

A Constructivist Analysis of Liberia's Ebola Response

Michlyne Nyenegahn Williams

School of International and Public Affairs,
Jilin University, Changchun, China

[Doi:10.19044/esj.2025.v21n32p37](https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2025.v21n32p37)

Submitted: 10 September 2025

Accepted: 01 November 2025

Published: 30 November 2025

Copyright 2025 Author(s)

Under Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0

OPEN ACCESS

Cite As:

Williams, M.N. (2025). *A Constructivist Analysis of Liberia's Ebola Response*. European Scientific Journal, ESJ, 21 (32), 37. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2025.v21n32p37>

Abstract

This article examines how Liberia established its sovereignty, legitimacy, and international identity during the Ebola crisis of 2014-2015. While much existing research focuses on institutional weaknesses and material dependence, this study employs a constructivist qualitative methodology that combines discourse analysis and content analysis of governmental communications, United Nations resolutions, international reports, and international media coverage. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns in state rhetoric, norm alignment, and engagement strategies with international actors. The findings indicate that Liberia's response was influenced not only by material constraints but also by international efforts to align with international norms, construct a credible national identity, and assert legitimacy in the global arena. By analyzing Liberia's experience, this article contributes to discussions on global health governance, African statehood, and the application of constructivist theory in international relations.

Keywords: Liberia; Ebola Crisis; Sovereignty and Legitimacy; Constructivism in International Relations; Global Health Governance

Introduction

The 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa was one of the most severe public health emergencies in recent history, resulting in over 11,000 deaths across Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia (WHO, 2014-2016 report). Beyond the immediate health crisis, the outbreak exposed the vulnerabilities

of fragile states and tested the resilience of both regional and global governance mechanisms. The crisis garnered unprecedented international attention, culminating in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2177, which, for the first time, declared that Ebola posed a threat to international peace and security and authorized the deployment of foreign aid and troops (United Nations Security Council, 2014).

The World Health Organization (hereinafter referred to as WHO), the African Union (hereinafter referred to as AU), and numerous bilateral and multilateral partners launched emergency interventions, creating a complex governance environment in which affected states were compelled to respond domestically while engaging with international actors (WHO, 2015; AU, 2016; CDC, 2014). Within this broader regional crisis, Liberia stands out as a critical case. As a post-conflict nation still rebuilding institutions after two civil wars, Liberia was widely perceived as ill-prepared to manage a health emergency of this scale (WHO, 2015). Yet, despite profound institutional and resource constraints, Liberia's response eventually gained international recognition as a success story in crisis management (Oxfam International, 2015).

Much of the existing literature explains African states' crisis governance primarily in material terms, focusing on institutional weakness, financial dependence, and external intervention (Adebisi, 2014; Yurtseven, 2021). While these factors are important, they do not fully capture the dynamics of how states like Liberia navigate crises. This study addresses this gap by examining how Liberia managed the tension between its material challenges and the demonstration of legitimate statehood during the Ebola crisis. Specifically, it investigates how the Liberian government constructed and performed sovereignty, legitimacy, and international identity under conditions of severe vulnerability. By adopting a constructivist perspective, this research emphasizes that sovereignty and legitimacy are not fixed institutional capacities but are socially constructed through discourse, practices, and alignment with international norms (Wendt, 1992).

The central research question guiding this study is: How did Liberia establish and demonstrate its sovereignty, legitimacy, and international identity during the Ebola crisis of 2014-2015, and what does this reveal about the influence of ideational factors on shaping state responses to global health emergencies? Through an analysis of governmental communications, international reports, and global media narratives, the study argues that Liberia's response cannot be fully explained by external assistance or institutional weakness. Rather, it reflects a deliberate process of aligning norms, constructing identity, and seeking legitimacy within the international community.

The contribution of this research is twofold. Empirically, it provides a detailed account of Liberia's Ebola response, highlighting the interplay between domestic narratives of sovereignty and international expectations of legitimacy. Theoretically, it demonstrates the explanatory power of Constructivism in understanding state behavior during crises, showing that sovereignty and legitimacy are socially negotiated constructs rather than static attributes. By analyzing Liberia's experience, this article contributes to discussions on norm diffusion, African statehood, and global health governance while offering insights into why states diverge in their engagement with international norms.

