

**Tom Long (2022). *A small state's guide to influence in world politics*. Oxford University Press. 240pp, Hbk, ISBN: 978-0-19-092620-5. US\$132.00.**

In this book, Tom Long delivers an insightful contribution to the field of International Relations (IR), particularly on the often neglected subject of small states. Through an innovative relational approach, Long offers a fresh perspective on how small states interact with larger powers and carve out influence in the international system. This book proposes a theoretical framework for understanding small states' international behaviour, and then applies this framework to diverse case studies, making it both rigorous and highly applicable to real-world situations.

One of the standout elements of Long's book is its departure from the traditional, structural IR theories that have largely sidelined small states. As Long observes, most IR theories focus on great powers as the key players, often treating small states as passive bystanders or, worse, as geopolitical pawns. *A small state's guide to influence in world politics* rectifies this oversight by placing small states at the centre of analysis. Through this shift in perspective, Long offers a robust counterargument to the long-held belief that small states are peripheral in global politics.

At the heart of Long's argument is his relational theory, which challenges traditional materialist views that define small states by their lack of power. Instead, Long emphasizes that the key to understanding small states lies in their relationships, particularly their asymmetrical relationships with larger states. He argues that influence is not merely a function of material resources but also of the strategic use of those resources within specific relational contexts. This theory provides an invaluable framework for small states to assess and pursue their international goals in an increasingly complex and multipolar global system.

A central strength of this book is the wide-ranging application of this relational theory across a variety of case studies. Long uses examples from regions such as Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe, highlighting how different small states have employed strategies to achieve security, economic gains, and policy influence. From Bhutan's management of its relationship with India to Estonia's balancing act between Russia and NATO, the diversity of examples lends credibility and depth to Long's theoretical approach. This global scope enriches the reader's understanding of small states in IR and invites a valuable comparative analysis across different geopolitical contexts.

One of the book's key ideas is that small states, while constrained by their limited material resources, can nevertheless leverage various forms of power – particularly intrinsic, derivative, and collective – to exert influence. Long identifies strategies such as agenda-setting, problem redefinition, and extraversion as tools that small states can and do use to shape outcomes in their favour, particularly in asymmetrical relationships. This analysis goes beyond the traditional view of small states as either “balancers” or “bandwagoners” in global politics and instead emphasizes the active agency of these states.

Long's approach also underscores the importance of timing, opportunity, and context. Small states must be adept at identifying moments when larger states are distracted or internally divided, thus opening opportunities for influence. His typological theory presented in Chapter 3, which categorizes relational dynamics into types based on the degree of preference, divergence and issue salience, is particularly useful for policymakers seeking to understand which strategies are most likely to succeed in specific contexts.

The chapter on small state security is another highlight of the book. Long provides a nuanced analysis of how small states navigate the global security environment, often finding innovative ways to diversify their security partnerships. The case study of Djibouti, which skillfully played different global powers against one another to enhance its security, stands out as an example of how small states can turn vulnerabilities into strategic advantages.

Another commendable feature of Long's book is its interdisciplinary approach, which incorporates insights from economics, political science, and security studies. This makes the book particularly valuable, to IR scholars as well as to policymakers, diplomats, and anyone involved in small state governance. By integrating diverse fields of study, Long's analysis of small states becomes a more holistic and practical guide for understanding their place in world politics.

Despite its many strengths, *A small state's guide to influence in world politics* does have some limitations. One critique is that, while the book provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing small states, it occasionally lacks detailed engagement with how these states navigate the nuances of domestic politics. Long touches on internal factors, but the focus remains predominantly on external relationships. This can be seen as a missed opportunity to explore how internal political dynamics, public opinion, or domestic institutions might shape a small state's foreign policy decisions and strategies.

Another limitation is that the book's relational approach, though refreshing, tends to downplay the significance of structural forces in the international system. Long's focus on agency and strategy is well-argued, but in some instances, the broader systemic constraints that small states face – such as economic dependency or entrenched geopolitical realities – are not given enough weight. For example, the extent to which small states can rely on normative power or institutional influence in a world increasingly dominated by geopolitical rivalries (e.g., US-China tensions) could have been explored in more depth.

Additionally, while the book's case studies are diverse, they primarily focus on states that have managed to navigate the international system with relative success. It would have been interesting to see more examples of small states that have failed in their attempts to exert influence, as this would have provided a more balanced view of the challenges and risks inherent in Long's proposed strategies.

Long's book is a thought-provoking and well-researched work that challenges traditional views in international relations by emphasizing the active role of small states. Through a combination of theoretical innovation and practical case studies, Long demonstrates how small states can strategically shape their global influence despite material limitations. The book offers significant value to both scholars and practitioners, reshaping our understanding of global power dynamics and the important role small states play in international affairs.

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