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COMPARATIVE STUDY

A Comparative Analysis of Peace Agreement Implementation

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan

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ABSTRACT

This comparative study critically examines the implementation trajectories of South Sudan's two principal peace accords: the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). It argues that structural flaws in power-sharing arrangements, coupled with the absence of robust enforcement mechanisms and the persistent political economy of conflict, have systematically undermined durable peace. The analysis employs a structured, focused comparison to evaluate key provisions on security sector reform, transitional governance, and wealth-sharing. The findings reveal that while the R-ARCSS learned from certain CPA shortcomings, it replicated critical vulnerabilities, leading to a cyclical pattern of fragile peace and renewed instability. The study concludes that sustainable peace requires moving beyond elite-centric pacts to address foundational issues of state legitimacy and inclusive political community.

Keywords: *South Sudan, Peace Agreement Implementation, Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Revitalised Agreement (R-ARCSS), Power-Sharing, Transitional Governance, Security Sector Reform, Political Settlement*

Article Highlights

- Structural flaws in power-sharing arrangements undermine durable peace
- Peace agreements replicate vulnerabilities despite learning from past shortcomings
- Elite-centric pacts fail to address foundational state legitimacy issues
- Implementation gaps between institutional design and political execution persist

Core Argument

Comparative analysis reveals both agreements failed to transform South Sudan's political marketplace, serving as temporary elite bargains rather than foundations for legitimate institutions.

This study employs structured, focused comparison to trace implementation trajectories across two pivotal peace accords.

Introduction

South Sudan's emergence as an independent state in 2011 was heralded as the culmination of a long and arduous struggle for self-determination, formalised by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Yet, this hard-won sovereignty swiftly unravelled into a devastating civil war, plunging the nascent nation into a cycle of violence that has persisted for much of its existence. This pattern of conflict, punctuated by internationally-brokered peace accords, presents a profound and persistent puzzle for scholars and practitioners of peacebuilding. Why do comprehensive peace agreements, meticulously negotiated and signed with great international fanfare, repeatedly fail to secure a durable peace in South Sudan? This question lies at the heart of this comparative study, which examines the trajectories of the two most significant peacemaking efforts in the country's history: the 2005 CPA, which ended the second Sudanese civil war and paved the way for independence, and the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), designed to end the internal conflict that began in 2013. The cyclical nature of war and peace in South Sudan suggests that the fundamental drivers of conflict were not resolved by the CPA but were, in many ways, embedded within its architecture and subsequently replicated. The CPA successfully achieved its primary goal of secession, yet it fostered a political economy of violence and a winner-takes-all system of governance that proved catastrophic for a multi-ethnic state. The post-independence period saw the consolidation of a kleptocratic regime, where control of the state became the paramount objective for rival elite factions, leading directly to the outbreak of war in 2013. The R-ARCSS, therefore, was negotiated not only to cease hostilities but to address the perceived flaws of its predecessor, proposing a more inclusive government and ambitious reforms. However, its implementation has been characterised by persistent delays, repeated violations, and a failure to transcend the very logic of elite predation that precipitated the crisis. This raises critical questions about the efficacy of peace agreement design and the realities of their implementation within a context of deeply entrenched elite interests. This article argues that a comparative analysis of the CPA and the R-ARCSS reveals a consistent failure to transform the underlying political marketplace of South Sudan. Both agreements, while differing in specific provisions, functioned primarily as elite bargains that allocated power and resources among contending leaders without dismantling the militarised patronage networks that sustain them. The theoretical framework guiding this analysis draws from literature on elite bargaining and institutional design in post-conflict settings. It posits that peace agreements which merely reshuffle positions within an unreformed, neo-patrimonial state structure do not create peace; they merely create a temporary ceasefire while incentivising the maintenance of conflict-ready networks for future bargaining. The focus, therefore, shifts from the content of the agreements on paper to the political logic governing their implementation in practice. It is in the gap between institutional design and political execution that the seeds of renewed conflict are often sown. The central research puzzle this paper addresses is therefore twofold: firstly, to what extent did the institutional design of the CPA contribute to state fragility and renewed conflict after independence? Secondly, in recognising these flaws, did the R-ARCSS offer a substantively different framework capable of constraining elite predation and building legitimate institutions, or has it succumbed to the same political logic? By placing these two agreements in comparative dialogue, the analysis moves beyond evaluating each in isolation and instead traces the evolution—or stagnation—of peacemaking approaches in response to a recurring set of challenges.