Literature Review

Global Health Governance and the Ebola Crisis

Global health governance has increasingly become a focus of study, examining how international organizations, states, and non-state actors interact to manage transnational health threats (Fidler, 2004; Moon et al., 2015). The 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa was a pivotal moment, prompting the United Nations Security Council to classify the epidemic as a threat to international peace and security (United Nations Security Council, 2014). Scholars highlight that the crisis revealed significant weaknesses in the WHO's response capacity (Moon et al. 2015) and emphasized the heavy dependence of fragile states on external interventions (Kamradt-Scott, 2015). In the African context, analyses note the AU's unprecedented deployment of the AU Support to Ebola Outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA), which marks a rise in regional health diplomacy (AU, 2016). However, much of the existing literature mainly portrays affected states as passive recipients of aid, rather than active agents involved in defining their own responses. This perspective neglects how states like Liberia asserted their sovereignty and legitimacy during periods of acute vulnerability.

The Ebola crisis emerged in countries often described as weak or failed, with Liberia in particular, recovering from civil war and relying on international donors (Dalberto, 2020). Traditional approaches in African politics and international relations tend to explain crisis governance in terms of institutional weakness, capacity deficits, or external imposition (Rotberg, 2003; Chapham, 1996). However, these explanations risk portraying African states as fundamentally incapable and overlook how governments actively frame crises to negotiate their legitimacy. Recent debate has shifted towards viewing African statehood as a performative and contested process (Englebert & Tull, 2008). Studies focusing on security crises, peacekeeping, and pandemics indicate that African governments use discourse, symbolism, and international engagement to project sovereignty beyond their actual capabilities (Williams & Hunt, 2024). In this context, Liberia's response to the

Ebola outbreak serves as a crucial case study for examining how a post-conflict state aimed to reaffirm its authority and enhance its international standing during a health emergency.

Constructivist Perspectives on Sovereignty, Norms, and Legitimacy

Constructivist International Relations theory emphasizes that sovereignty and legitimacy are not fixed attributes; rather, they are socially constructed through norms, discourse, and practices (Wendt, 1992; Finnemore 1996; Adler, 1997). Research on norm diffusion further illustrates how international expectations shape state behavior not only through coercion or material incentives but also through processes of persuasion, localization, and identity formation (Checkel, 1999). In the realm of global health governance, constructivist scholars argue that pandemics are as much political and normative crises as they are biological ones (Taylor, 2021). States are required to demonstrate responsibility, transparency, and adherence to international norms to gain legitimacy and mobilize support. The Ebola crisis serves as an empirical case study to examine how a fragile states like Liberia engaged in “sovereignty performance” (Sending, 2015) by aligning its actions with international norms while framing them as legitimate within its domestic context.

Hypothesis Formulation and Theoretical Framework:

Hypothesis Formulation

This study is guided by the following central hypothesis:

- **H1:** Liberia’s Ebola response was shaped less by material capacity constraints and more by constructivist mechanisms of sovereignty performance, norm alignment, and legitimacy-seeking in the international arena.
- **H1a:** Liberia framed its crisis management discourse to highlight sovereignty and responsible statehood, despite relying on external actors.
- **H1b:** Liberia strategically aligned itself with international health governance norms (such as transparency, cooperation, and responsibility) to enhance its international legitimacy and gain support.

These hypotheses challenge materialist explanations that view governance solely through the lens of capacity and dependency. Instead, they suggest that ideational and normative factors were equally important.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in Constructivist International Relations theory, which emphasizes that sovereignty, legitimacy, and identity are socially constructed through discourse, norms, and practices, rather than being

fixed material attributes (Wendt, 1992; Finnemore, 1996). Three theoretical strands are particularly relevant:

1. **Sovereignty as Performance:** Following the work of Sending (2015), sovereignty is understood not just as a legal status but as something that is enacted through specific practices and discourse. States, especially those labeled as fragile, must “perform” their sovereignty to both domestic and international audiences. Liberia’s response to the Ebola crisis offers a valuable case study for examining these performances under conditions of crisis.
2. **Norm Diffusion and Localization:** Constructivist scholars underscore how international norms spread through processes of persuasion, adaptation, and localization (Checkel, 1999). Liberia’s adoption of international health governance norms during the Ebola outbreak can be viewed as a process of norm localization, which aligns global expectations with domestic narratives of authority.
3. **Legitimacy and Identity Construction:** Crisis governance involves projecting a specific identity to international audiences. States that are facing vulnerabilities can enhance their legitimacy by presenting themselves as responsible actors aligned with global norms (Taylor, 2021). The case of Liberia illustrates how a post-conflict state can use a health crisis to renegotiate its international identity.

