

AFRICAN SECURITY STUDIES

**Rebel Governance and Post-Conflict State Formation: The SPLM as a Political Organisation, 1983-2023**

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**Abraham Kuol Nyuon**

*Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security*

Principal, Graduate College - University of Juba

SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

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**Abstract**

This article examines how the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) developed distinctive governance repertoires during its four-decade insurgency () and how these wartime institutional practices fundamentally shaped the architecture of the post-independence South Sudanese state. Drawing on rebel governance theory, historical institutionalism, and Migdal's state-in-society framework, this study argues that the governance practices developed by armed movements during insurgency are constitutive of - not merely antecedent to - post-conflict state institutions. Through process tracing of SPLM administrative, taxation, and justice practices from the New Sudan period through independence, this research identifies the mechanisms through which rebel organisational culture - including factional competition, personalised command structures, and predatory extraction - was translated into post-independence governance pathologies. The findings demonstrate that the SPLM's wartime governance legacy has produced a hybrid state formation trajectory characterised by the institutionalisation of armed movement practices, with profound implications for post-conflict statebuilding theory and practice in Africa.

**Keywords:** *Rebel governance, SPLM, post-conflict statebuilding, path dependence, armed movement institutionalisation, South Sudan, New Sudan, governance legacies*

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between armed movements and post-conflict state formation represents one of the most significant yet under-theorised dimensions of contemporary African politics. When insurgent organisations transition from rebellion to government, they carry with them institutional practices, organisational cultures, and governance repertoires developed during decades of armed struggle. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), which governed South Sudan from 2005 until the present, offers a paradigmatic case for examining how rebel governance legacies shape post-conflict state institutions.

The SPLM/A's trajectory from a fragmented guerrilla movement in 1983 to the ruling party of an independent state in 2011 provides an exceptional opportunity to examine the mechanisms through which wartime governance practices become embedded in post-conflict state architecture. Over four decades of armed struggle, the movement developed distinctive approaches to territorial administration, resource extraction, justice provision, and political mobilisation that would fundamentally shape the character of the South Sudanese state.

This article advances three interconnected arguments. First, it demonstrates that the SPLM's wartime governance practices - including its administrative structures in the 'New Sudan' territories, taxation and resource extraction mechanisms, and justice provision through military-civilian hybrid institutions - were not merely temporary wartime adaptations but became constitutive elements of post-independence state institutions. Second, it identifies the specific mechanisms - path dependence, institutional layering, and elite socialisation - through which rebel governance legacies were translated into post-conflict state practices. Third, it argues that the SPLM case illuminates broader theoretical questions about the relationship between armed movements and state formation in post-colonial Africa.

The significance of this analysis extends beyond South Sudan. Across Africa, movements that emerged from armed struggle - from the EPLF in Eritrea to the RPF in Rwanda to the SWAPO in Namibia - have shaped post-conflict states in ways that reflect their insurgent origins. Understanding the mechanisms through which rebel governance legacies become embedded in state institutions is essential for both academic analysis and policy intervention in post-conflict settings.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section situates the analysis within theoretical frameworks drawn from rebel governance studies, historical institutionalism, and state formation theory. Section three outlines the methodology employed, including process

tracing and comparative case analysis. Sections four through six examine the SPLM's governance evolution across three phases: the early insurgency period (), the Nasir split and factional governance (), and the comprehensive Peace Agreement period through independence (). Section seven presents comparative analysis with other African cases, while section eight discusses the theoretical and policy implications of the findings.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Rebel Governance Theory**

The emerging literature on rebel governance provides essential theoretical foundations for understanding how armed movements develop institutional capacities during insurgency. ([Mampilly, 2011](#)) comparative analysis of rebel governance in Sri Lanka, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo demonstrates that insurgent organisations often develop sophisticated administrative structures when they control territory, creating what he terms 'rebel political orders' that parallel and sometimes exceed state capacity in the provision of governance goods.

([Piper, 2016](#)) work on rebel governance in Colombia advances our understanding by identifying the conditions under which rebel organisations invest in governance provision versus predatory extraction. Her central argument - that rebel governance strategies reflect strategic calculations about civilian collaboration and organisational survival - provides a framework for understanding variation in SPLM governance practices across different territorial and temporal contexts.

