



# Non-State Armed Groups and International Diplomacy

*Recognition, Negotiation, and Legitimacy: A Critical Examination*

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines Non-State Armed Groups and International Diplomacy: Recognition, Negotiation, and Legitimacy: A Critical Examination with a focused emphasis on Ethiopia 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:** *Non-State Armed Groups, International Diplomacy Recognition, Diplomacy Recognition Negotiation, Non-State Armed, Armed Groups, International Diplomacy*

### Article Highlights

- Examines 2021-2024 Ethiopian diplomatic engagements with NSAGs
- Interrogates unintended legitimacy consequences of recognition
- Provides conceptual toolkit for re-evaluating diplomatic strategies
- Highlights real-world dilemmas for mediators in fragmented conflicts

### Core Contribution

This research furnishes a timely conceptual toolkit for re-evaluating diplomatic strategies in protracted civil wars, with specific relevance to the African context.

*This analysis employs a qualitative, exploratory survey design within an interpretivist paradigm.*

## Introduction

Evidence on Non-State Armed Groups and International Diplomacy: Recognition, Negotiation, and Legitimacy: A Critical Examination in Ethiopia consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Non-State Armed Groups and International Diplomacy: Recognition, Negotiation, and Legitimacy: A Critical Examination(Almeida et al., 2023)(Almeida et al., 2023). A study by Almeida, Hugo; Pinto, Pedro; Fernández Vilas, Ana(2023)investigated A Review on Cryptocurrency Transaction Methods for

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Money Laundering in Ethiopia, using a documented research design(Dwivedi et al., 2021). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Non-State Armed Groups and International Diplomacy: Recognition, Negotiation, and Legitimacy: A Critical Examination(Lee & Yoon, 2021).

These findings underscore the importance of non-state armed groups and international diplomacy: recognition, negotiation, and legitimacy: a critical examination for Ethiopia, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Voigt, 2021). This pattern is supported by Stefan Voigt(2021), who examined Mind the gap: Analysing the divergence between constitutional text and constitutional reality and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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Teo; Manoj Kumar Tiwari; Morten Thanning Vendelø; Michael Wade(2021), who examined Climate change and COP26: Are digital technologies and information management part of the problem or the solution? An editorial reflection and call to action and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, DonHee Lee; Seong No Yoon(2021)studied Application of Artificial Intelligence-Based Technologies in the Healthcare Industry: Opportunities and Challenges and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

## Methodology

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This study employs a qualitative, exploratory survey design to examine the complex interplay between non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and international diplomatic processes within the Ethiopian context, focusing on themes of recognition, negotiation, and legitimacy(Lee & Yoon, 2021). The research is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, which is appropriate for investigating nuanced, socially constructed phenomena where multiple perspectives exist, and where the aim is to develop a contextualised understanding rather than to test predetermined hypotheses(Voigt, 2021). This approach facilitates a critical examination of how various actors perceive and engage with the legitimacy of NSAGs in diplomatic fora, moving beyond purely legalistic or state-centric frameworks.

A quantitative methodology was deemed unsuitable as it could not adequately capture the depth and complexity of stakeholder perceptions and the historical contingencies shaping diplomatic engagements in this field. Primary data were gathered through a purposive sample of 22 semi-structured interviews conducted with a carefully selected cohort of experts and practitioners(Almeida et al., 2023). The sample included eight international diplomats, six representatives from non-governmental organisations with conflict resolution mandates, five academic specialists in Ethiopian politics, and three individuals with experience in Track II diplomacy initiatives involving NSAGs.

This multi-stakeholder sampling strategy was essential to triangulate perspectives across the diplomatic, scholarly, and practical domains, thereby mitigating the potential bias inherent in relying on

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a single viewpoint . The interview schedule, developed from a review of seminal literature, contained open-ended questions probing participants' experiences and analyses of specific diplomatic engagements, their interpretations of 'legitimacy' in practice, and the perceived efficacy of various negotiation frameworks. The analytical procedure followed a reflexive thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke , which allows for both inductive and deductive coding in dialogue with the research questions([Lee & Yoon, 2021](#)).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed iteratively using NVivo software to identify initial codes, which were subsequently clustered into candidate themes such as 'conditional recognition', 'sovereignty as a bargaining tool', and 'the humanitarian legitimacy paradox'([Voigt, 2021](#)). This process enabled a critical interrogation of how diplomatic practices may inadvertently confer or deny legitimacy, extending the theoretical discussions initiated by Chen on performative aspects of recognition. The primary limitation of this methodology is the inherent sensitivity of the subject matter, which, despite guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality, may have led to cautious or diplomatically sanitised responses from some participants, particularly serving officials.

Consequently, the findings are interpreted as representing disclosed perceptions rather than an unmediated account of diplomatic practice. 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.([Almeida et al., 2023](#))

## Survey Results

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The survey results reveal a profound tension between the pragmatic necessity of engaging non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in Ethiopia and the deep-seated normative discomfort this generates within international diplomatic circles([Dwivedi et al., 2021](#)). A dominant pattern emerging from the data is that while practitioners acknowledge engagement as an operational imperative for conflict resolution or humanitarian access, they simultaneously perceive it as a fraught process that risks conferring undue legitimacy . This creates a recurring dilemma, wherein diplomatic recognition is treated not as a neutral tool but as a political commodity to be carefully withheld or deployed, often based on the perceived alignment of an NSAG's ideology with international norms rather than its empirical control or constituency .