4. **Data and Methodology**

This section outlines the data sources, sample construction, variable descriptions, and empirical approach used in this study to investigate how Liberia constructed its sovereignty, legitimacy, and international identity during the Ebola crisis of 2014-2015. A qualitative, interpretive methodology is employed, utilizing secondary data sources to analyze the interaction between state behavior, global norms, and post-conflict institutional capacity. This approach emphasizes discourse analysis to examine how Liberia performed sovereignty and negotiated legitimacy in a crisis context.

Table 1: Variable Descriptions

Variable	Description	Operationalization
Sovereignty	The capacity of the Liberian state to exercise authority and manage the Ebola crisis.	Measured by degree of national control over emergency response, coordination with international actors, and performance of leadership in crisis management.
Legitimacy	Recognition and acceptance of the government by domestic and international actors.	Assessed through public communication, community engagement strategies, international praise, and media framing.
Identity	Strategic self-representation Liberia as a responsible, cooperative post-conflict state.	Evaluated through discourse analysis of speeches, UN statements, and media narratives
Norm Alignment	Degree to which Liberia's policies and actions conformed to international health governance standards.	Measured by adoption of WHO guidelines, compliance with UN resolutions, and collaboration with NGOs and donor agencies.

Notes: the variables, descriptions, and operationalization strategies in this table are derived from constructivist approaches to understanding sovereignty and legitimacy in crisis governance (Wendt, 1992; Finnemore, 1996). The empirical indicators are informed by previous studies on studies on state responses to global health emergencies (Moon et al. 2015; Kamradt Scott, 2015) and are specifically contextualized to Liberia's experience with Ebola. This context is established through an analysis of governmental communications, UN Security Council resolutions, WHO guidelines, and international media reports.

Data sources

The study draws on 42 secondary sources carefully selected for relevance and coverage. These sources include official governmental communications, international resolutions, media coverage, and peer-reviewed academic publications. Triangulation across these sources strengthens the reliability of the findings.

1. Governmental Communications and Speeches (4 sources, 21):

Presidential speeches by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf focused on themes of national unity, resilience, and calls for international cooperation (Liberian Embassy in the U.S., 2014).

Findings: Three out of four sources (75%) emphasized collaboration with international partners, while an equal proportion (75%) highlighted national resilience and the importance of unified public health messaging.

2. International Resolutions and Reports (10 sources, 24%):

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2177 (2014) establishes the international legal and normative framework for interventions in countries affected by Ebola. WHO reports documented epidemic data, evaluated responses, and provide normative recommendations for

managing epidemics. UNMEER reports included coordination of international assistance, development efforts, and mechanisms for local collaboration.

Findings: Eight out of ten sources (80%) emphasized local-international coordination, highlighting Liberia's negotiation of sovereignty within global frameworks.

3. Media coverage and International Observations (8 sources, 19%):

News outlets such as BBC Africa News and Times, along with press releases and interviews from humanitarian organizations and foreign aid agencies, reported on Liberia's Ebola response, leadership actions, and community reactions (e.g., United National Security Council Resolution 2177; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016).

Findings: Six out of eight sources (75%) noted challenges in public trust and community resistance, demonstrating the social dimensions of legitimacy and compliance.

4. Academic Journals and Publications (27 sources, 64%):

A broad range of peer-reviewed academic studies explored Liberia's Ebola response, post-conflict reconstruction, and the implications for global governance frameworks (e.g., Andren, 2017; Baker, 2014; Brooks, 2015; Moon et al., 2015; Wilkinson & Fairhead, 2016). Complementary strands of constructivist scholarship examined questions of state identity, sovereignty, and legitimacy in international relations (e.g., Checkel, 1999; Wendt, 1992; Biersteker & Weber, 1996; Sending, 2015).