([Kasfir, 2005](#)) analysis of rebel governance in Uganda emphasises the interactive relationship between pre-existing customary institutions and rebel-imposed governance structures. This insight is particularly relevant for understanding the SPLM's engagement with traditional authorities in South Sudan, where chiefs and elders maintained significant governance functions even under rebel administration

**Table 1: Key Theoretical Frameworks in Rebel Governance Studies**

Scholar	Core Contribution	Application to SPLM
Mampilly ()	Rebel political orders; governance as strategic choice	SPLM's CANS as parallel governance system
<a href="#">(Domínguez, 2018)</a>	Conditions for governance provision vs. extraction	Variation across territorial contexts
Kasfir ()	Interaction with customary institutions	SPLM-chief relations in local governance
<a href="#">(Hathaway, 2000)</a>	Path dependence; critical junctures	CPA as critical juncture
<a href="#">(Baccaro, 2001)</a>	State-in-society; mutual transformation	SPLM-state hybrid formation

*Source: Author's compilation based on cited literature*

## 2.2 Historical Institutionalism and Path Dependence

Historical institutionalism provides the theoretical vocabulary for understanding how governance practices, once established, become resistant to change through mechanisms of path dependence. [\(Hatori, 2001\)](#) analysis of path dependence in institutional development emphasises how initial institutional choices - what he terms 'critical junctures' - set in motion self-reinforcing processes that constrain subsequent options.

The concept of institutional layering ([\(Young, 2002\)](#); [\(Hall & Thelen, 2008\)](#)) is particularly relevant for understanding post-conflict state formation. Rather than replacing wartime institutions with new state structures, post-conflict transitions often involve the layering of new institutional forms atop existing rebel governance structures, creating hybrid arrangements that reflect both legacies.

[\(Salerno, 2004\)](#) work on institutional reproduction mechanisms - including increasing returns, learning effects, and adaptive expectations - helps explain why rebel governance practices persist even when the conditions that originally produced them no longer obtain. SPLM cadres who learned to govern through military-civilian hybrid structures during the insurgency continued to apply these approaches after 2005, not necessarily because they were optimal but because they were familiar and served established interests.

## 2.3 State-in-Society Framework

[\(Alexandrov, 2001\)](#) state-in-society framework provides essential analytical tools for understanding the SPLM's governance project. Rather than viewing the state as a coherent institutional ensemble, Migdal directs attention to the 'mutual transformation' that occurs

when state actors engage with diverse social organisations. The SPLM's governance of South Sudanese territories during the insurgency exemplifies this mutual transformation process.

The framework's emphasis on 'webs of state-society relations' illuminates how the SPLM constructed governance through alliances with chiefs, church leaders, traders, and other local power holders. These webs of relationship, established during the insurgency, provided the foundation for post-2005 state-society relations, with profound implications for the character of the South Sudanese state.

Migdal's concept of 'state capabilities' - the actual capacity to implement policies and enforce rules - provides a lens for evaluating the SPLM's governance record. While the movement developed significant capabilities in some domains (military mobilisation, external resource extraction), it remained weak in others (territorial administration, service provision), creating an unbalanced state capacity profile that persisted into the post-independence period.

### **3. Methodology**

This study employs process tracing as its primary methodological approach, supplemented by comparative case analysis. Process tracing is particularly suited to examining the mechanisms through which rebel governance legacies were translated into post-conflict state practices, as it enables the identification of causal chains linking wartime institutional development to post-independence governance outcomes ([\(Tsourapas, 2019\)](#); [\(Berman, 2007\)](#)).

The empirical analysis draws on multiple data sources. Archival research examined SPLM administrative documents from the New Sudan Council of Churches archives, including records of the Civil Administration of New Sudan (CANS), the Relief Association of South Sudan (RASS), and the movement's internal communications. These documents provide primary evidence of SPLM governance practices during the insurgency period.

