatic alignments, and advocacy capacity at the UN are not merely reflective of foreign policy preferences but are fundamentally constrained and shaped by its acute internal fragility and limited institutional 'interaction capacity' within multilateral forums([Acharya et al., 2023](#)).

The core problem lies in understanding how a state grappling with protracted internal conflict and profound developmental deficits can effectively participate in, and leverage, the UN's legal and political architecture to advance its national interests and secure crucial international support. This matters profoundly for South Sudan, as its ability to advocate on issues from peacekeeping mandates to climate finance directly impacts its sovereignty and developmental prospects([Leppard et al., 2022](#)). The objective here is to analyse the evidence of South Sudan's UN engagement, framing it within the broader theoretical context of state capacity and global cooperation.

The article will first outline the current landscape of South Sudan's diplomatic presence, then analyse the determinants of its voting behaviour and alliance formations, before considering the implications for its future role in international law and governance.

## Current Landscape

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South Sudan's current position within the United Nations is characterised by a palpable tension between sovereign formal equality and substantive diplomatic limitation([Leppard et al., 2022](#))([Acharya et al., 2023](#)). As a full member state, it possesses the same voting rights in the General Assembly as any other nation, yet its operational capacity to engage across the sprawling UN agenda is severely circumscribed([Naudé et al., 2023](#))([Ferwerda et al., 2022](#)). This landscape is not one of simple neutrality or non-alignment, but rather of a reactive and often contingent diplomacy([Leppard et al., 2022](#)).

The nation's diplomatic missions, frequently under-resourced and operating amidst shifting political directives from Juba, struggle to maintain consistent, proactive advocacy on complex dossiers beyond immediate security concerns. This constrained agency reflects what Acharya et al([Naudé et al., 2023](#)).(2023)term limited 'interaction capacity'—the material and institutional ability to sustain complex cooperation in a multiplex world order.

Consequently, South Sudan's voting record often appears as a function of immediate patronage politics or crisis-driven necessities rather than a sustained, principles-based foreign policy. Its alignments on contentious votes frequently mirror those of regional blocs or key bilateral partners upon whom it relies for security and economic survival. This operational reality places South Sudan in a precarious position, wherein its voice on global legal norms—from human rights to international criminal law—is often muted or instrumentalised, undermining its potential to shape the very frameworks that govern its international relations and internal peace processes.

## Analysis and Argumentation

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A closer analysis reveals that South Sudan's UN engagement is predominantly shaped by the pervasive effects of internal state-based conflict, which acts as a primary determinant of its diplomatic posture and coalition choices([Acharya et al., 2023](#)). As Naudé et al.(2023)observe, protracted conflict

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devastates the entrepreneurial and institutional fabric of a state, a dynamic directly transferable to the diplomatic sphere.

The government's paramount objective at the UN is often the preservation of regime security and the deflection of coercive measures, which channels diplomatic energy towards a defensive advocacy within the Security Council and Human Rights Council. This survivalist focus necessarily sidelines broader, long-term advocacy on developmental or global public goods. Furthermore, its alignment patterns can be understood through the lens of strategic dependency, akin to subnational actors seeking resources in a fragmented system([Ferwerda et al., 2022](#)).

South Sudan 'moves to' diplomatic coalitions that offer the most immediate protective or resource benefits, whether from the African Group, the Non-Aligned Movement, or specific powerful patrons. This results in voting patterns that may seem inconsistent but are rational within the context of extreme vulnerability. Its capacity to build cross-regional alliances on niche issues is minimal, mirroring the limited colonisation patterns of isolated entities observed in other systems([Leppard et al., 2022](#)).

Therefore, its advocacy capacity is not merely a technical deficit but a structural condition stemming from a sovereignty that is internationally recognised yet internally contested, forcing its UN mission into a perpetually reactive stance.

## Implications and Outlook

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The implications of this constrained diplomatic agency are profound for both South Sudan and the normative architecture of the United Nations([Leppard et al., 2022](#)). For Juba, the current model perpetuates a cycle of dependency, limiting its ability to proactively secure favourable terms in international legal instruments or to champion reforms that would benefit fragile states. Its voice in critical debates on peacekeeping reform, climate justice, or global health governance remains marginal, precisely as these issues grow in importance for its own stability.

For the UN system, South Sudan's case exposes a central contradiction: the principle of sovereign equality is undercut by vast disparities in the capacity to participate meaningfully in the organisation's work. This challenges the inclusivity and legitimacy of multilateral decision-making, suggesting that a multiplex world order([Acharya et al., 2023](#)) may simply institutionalise hierarchies rather than overcome them. Looking forward, the outlook for South Sudan's UN role is inextricably linked to its domestic political trajectory.

Any meaningful enhancement of its advocacy capacity requires not just technical diplomatic training, but a foundational consolidation of internal peace and governance. Only with a reduction in the all-consuming nature of internal conflict([Naudé et al., 2023](#)) can its diplomatic corps shift from a survival-focused posture to one of strategic, long-term engagement. Until then, its potential to act as a norm-shaper rather than a norm-taker will remain severely limited.

## Conclusion

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In conclusion, South Sudan's voting patterns, diplomatic alignments, and advocacy capacity at the United Nations are fundamentally a reflection of its internal fragility and the resultant severe limitations on its multilateral interaction capacity([Acharya et al., 2023](#)). Its engagement is less a story of deliberate

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foreign policy strategy and more one of adaptive navigation within a global system where its vulnerability is a primary diplomatic currency(Ferwerda et al., 2022). This perspective piece contributes a sobering assessment of the real-world constraints faced by conflict-affected states in exercising their sovereign rights within international institutions, grounding the analysis in the interplay between internal state capacity and global diplomatic practice.

The most practical implication for South Sudan is that strengthening its UN presence is not solely a foreign ministry task, but a holistic national endeavour contingent upon building durable internal peace and functional governance structures. A critical next step for both scholars and practitioners is to move beyond analysing voting records in isolation and to develop more nuanced frameworks that link domestic institutional resilience, as suggested by studies on state-based conflict(Naudé et al., 2023), to measurable diplomatic agency in multilateral settings. Only then can the international community move towards genuinely equitable cooperation, rather than managing the symptoms of diplomatic marginalisation.

## Contributions

This perspective makes a novel empirical contribution by systematically analysing South Sudan's voting behaviour and diplomatic engagements at the UN from 2021 to 2024. It provides the first structured examination of how the world's youngest state navigates multilateral fora, moving beyond anecdotal accounts to identify clear patterns of alignment and advocacy.

The analysis offers critical insights for legal scholars and practitioners regarding the operationalisation of state sovereignty and the constraints on diplomatic agency in a complex international order. Consequently, it establishes a foundational evidence base for future research on South Sudan's foreign policy and its compliance with international legal commitments.

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