Findings: Twenty out of twenty-seven sources (approximately 74%) emphasized that sovereignty is not an inherent condition but is actively constructed and negotiated through interactions with international actors, particularly within crisis response and post-conflict governance contexts.

Sample Construction

Temporal Scope: March 2014-June 2015, covering the peak of the Ebola outbreak in Liberia.

Data Type: Discourse and narrative data obtained from speeches, reports, and media coverage; official documentation of interventions and policies; as well as peer-reviewed analyses.

Selection Criteria: Sources were chosen based on their relevance to Liberia's engagement with international norms, and their demonstration of legitimacy and the construction of sovereignty. Only sources providing

evidence of Liberia's interaction with domestic and international actors were included.

Reliability of Data

The use of 42 diverse sources strengthens the reliability of findings:

- **Triangulation:** Themes such as national unity, international collaboration, and sovereignty construction consistently appeared across governmental, international, media, and academic sources.
- **Limitations:** Governmental communications may be biased to portray actions positively; media may selectively report events; percentages derived from qualitative coding are indicative rather than precise measures.
- **Conclusion:** Despite limitations, the convergence of findings across multiple sources supports robust and credible interpretations of Liberia's construction of sovereignty during the Ebola crisis.

Empirical Approach

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach, using discourse analysis to investigate Liberia's response to the 2014–2015 Ebola crises. Specifically, the research examines three interrelated areas: how Liberia framed Ebola as a transnational threat while communicating norms of responsibility and cooperation; how state identity and sovereignty were enacted through alignment with international expectations; and how domestic legitimacy was reinforced through engagement with local leaders, civil society, and community structures.

This methodology enables an in-depth exploration of the ideational and normative dimensions of Liberia's crisis response, highlighting the interplay between social interactions, leadership strategies, and global norms in shaping both domestic and international perceptions of the state. By linking qualitative evidence from speeches, governmental communications, international reports, and media coverage with constructivist theory, the study demonstrates how a post-conflict state can actively construct sovereignty, negotiate legitimacy, and shape international identity under conditions of global pressure and local vulnerability.

Performing Sovereignty: Liberia's Ebola Response

A central paradox in Liberia's response to the Ebola crisis was the simultaneous assertion of sovereignty and dependence on international assistance. From a Constructivist perspective, sovereignty is not a fixed resource but a performance enacted through discourse, practices, and symbolic acts (Holm & Sending, 2018). During the Ebola crisis, the Liberian

government needed to demonstrate both domestic authority and international responsibility amid acute vulnerability.

Asserting Control amid International Intervention

Although the international community, led by the United States, and various humanitarian organizations, played a crucial role in providing resources, the Liberian government framed itself as the primary coordinator of the national response. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf consistently emphasized that external actors were “partners” rather than “replacements” for national authority. The establishment of the National Ebola Task Force, chaired by the President, symbolically positioned the Liberian state at the center of decision-making (Embassy of the Republic of Liberia, U.S., 2014).

By doing this, Liberia projected its sovereignty through ownership of the coordination process, despite its reliance on foreign expertise and aid. This reflects what Constructivist refer to as performance of statehood the necessity to be perceived as acting like a responsible sovereign, even when material capabilities are limited.

Framing Ebola as a National and Global Threat

Liberia effectively framed the Ebola outbreak as both national crisis and a global security threat (UN Security Council, 2014; WHO, 2015). The government appealed to the United Nations, WHO, and AU, emphasizing that the virus could destabilize international order if not contained. This approach led UN Security Council Resolution 2177 (2014), which recognized Ebola as a threat to peace and security an unprecedented acknowledgement for a health crisis. By elevating the issue of Ebola to a global concern, Liberia achieved two main objectives:

1. Mobilizing international resources and gaining legitimacy: presenting itself as a cooperative member of the international community.
2. Reinforcing its sovereignty: demonstrating that it could speak on behalf of its people while influencing international narratives,

By this way, the Liberian government transformed its vulnerability into an opportunity for building legitimacy, using the crisis to reaffirm its sovereignty within the international system.

Negotiating Legitimacy

Sovereignty is established through the assertion of control, while legitimacy is built through recognition by both domestic and international audiences (Brahm, 2004; Regenerative Economics Textbook, 2024-2025). During the Ebola crisis, the government of Liberia aimed not only to manage the epidemic but also to demonstrate that it was a credible and responsible actor deserving of trust. Constructivist theories emphasize that legitimacy is

not inherent; rather, it is constructed through norms and practices (Wendt, 1992; Finnemore 1996; Adler, 1997).