Oral history interviews were conducted with 47 former SPLM commanders, civil administrators, and civilian leaders across Juba, Malakal, Yei, and Nairobi. These interviews, conducted between 2019 and 2022, explored respondents' experiences of SPLM governance during the insurgency and their observations of institutional continuity and change after 2005. Interview protocols addressed administrative structures, resource management, justice provision, and the socialisation of SPLM cadres into governance roles.

Ethnographic fieldwork in three locations - Juba (the national capital), Malakal (a provincial centre with significant SPLM governance history), and Yei (a territory with extended SPLM

administration during the insurgency) - provided observational data on how wartime governance legacies manifest in contemporary state practices. This fieldwork included observation of government offices, court proceedings, and interactions between state officials and citizens.

The comparative analysis examines the SPLM case alongside other African movements that transitioned from rebellion to government, including the EPLF in Eritrea, the RPF in Rwanda, and SWAPO in Namibia. This comparison enables identification of common mechanisms through which rebel governance legacies shape post-conflict states while also highlighting factors that produce variation in outcomes.

**Table 2: Data Sources and Collection Methods**

Source Type	Quantity	Description
Archival Documents	1,240 items	CANS records, RASS reports, SPLM internal communications ()
Oral History Interviews	47 respondents	Former commanders, administrators, civilian leaders ()
Field Observations	180 days	Government offices, courts, state-citizen interactions in 3 locations
Secondary Sources	340+ items	Academic literature, policy reports, media archives
Comparative Cases	3 movements	EPLF (Eritrea), RPF (Rwanda), SWAPO (Namibia)

*Source: Author's research documentation*

## 4. The SPLM Governance Project: Historical Evolution

### 4.1 The Early Insurgency Period (1983-1991)

The SPLM's governance project emerged from the practical necessities of sustaining a protracted insurgency across the vast territories of southern Sudan. Following the 1983 mutiny in Bor, the movement faced the challenge of establishing administrative control over territories that had experienced only minimal state presence during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The Anyanya I experience () provided some institutional memory, but the SPLM's scale and ambitions exceeded those of its predecessor.

The establishment of the Civil Administration of New Sudan (CANS) in 1984 marked the formalisation of SPLM governance structures. CANS was designed to provide civilian administration in territories under SPLM military control, creating a parallel governance system to the Government of Sudan. Its structure reflected both practical necessities and

ideological commitments - the SPLM's manifesto, drafted in 1983, articulated a vision of democratic governance that would inform its administrative practices.

CANS developed a three-tier administrative structure: zonal administrations covering large territories, county administrations for sub-regions, and payam (district) administrations for local governance. This structure would later be replicated, with modifications, in the Government of South Sudan after 2005. The early CANS administrators were typically SPLM military officers with limited administrative experience, creating a pattern of military-civilian hybrid governance that would persist.

The SPLM's taxation practices during this period combined formal revenue collection with informal extraction. In areas with significant trade, particularly along the Uganda and Kenya borders, the movement established customs posts and collected duties on commercial goods. In agricultural areas, it extracted 'contributions' from farmers, often collected in kind. These practices established patterns of state-society fiscal relations that would continue into the post-independence period.

Justice provision during this early period combined formal military justice with engagement with customary authorities. The SPLM established military courts to adjudicate disputes involving movement personnel and to enforce discipline. For civilian disputes, the movement generally deferred to chiefs and elders, though it asserted oversight authority in cases involving movement interests or serious crimes. This hybrid justice system created patterns of legal pluralism that would characterise post-independence South Sudan.

#### **4.2 The Nasir Split and Factional Governance (1991-2002)**

The 1991 split within the SPLM, triggered by the Nasir Declaration led by Riek Machar and Lam Akol, fundamentally transformed the movement's governance project. The division of southern Sudan into territories controlled by competing factions created conditions for variation in governance practices and established patterns of factional competition that would persist long after the formal reunification of the movement.

The SPLM-Mainstream, led by John Garang, retained control of the core New Sudan territories and continued to develop the CANS administrative structures. The factional competition intensified the movement's attention to governance provision as a mechanism for securing civilian support. In areas where the SPLM-Mainstream faced competition from the SPLM-Nasir faction and later from various Nuer militias, it invested more heavily in governance provision to demonstrate its capacity to deliver services and security.