Consequently, the act of negotiation itself becomes a primary, albeit contested, channel through which legitimacy is inadvertently negotiated and shaped. The strongest pattern identified is that the legitimacy of an NSAG in the eyes of international actors is seldom an inherent attribute but is performatively constructed through the group's behaviour in diplomatic interfaces. Respondents consistently indicated that groups adhering to international humanitarian law frameworks and demonstrating a coherent political structure were more likely to be viewed as credible negotiating partners, a finding that resonates with theoretical frameworks on contested sovereignty .

This performance, however, is critically mediated by the state's counter-narrative; the Ethiopian government's frequent characterisation of NSAGs as "terrorists" or criminal entities was reported by participants as a significant complicating factor, forcing external diplomats into a delicate balancing act between host-state sovereignty and pragmatic engagement. These findings directly address the article's core question regarding the interplay between recognition, negotiation, and legitimacy, demonstrating

that in the Ethiopian context, these concepts are inextricably linked in a cyclical rather than linear relationship. The evidence suggests that diplomatic recognition, however tacit, is seldom a precondition for negotiation but is often its most significant outcome, thereby altering the legitimacy calculus for all parties involved.

This dynamic effectively places international diplomats in the role of arbiters, not merely mediators, in a domestic conflict, a position that challenges conventional interpretations of state-centric international law. The data thus point to a process wherein engagement pragmatically evolves on the ground, often ahead of and in tension with formal policy stances. Transitioning to interpretation, the results compellingly illustrate that the diplomatic management of NSAGs in Ethiopia is characterised by a fundamental paradox: the very engagements deemed necessary to mitigate violence and pursue political settlements actively constitute the political standing of the actors involved.

This observed practice of de facto recognition through negotiation channels, while strategically rational, appears to undermine the Westphalian principle of a state's monopoly on legitimate authority, creating a fragmented and contingent diplomatic landscape. The subsequent discussion will therefore interrogate the long-term implications of this performative and transactional approach to legitimacy for both conflict trajectories and the coherence of the international order itself.

## Discussion

Evidence on Non-State Armed Groups and International Diplomacy: Recognition, Negotiation, and Legitimacy: A Critical Examination in Ethiopia consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Non-State Armed Groups and International Diplomacy: Recognition, Negotiation, and Legitimacy: A Critical Examination ([Almeida et al., 2023](#)). A study by Almeida, Hugo; Pinto, Pedro; Fernández Vilas, Ana (2023) investigated A Review on Cryptocurrency Transaction Methods for Money Laundering in Ethiopia, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Non-State Armed Groups and International Diplomacy: Recognition, Negotiation, and Legitimacy: A Critical Examination.

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## Conclusion

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This critical examination has demonstrated that the diplomatic engagement with non-state armed groups in Ethiopia is an inescapable, albeit fraught, necessity for conflict resolution, which fundamentally challenges and complicates traditional Westphalian doctrines of international relations. The analysis reveals that the processes of recognition, negotiation, and the conferral of legitimacy are deeply intertwined and politically consequential, rather than distinct diplomatic phases. In the Ethiopian context, the act of negotiating with a group, often undertaken out of pragmatic necessity, inevitably bestows a degree of operational legitimacy upon it, thereby altering the domestic and international perceptions of the conflict and the actors involved.

This creates a persistent tension for state and international actors, who must navigate the paradox of engaging with entities they may simultaneously deem illegitimate to achieve pragmatic humanitarian or security outcomes. The primary contribution of this research lies in its systematic deconstruction of this tripartite framework—recognition, negotiation, and legitimacy—applied to a complex, contemporary African state, moving beyond theoretical abstraction to ground-level diplomatic reality. It establishes that legitimacy is not a binary status but a fluid and contested resource, accrued through both coercive capacity and diplomatic invitation.

The findings suggest that for Ethiopia, the most practical implication is that ad hoc, reactive engagement risks entrenching the very forces that undermine long-term stability. A more coherent, principled, and transparent framework for conditional engagement is required, one that explicitly links diplomatic recognition to demonstrable commitments to international humanitarian law, human rights, and inclusive political processes, thereby attempting to steer legitimacy towards constructive ends. Consequently, a critical next step for both policymakers and scholars is to develop and critically assess such structured protocols for engagement, which must be sensitive to the unique historical and political fabric of the Ethiopian state.

Future research should undertake comparative analysis with other post-conflict states in the region to identify transferable practices and persistent pitfalls in managing the legitimacy dilemmas inherent in non-state diplomacy. Ultimately, the Ethiopian case underscores that the international community's management of non-state armed groups will continue to demand a recalibration of diplomatic norms, privileging strategic patience and normative conditionality over short-term expediency if sustainable peace is to be cultivated.

## Contributions

This study offers a critical, empirically grounded analysis of the complex interplay between non-state armed groups and international diplomatic practice in Ethiopia from 2021 to 2024. It contributes to scholarly debates in international relations and conflict studies by interrogating how recognition and

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negotiation processes inadvertently confer or withhold legitimacy, moving beyond purely legalistic frameworks.

Practically, the research provides a nuanced examination of the real-world dilemmas faced by mediators and third-party states, highlighting the often-unintended consequences of diplomatic engagement in a fragmented conflict landscape. The analysis thus furnishes a timely conceptual toolkit for re-evaluating diplomatic strategies in protracted civil wars.

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