Transparency and Responsibility

One way Liberia sought to establish legitimacy was by prioritizing transparency in its reporting and communications. The government conducted daily press briefings, issued public updates, and made international appeals, which helped portray it as open and accountable (BBC News Africa, 2014). President Sirleaf frequently asserted that Liberia has “nothing to hide,” signaling compliance with global health norms related to transparency. This approach contrasted sharply with previous crisis where African governments faced accusations of concealment and denial, positioning Liberia as a nation that had learned from its tumultuous past.

Alignment with International Norms

Additionally, Liberia actively aligned itself with international norms of cooperation and responsibility. The government collaborated closely with international organizations (WHO, 2023; CDC, 2016; UNMEER). Instead of resisting external involvement, which could be viewed as a violation of sovereignty, Liberia framed its partnerships as consistent with responsible statehood. This strategic effort to be seen as a cooperative partner helped the country earn international recognition and resources.

Managing Domestic and International Audiences

Negotiating legitimacy involved balancing the expectations of different audiences. Domestically, the government needed to convince citizens that it was in control and capable of ensuring their safety. Internationally, it had to assure partners that aid would be managed effectively and that there were political justifications for its use. The establishment of the Incident Management System (IMS), which included both Liberian officials and international experts, exemplified this dual legitimacy. It reassured the domestic audience about the government’s leadership while demonstrating accountability to the international community.

The process of negotiating legitimacy during the Ebola crisis also had lasting effects. It allowed Liberia to reposition itself on the global stage as a post-conflict state able to act responsibly under pressure. This newfound legitimacy was not merely symbolic; it led to renewed confidence from donors, increased diplomatic engagement, and a rebranding of Liberia’s international identity, moving beyond perceptions of fragility (Cakourous et al, 2024).

Constructing International Identity

In Liberia's response to the Ebola crisis, two immediate priorities were asserting sovereignty and negotiating legitimacy. However, these actions also contributed to a larger project of constructing international identity. Constructivist IR theory emphasizes that identity is relational- states define themselves through interactions with others, aligning with norms, roles, and expectations within the international community (Wendt, 1992). The Ebola crisis became a responsible, post-conflict state capable of engaging with the global community.

Before the Ebola crisis, Liberia was often depicted in international discourse as a fragile or failed state emerging from civil conflict. The crisis presented an opportunity to reshape this narrative (Marmon, 2015). By actively engaging with international partners, Liberia positioned itself not as a passive recipient of aid but as an active participant in global emergency. This rebranding marked a significant shift from dependency to responsibility, highlighting Liberia's willingness to share the burdens alongside the international community.

The construction of identity was also evident in Liberia's performance in global health governance. By framing the Ebola outbreak as both national and international security threat, Liberia inserted itself into discussions typically dominated by larger or more institutionalized states. Its cooperation with the African Union Support to Ebola Outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA) mission symbolized regional solidarity, while appeals to the UN Security Council elevated Liberia's voice on the global stage. In this way, Liberia constructed its identity as both a responsible member of the global community.

In addition to policy efforts, Liberia's leadership under President Sirleaf engaged in symbolic actions that conveyed moral authority. Her speeches often emphasized themes of resilience, sacrifice, and solidarity (Baker, 2014), portraying Liberia not merely as a victim of disease, but as a courageous nation fighting for the greater good of humanity. This moral framing resonated on an international level, enhancing Liberia's identity as a nation whose struggles held global significance.

Lasting Effects on International Standing

The construction of Liberia's international identity during the Ebola crisis had enduring consequences. The situation positioned Liberia as a case study in resilience and cooperation, leading to increased diplomatic visibility. While material vulnerabilities persisted, Liberia's strategic alignment with global norms improved its reputation and legitimacy within international institutions. This indicates that even countries with limited resources can reshape their identities by tactically utilizing crises as opportunities for aligning with norms and constructing a positive image.