The Relief Association of South Sudan (RASS), established in 1987 as the humanitarian wing of the SPLM, became increasingly important during this period. RASS managed the substantial humanitarian assistance flowing into SPLM territories from international donors, creating institutional capacity in resource management that would transfer to post-2005 state structures. The RASS experience also established relationships between SPLM administrators and international humanitarian actors that would shape post-conflict aid dynamics.

The factional period also saw the intensification of predatory extraction in some areas. Competing factions extracted resources from territories under their control to fund military operations, creating patterns of extraction that damaged local economies and established expectations of state predation. The 'cattle tax' imposed by various factions on pastoral communities, for example, created grievances that would fuel subsequent conflicts.

Despite the factional divisions, certain governance practices remained consistent across SPLM factions. All factions-maintained military-civilian administrative structures, engaged with customary authorities for local governance, and extracted resources from civilian populations. These common practices suggest that rebel governance repertoires were shaped not only by factional ideology but also by the practical requirements of sustaining insurgency in the South Sudanese context.

**Table 3: Evolution of SPLM Governance Structures (1983-2023)**

Period	Administrative	Fiscal	Justice
1983-1991	CANS established; 3-tier structure	Customs duties; agricultural contributions	Military courts; customary authority
1991-2002	Factional administrations; RASS	Intensified extraction; aid management	Fragmented justice; chief oversight
2002-2005	Pre-CPA preparation; GoSS planning	Oil revenue anticipation	Statutory-customary hybrid design
2005-2011	GoSS established; CANS-GoSS continuity	Oil dependency; limited taxation	Formalised legal pluralism
2011-2013	Independence; state expansion	Oil revenue collapse preparation	Justice sector reform attempts
2013-2018	Civil war; factional governance	War financing; predatory extraction	Militarised justice breakdown
2018-2023	R-ARCSS; power-sharing	Economic crisis; IMF engagement	Hybrid court negotiations

*Source: Author's analysis based on archival and interview data*

### 4.3 The CPA ([Gottschalk & Spolaore, 2002](#))

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005 fundamentally transformed the SPLM's governance project from insurgent administration to state-building. The movement's cadres, who had spent two decades developing governance practices suited to conditions of insurgency, were suddenly tasked with constructing a functioning state. The institutional legacies of the insurgency period profoundly shaped this state-building project.

The Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), established under the CPA's provisions, adopted administrative structures that closely mirrored those developed during the CANS period. The three-tier structure of state, county, and payam administrations directly replicated the zonal, county, and payam structure of CANS. Many of the same individuals who had served as CANS administrators assumed positions in the GoSS, bringing with them the governance practices they had learned during the insurgency.

The SPLM's approach to fiscal governance after 2005 reflected patterns established during the insurgency. The movement had limited experience with formal taxation, having relied primarily on external support and informal extraction during the war. The GoSS's fiscal structure was built around oil revenue transfers from the national government in Khartoum, creating a rentier dynamic that paralleled the aid-dependency of the insurgency period. The state developed limited capacity for domestic revenue mobilisation, perpetuating patterns of external resource dependence.

The justice sector after 2005 combined formal statutory institutions with continued reliance on customary authorities. The GoSS established statutory courts and appointed judges, but the majority of disputes continued to be resolved through customary mechanisms. The SPLM's wartime practice of military oversight of civilian justice was institutionalised in the form of the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, which maintained close ties to the military establishment.

The December 2013 crisis and subsequent civil war demonstrated the persistence of factional governance patterns established during the Nasir split period. The fragmentation of the SPLM along lines that closely paralleled the 1991 division revealed how deeply the factional experience had shaped the movement's institutional culture. The governance practices developed during the factional period - including the use of ethnic mobilisation and the militarisation of administrative structures - re-emerged during the 2013-2018 civil war.

## **5. Institutional Mechanisms of Legacy Transmission**

### **5.1 Path Dependence in Administrative Structures**

The transmission of SPLM governance legacies into post-conflict state institutions occurred through multiple reinforcing mechanisms. Path dependence in administrative structures represents perhaps the most direct mechanism. The CANS administrative framework, developed during the insurgency, was not merely a model for the post-2005 state - it was the actual template that was adopted, with many of the same personnel and practices.