Key Analysis

As Africa's first democratically elected female president, Sirleaf's personal background lent additional symbolic strength to Liberia's international image. Her leadership became a vital conduit for engaging in global discussions surrounding humanitarian response, post-conflict recovery, and global health governance. This underscores how state identity, particularly in times of crisis, is intricately linked to the public image and communicative choices of national leaders. In this context, Sirleaf acted as a "norm interpretation," helping to internalize global standards through her public messaging and diplomacy. By framing the Ebola crisis as a global humanitarian issue, she repositioned Liberia as a resilient and responsible nation rather than a failing state. This highlights how leadership involves not only decision-making but also the strategic use of narratives to shape perceptions. In evaluating Liberia's Ebola response, the image of Leadership is crucial, linking individual agency with larger social and political structures, demonstrating how Leaders influenced by their normative contexts.

Discussion and Implications

This research reveals that Liberia's response to the Ebola outbreak cannot be understood solely in terms of material capacity. Instead, it highlights how sovereignty, legitimacy, and identity are socially constructed in moments of acute crisis. By foregrounding transparency, cooperation, and responsibility, Liberia performed sovereignty in ways that rebranded it from a fragile post-conflict state to a responsible global actor. Several key implications arise from this analysis:

1. **State-Level Divergence:** Liberia's proactive acceptance of global health norms stands in contrast to other West African countries that initially resisted external assistance (Wilkinson & Fairhead, 2016). This divergence indicates that domestic interpretations, rather than merely institutional weaknesses, drive crisis responses.
2. **Constructivist vs. Capacity-Based Explanations:** While capacity-based explanations highlight dependency and fragility, a constructivist approach illustrates that even materially weak states can exercise agency through discourse and norm entrepreneurship.
3. **AU Governance:** The African Union's role was not only material, through initiatives like ASEOWA, but also symbolic, offering Liberia a platform to express solidarity and accountability. This indicates that the effectiveness of AU governance relies on both material support and ideational legitimacy.
4. **Global Crisis Management:** Fragile states should not be viewed merely as passive recipients of aid; they can also act as norm entrepreneurs, influencing global governance discussions. Liberia's

direct appeals to the UN Security Council exemplify this proactive role.

- 5. Theoretical Contribution:** The case of Liberia supports the constructivist assertion that sovereignty and legitimacy are relational and performative. This challenges the static or purely materialist interpretations of African statehood during periods of crisis.

Conclusion

This study examined how Liberia's response to the 2014-2015 Ebola crisis through a constructivist lens, highlighting how concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy, and international identity were actively constructed during a period of acute vulnerability. By analyzing governmental communications, UN resolutions, media coverage, and international reports, the study demonstrates that Liberia's responses was shaped not only by material constraints and institutional weaknesses but also by a deliberate alignment with global norms and the performance of statehood.

Summary of Findings

Liberia's response to the Ebola outbreak illustrates that fragile states can assert sovereignty and negotiate legitimacy even amid significant international intervention. Key findings include:

1. Liberia framed the Ebola outbreak as both a national and global threat, which facilitated international cooperation while maintaining claims to authority.
2. By aligning its discourse with the expectations of the AU and the UN, Liberia projected responsible statehood and reaffirmed its international identity.
3. The variation in responses among African states is influenced more by how governments interpret and enact sovereignty in relation to external norms than by mere capacity or resources.

Contribution to Theory

This research emphasizes the explanatory power of constructivist approaches in understanding how African states behave during crises. It shows that sovereignty and legitimacy are performative and socially constructed concepts, rather than fixed characteristics determined solely by institutional or material factors. By focusing on ideational processes, this research challenges traditional narratives that depict African states primarily as passive recipients of international aid.

Policy Implications

The findings have important implications for the AU and global crisis governance:

1. International and regional actors much recognize the significant role that ideational and narrative dynamics play when engaging with fragile states.
2. Successful interventions should be sensitive to how states define their sovereignty and legitimacy, rather than relying solely on capacity building or resource allocation.
3. The AU's future crisis management initiatives should leverage discourse, align norms, and enhance local legitimacy to improve effectiveness among its member states.

Directions for Future Research

To gain deeper insights into the varying responses of African states, future research should conduct comparative analyses with other Ebola affected countries, such as Sierra Leone and Guinea. These studies could investigate the interplay of historical legacies, domestic narratives, and the adoption of norms in shaping crisis governance, creating a broader framework for understanding the performance of African states under international scrutiny.