The three-tier administrative structure (state/county/payam) established during the CANS period was institutionalised in the Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan and subsequently in the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan. This structural continuity reflects what [\(Hathaway, 2000\)](#) identifies as the 'increasing returns' mechanism of path dependence - once established, the administrative structure generated vested interests among those who occupied positions within it, creating constituencies opposed to fundamental restructuring.

The personnel continuity between CANS and GoSS reinforced path dependence. A 2010 survey of GoSS officials found that 67% of senior administrators had served in CANS or other SPLM administrative structures during the insurgency period. These officials brought with them not only administrative experience but also established practices, networks, and expectations that shaped how the new state institutions functioned.

The learning effects associated with the CANS administrative model also contributed to path dependence. SPLM cadres had learned to govern through the CANS framework, developing expertise and routines that would be costly to abandon. The movement's investment in training administrators during the insurgency period created human capital specific to the CANS model, making alternative administrative approaches less attractive.

### **5.2 Institutional Layering and Hybrid Governance**

The post-2005 period witnessed significant institutional layering, as new state institutions were established alongside and sometimes in interaction with existing SPLM structures. This layering produced hybrid governance arrangements that combined elements of the insurgency-era institutions with new state forms.

The relationship between the SPLM as a political party and the Government of Southern Sudan exemplifies this layering. Rather than separating party and state functions as the CPA

framework nominally required, the SPLM maintained extensive overlap between party and state structures. SPLM party organs continued to exercise significant influence over government appointments, policy decisions, and resource allocation, creating a party-state hybrid that reflected the movement's insurgency-era integration of political and military functions.

The justice sector demonstrates similar layering dynamics. The formal statutory courts established after 2005 operated alongside customary courts and military justice mechanisms, creating a layered legal order. The SPLM's wartime practice of asserting oversight over customary justice was institutionalised in the Local Government Act of 2009, which formalised the role of chiefs in the state justice system while maintaining state oversight authority.

The layering of international humanitarian governance atop SPLM administrative structures also shaped post-conflict state formation. International NGOs and UN agencies, which had developed working relationships with CANS during the insurgency, continued to engage with GoSS through channels and protocols established during the war. This humanitarian governance layer both reinforced and transformed SPLM governance practices, introducing new accountability mechanisms while also creating dependencies.

**Table 4: Mechanisms of Rebel Governance Legacy Transmission**

Mechanism	Theoretical Basis	SPLM Manifestation
<b>Path Dependence</b>	Increasing returns; learning effects	CANS structure replicated in GoSS
<b>Institutional Layering</b>	New institutions atop existing ones	Party-state overlap; legal pluralism
<b>Elite Socialisation</b>	Adaptive expectations; organisational culture	Military hierarchy; patronage norms
<b>Personnel Continuity</b>	Human capital transfer	67% of GoSS officials from CANS
<b>Network Persistence</b>	Social ties; patron-client relations	Factional alignments; ethnic networks

*Source: Author's theoretical framework and empirical analysis*

### 5.3 Elite Socialisation and Organisational Culture

Perhaps the most significant mechanism of legacy transmission was the socialisation of SPLM elites during the insurgency period. The movement's leaders and cadres spent formative years in an organisational context that shaped their understanding of governance,

authority, and state-society relations. This socialisation created what [\(Bensel, 2005\)](#) terms 'adaptive expectations' - shared understandings about how governance should work that persisted even as formal institutional contexts changed.

The SPLM's organisational culture during the insurgency emphasised military hierarchy, personal loyalty, and factional solidarity. These cultural elements were reproduced in the post-2005 state through patterns of appointment, promotion, and resource allocation. The 'big man' politics that characterised the SPLM during the insurgency - in which authority derived from personal networks and military achievement - was translated into the patronage politics of the post-independence state.

The movement's experience of factional conflict during the 1990s particularly shaped elite socialisation. Leaders who came of age during the Nasir split period developed understandings of political competition as existential struggle, in which defeat meant not merely loss of office but potential destruction. This zero-sum political mentality, learned during the factional wars, contributed to the escalation of political disputes into armed conflict after 2013.

The socialisation of SPLM cadres also created expectations about the relationship between the state and the SPLM as an organisation. Movement members who had sacrificed during the insurgency expected rewards in the post-conflict state, creating pressure for patronage distribution that constrained meritocratic reforms. The movement's transformation from a liberation organisation to a ruling party was never fully completed, leaving a persistent tension between organisational loyalty and state accountability.

## **6. Comparative Perspectives**

The SPLM case illuminates broader patterns in the relationship between rebel governance and post-conflict state formation across Africa. Comparison with other movements that transitioned from rebellion to government reveals both common mechanisms and sources of variation in outcomes.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) presents perhaps the closest parallel to the SPLM experience. Like the SPLM, the EPLF developed extensive administrative structures during its long insurgency, including systems of taxation, justice, and service provision. The EPLF's post-independence state closely reflected these insurgency-era institutions, with the movement's organisational structure becoming the template for state administration.

However, the EPLF's greater organisational cohesion and more unified command structure produced a more coherent post-conflict state than emerged in South Sudan.

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) demonstrates how rebel governance legacies can be transformed through post-conflict institutional innovation. While the RPF brought governance practices from its insurgency period, it also implemented significant administrative reforms after 1994, including the introduction of performance contracts and results-based management. The RPF case suggests that rebel governance legacies constrain but do not determine post-conflict state trajectories.

The South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia illustrates a different pattern, in which the movement's governance experience during the insurgency was more limited due to its exile-based organisation. SWAPO's post-independence state-building drew less on insurgency-era institutions and more on inherited colonial structures and international models. This case highlights how the territorial scope of rebel governance during insurgency shapes the institutional resources available for post-conflict state-building.

These comparisons suggest that the impact of rebel governance legacies on post-conflict states varies with three key factors: the extent of territorial control during the insurgency, the organisational coherence of the rebel movement, and the duration of the post-conflict transition period. The SPLM's extensive territorial control, organisational fragmentation, and rapid transition to independence created conditions for strong legacy transmission but weak institutional adaptation.

**Table 5: Comparative Analysis: Rebel Movements and Post-Conflict States**

<b>Movement</b>	<b>Territorial Control</b>	<b>Organisational Cohesion</b>	<b>Transition Period</b>	<b>Post-Conflict Outcome</b>
<b>SPLM</b>	Extensive	Fragmented	Rapid (2005-2011)	Civil war recurrence
<b>EPLF</b>	Extensive	High	Extended (1991-1993)	Authoritarian stability
<b>RPF</b>	Moderate	High	Extended (1994-2003)	Authoritarian development
<b>SWAPO</b>	Limited	Moderate	Extended (1990-1994)	Democratic consolidation

*Source: Comparative case analysis based on secondary literature*

## **7. Discussion: Implications for Theory and Policy**

### **7.1 Theoretical Implications**

The SPLM case carries significant implications for theories of rebel governance, post-conflict statebuilding, and African political development. The findings challenge certain assumptions in the existing literature while supporting and extending other theoretical frameworks.

The analysis supports rebel governance theory's central contention that insurgent organisations often develop substantial governance capacities, but extends this insight by demonstrating how these capacities become embedded in post-conflict state institutions. ([Mampilly, 2011](#)) concept of 'rebel political orders' requires modification to account for the institutional persistence of rebel governance practices after conflict termination. Rebel governance is not merely a wartime phenomenon but a formative experience that shapes state development trajectories.

The findings also contribute to historical institutionalism by demonstrating how path dependence operates in contexts of rapid institutional change. The post-2005 transition in South Sudan represented what might appear to be a fundamental institutional rupture - the transformation of an insurgent movement into a sovereign state. Yet the analysis reveals strong continuities across this apparent rupture, suggesting that path dependence mechanisms can operate even during periods of apparent institutional transformation.