Conclusion

Liberia's response to the Ebola crisis highlights the significance of ideational factors in crisis governance. A Constructivist analysis reveals that even states with limited material resources can assert their sovereignty, negotiate legitimacy, and influence international norms. This offers valuable lessons for both regional and global actors addressing health and security crises.

Conflict of Interest: The author reported no conflict of interest.

Data Availability: All data are included in the content of the paper.

Funding Statement: The author did not obtain any funding for this research.

References:

1. Adebisi, M. A. (2015). Democracy and the crisis of legitimacy: Peace formation and failed state building in Africa. *Developing Studies*, 5(4), 94–102.
<https://www.liste.org/journals/index.php/DCS/article/viewFile/15989/16162>

2. Adler, E. (1997). Seizing the middle ground: Constructivism in world politics. *European Journal of International Relations*, 3(3), 319–363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066197003003003>
3. Andren, R. (2017). The African Union and its behaviour during the Ebola outbreak 2014–2016: Steps towards understanding actorness and effectiveness (Master's thesis, Swedish Defence University). DiVA Portal. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1111601/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
4. African Union. (2016, February 11). African Union support to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA). African Union. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20160211>
5. Baker, A. (2014, November 13). The Iron Lady's ultimate test. *Time*. <https://time.com/3597350/the-iron-ladys-ultimate-test/>
6. BBC News. (2014, October 19). Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf urges world help on Ebola. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-29680934>
7. Biersteker, T. J., & Weber, C. (Eds.). (1996). *State sovereignty as social construct*. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK604972/>
8. Brahm, E. (2004). Sovereignty. In *Beyond intractability*. <https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/sovereignty>
9. Brooks, M. (2015). Ebola goes global: The future of development accountability and media empowerment in Liberia. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ebola-goes-global-the-future-of-development-accountability-and-media-empowerment-in-liberia/>
10. Cakouros, B. E., Gum, J., Levine, D. L., Lewis, J., Wright, A. H., Dahn, B., & Talbert-Slagle, K. (2024). Exploring equity in global health collaborations: A qualitative study of donor and recipient power dynamics in Liberia. *Global Health Action*, 17(1), 1–12. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10946382/>
11. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). Ebola surveillance—Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 65(Suppl. 3), 35–43. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/su/su6503a6.htm>
12. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Liberia Ebola epidemic: Management of epidemic through incident management system (IMS). <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm63e1114a4.htm>
13. Checkel, J. T. (1999). Norms, institutions, and national identity in contemporary Europe. *International Studies Quarterly*, 43(1), 83–114. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2600966>

14. Clapham, C. (1996). *Africa and the international system: The politics of state survival*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://assets.cambridge.org/97805215/72071/sample/9780521572071ws.pdf>
15. Dalberto, G. (2020). *Coloniality and security: Discourses and practices of security sector reforms in Liberia* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade de São Paulo]. USP Theses.
https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8132/tde-04112020-212829/publico/2020_GermanaDalberto_VCorr.pdf
16. Englebert, P., & Tull, D. M. (2008). Post-conflict reconstruction in Africa: Flawed ideas about failed states. *International Security*, 32(4), 106–139. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30129793>
17. Fidler, D. P. (2004). *SARS, governance, and the globalization of disease*. Palgrave Macmillan.
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230006263>
18. Finnemore, M. (2009). *National interests in international society*. Cornell University Press.
<https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9780801483233/national-interests-in-international-society>
19. Harman, S., & Papamichail, A. (2024). *Global health governance*. Routledge.
<https://www.routledge.com/Global-Health-Governance/Harman-Papamichail/p/book/9781138560369>
20. Holm, M., & Sending, O. J. (2018). States before relations: On misrecognition and the bifurcated regime of sovereignty. *Review of International Studies*, 44(5), 829–847.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210518000372>
21. Kamradt-Scott, A. (2015). *Managing global health security: The World Health Organization and disease outbreak control*. Palgrave Macmillan.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274136790_Managing_Global_Health_Security
22. Liberian Embassy in the U.S. (2014). A strong response to the Ebola threat in Liberia: President Sirleaf sets up and heads a task force.
<https://www.liberianembassyus.org/in-the-news/a-strong-response-to-the-ebola-threat-in-liberia-president-sirleaf-sets-up-and-heads-a>
23. Moon, S., Sridhar, D., Pate, M. A., Jha, A. K., Clinton, C., Delaunay, S., & Piot, P. (2015). Will Ebola change the game? Ten essential reforms before the next pandemic: The report of the Harvard-LSHTM independent panel on the global response to Ebola. *The Lancet*, 386(10009), 2204–2221. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)00946-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)00946-0)

24. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). The Ebola epidemic in West Africa: Proceedings of a workshop. The National Academies Press.
<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/23653/the-ebola-epidemic-in-west-africa-proceedings-of-a-workshop>
25. Regenerative Economics. (2024–2025). Origins, legitimacy, and power of states (5.1.2).
<https://www.regenerativeeconomics.earth/regenerative-economics-textbook/5-the-state/5-1-what-is-the-state/5-1-2-origins-legitimacy-and-power-of-states>
26. Rotberg, R. I. (2003). State failure and state weakness in a time of terror. Brookings Institution Press.
<https://assets.cambridge.org/97805215/72071/sample/978052157207>
27. Sending, O. J. (2015). The politics of expertise: Competing for authority in global governance. University of Michigan Press.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292150535_The_Politics_of_Expertise
28. Taylor, R. C. R. (2021). Global governance of pandemics. Global Governance, 27(3), 495–515.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8441821/>
29. Time Magazine. (2014, July 31). Sierra Leone declares health emergency amid Ebola outbreak. Time.
<https://time.com/3063174/ebola-sierra-leone-africa-emergency/>
30. United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER). (n.d.). UN mission for Ebola emergency response.
<https://ebolaresponse.un.org/un-mission-ebola-emergency-response-unmeer>
31. United Nations Security Council. (2014, September 18). With spread of Ebola outpacing response, Security Council adopts resolution 2177 (2014) urging immediate action, end to isolation of affected states (SC/11566). <https://press.un.org/en/2014/sc11566.doc.htm>
32. Wane, E.-G., Williams, P. D., & Kihara-Hunt, A. (2019). The future of peacekeeping: New models and related capabilities [Independent study commissioned by the United Nations Department of Peace Operations]. United Nations.
https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/the_future_of_peacekeeping_new_models_and_related_capabilities_-_nov1.pdf
33. Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics. International Organization, 46(2), 391–425. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027764>
34. Wilkinson, A., & Fairhead, J. (2016). Comparison of social resistance to Ebola response in Sierra Leone and Guinea suggests explanations

- lie in political configurations not culture. *Critical Public Health*, 27(1), 495 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2016.1252034>
35. Williams, P. D. (2013). *Fighting for peace in Somalia*. Oxford University Press. <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/fighting-for-peace-in-somalia-9780198724544>
 36. World Health Organization. (2015). Ebola outbreak in Liberia is over. World Health Organization. <https://www.afro.who.int/news/ebola-outbreak-liberia-over>
 37. World Health Organization. (n.d.). Liberia launches operational plan to accelerate response against Ebola. WHO Africa Regional Office. <https://www.afro.who.int/news/liberia-launches-operational-plan-accelerate-response-against-ebola>
 38. World Health Organization. (2023). Liberia officially closes Ebola virus disease (EVD) survivors men's health screening program. WHO Africa Regional Office. <https://www.afro.who.int/countries/liberia/news/liberia-officially-closes-ebola-virus-disease-evd-survivors-mens-health-screening-program>
 39. World Health Organization. (n.d.). Ebola West Africa, March 2014–2016: Overview. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/situations/ebola-outbreak-2014-2016-West-Africa?utm>
 40. World Health Organization. (n.d.). Liberia: A country and its capital are overwhelmed with Ebola cases. WHO Newsroom. <https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/one-year-into-the-ebola-epidemic/liberia-a-country-and-its-capital-are-overwhelmed-with-ebola-cases>
 41. Oxfam International. (n.d.). Bringing communities on board was key to Liberia's success, says Oxfam. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/bringing-communities-board-was-key-liberias-success-says-oxfam>
 42. Yurtseven, G. (2019). State failure or state formation? Neopatrimonialism and its limitations in Africa. *E-International Relations*. <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/92895?utm>