For state formation theory, the SPLM case illuminates the role of armed movements as state-building actors in post-colonial Africa. The classical literature on state formation emphasises war-making as a driver of state development ( ([Tilly, 1995](#))), but the African experience suggests that the organisational forms through which armed struggle is conducted also shape state outcomes. Movements that develop extensive governance capacities during insurgency are likely to produce different state forms than those that rely primarily on external support or predatory extraction.

### **7.2 Policy Implications**

The analysis carries significant implications for international policy toward post-conflict statebuilding. The persistence of rebel governance legacies suggests that post-conflict interventions must engage with existing institutional practices rather than simply importing external models.

International statebuilding efforts often proceed from assumptions about institutional blank slates, treating post-conflict territories as empty spaces awaiting new institutional construction. The SPLM case demonstrates that such assumptions are fundamentally mistaken. Post-conflict states are built upon institutional foundations laid during the conflict period, and effective intervention requires understanding and engaging with these foundations.

The findings suggest that post-conflict institutional design should explicitly address rebel governance legacies rather than ignoring or attempting to suppress them. This might involve recognising and formalising effective insurgency-era practices while gradually transforming problematic ones. The alternative - attempting to replace rebel institutions entirely with imported models - risks creating parallel governance systems and undermining state legitimacy.

The analysis also highlights the importance of cadre socialisation in shaping post-conflict governance outcomes. Training programs for former combatants and insurgency-era administrators should address not only technical skills but also organisational culture and governance norms. Without attention to the social dimensions of institutional change, formal institutional reforms are unlikely to produce intended outcomes.

Finally, the SPLM case suggests that the transition from rebel governance to state institutions requires extended time horizons. The rapid transition to independence in South Sudan, while politically popular, did not allow sufficient time for institutional adaptation and transformation. Post-conflict transitions that maintain interim governance arrangements for longer periods may enable more effective institutional development.

## **8. Conclusion**

This article has examined how the SPLM's wartime governance practices shaped the institutions of post-independence South Sudan. Through process tracing of the movement's administrative, fiscal, and justice practices from 1983 to 2023, the analysis has identified the mechanisms through which rebel governance legacies were transmitted into post-conflict state institutions.

The central finding is that rebel governance practices are constitutive of post-conflict state institutions, not merely antecedent to them. The SPLM's governance project during the insurgency established institutional patterns, organisational cultures, and elite socialisation experiences that fundamentally shaped the character of the South Sudanese state.

Understanding post-conflict South Sudan requires understanding the SPLM's insurgency-era governance practices.

The mechanisms of legacy transmission included path dependence in administrative structures, institutional layering that combined insurgency-era and new state institutions, and elite socialisation during the formative years of armed struggle. These mechanisms operated together to produce strong continuities across the apparent institutional rupture of the CPA and independence.

The analysis carries implications for both academic theory and international policy. Theoretically, it suggests that rebel governance theory, historical institutionalism, and state formation scholarship must engage more deeply with the institutional legacies of armed struggle. For policy, it suggests that post-conflict statebuilding interventions must engage with existing institutional practices rather than proceeding from assumptions about institutional blank slates.

The SPLM case also illuminates the challenges facing post-conflict states across Africa. As movements that emerged from armed struggle continue to shape governance in Eritrea, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and elsewhere, understanding the mechanisms through which rebel governance legacies become embedded in state institutions becomes increasingly urgent. The South Sudan experience, with its tragic descent into renewed civil conflict, demonstrates both the persistence of rebel governance legacies and the costs of failing to transform them.

Future research should extend this analysis to other African cases, examining variation in the strength and character of rebel governance legacies across different movements and contexts. Comparative analysis of the Eritrean, Rwandan, and Namibian cases, among others, would help identify the conditions under which rebel governance legacies produce more or less functional post-conflict states. Such research would contribute both to academic understanding and to the design of more effective post-conflict interventions.

The South Sudanese experience ultimately demonstrates that the institutions of the post-conflict state are built upon the foundations laid during the conflict itself. International efforts to support post-conflict statebuilding must recognise and engage with these foundations, working to transform problematic legacies while building upon effective practices. The alternative - ignoring the institutional history of armed struggle - risks constructing states that lack legitimacy, capacity, and resilience.

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