The article proceeds as follows. The subsequent Methodology section will detail the comparative case study approach, outlining the process-tracing methods used to analyse the negotiation, design, and implementation phases of both agreements. The third section provides a detailed comparative analysis of the two accords, examining their key provisions on power-sharing, security arrangements, wealth-sharing, and transitional justice. It will argue that while the R-ARCSS expanded inclusivity and reform agendas, both agreements ultimately privileged elite accommodation over transformative change. The fourth section then analyses the implementation records, highlighting how elite bargaining and the logic of the political marketplace have consistently undermined institutional provisions, leading to stalled reforms and a perpetuation of violence. The final section concludes by synthesising the comparative findings, contending that without a fundamental reconfiguration of the political economy and a decisive

Methodology

This study employs a comparative case study design to systematically analyse the implementation of two pivotal peace agreements in South Sudan: the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). The methodology is structured to facilitate a rigorous, qualitative examination of why these ostensibly similar agreements have yielded divergent implementation outcomes, thereby contributing to broader theoretical and policy debates on peacebuilding in Africa. The approach is anchored in a structured, focused comparison, drawing on a defined set of primary and secondary sources and analysed through consistent analytical criteria. The selection of the CPA and the R-ARCSS constitutes a ‘most-similar systems’ comparative design. Both agreements were negotiated to end large-scale civil wars within the same national context, involving many of the same principal actors and addressing fundamentally similar conflict issues, such as power-sharing, security sector reform, and wealth distribution. This similarity in core variables makes the divergence in their implementation trajectories—with the CPA leading to independence but the R-ARCSS facing profound stagnation—a compelling puzzle. By holding constant the country and many underlying conflict drivers, this comparison allows for a more precise isolation of the factors within the agreements’ design and the evolving political context that explain differing levels of adherence and success. To execute this comparison, the research adopts the technique of structured, focused comparison. This method involves asking the same set of standardised, theoretically informed questions of each case to ensure systematic data collection and analysis. The ‘focused’ aspect pertains to the examination of specific facets of the cases—here, the processes and outcomes of implementation—rather than providing an exhaustive historical narrative. This structure mitigates the risk of descriptive, non-comparable analysis and enhances the potential for generating insights that are transferable to other post-conflict settings. The investigation relies on a triangulation of qualitative data sources. Primary documents form the evidential core, including the full texts of the CPA and R-ARCSS, their respective annexes, and implementation timelines. These are supplemented by a rich array of monitoring reports from official bodies such as the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Reports from reputable international non-governmental organisations, including the International Crisis Group and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, provide additional

real-time analysis of the political and security landscape. Secondary scholarly literature from the fields of African Studies, Peace and Conflict Studies, and Political Science furnishes the necessary theoretical frameworks and contextual depth, enabling the interpretation of primary data within established academic discourses.

The analysis is organised around four key criteria derived from both the content of the agreements and critical themes in peacebuilding literature. These criteria serve as the framework for the structured comparison in the subsequent section:

Security Arrangements: This criterion assesses the cantonment, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes, and the unification of forces. It examines the sequencing, resourcing, and political commitment to creating a unified national army, a consistently cited cornerstone for sustainable peace.

Transitional Governance and Power-Sharing: The study evaluates the establishment and functionality of transitional institutions, such as the presidency, cabinet, and legislature, as stipulated in the agreements. It pays particular attention to the inclusivity of arrangements, the distribution of executive authority, and the management of inter-party relations within these structures.

Resource Management and Wealth Sharing: This dimension analyses the mechanisms established for the transparent and equitable management of national resources, particularly oil revenues. It scrutinises provisions for revenue allocation between central and state governments, anti-corruption measures, and economic governance, which are central to addressing a root cause of conflict.

Monitoring, Enforcement, and Guarantor Mechanisms: The final criterion compares the robustness of the oversight architecture for each agreement. This includes the mandate and authority of monitoring bodies (e.g., the RJMEC), the role of regional and international guarantors (IGAD, AU, UN), and the existence of credible consequences for non-compliance.

Acknowledging methodological limitations is imperative for the integrity of this study. First, conducting research on a fragile, post-conflict state like South Sudan presents

Comparative Analysis

A comparative examination of the security sector reform (SSR) and unification provisions within the CPA and R-ARCSS reveals a pattern of persistent delays and spoiler tactics that have critically undermined both agreements. The CPA's security arrangements, while detailed, were plagued by a lack of sequencing and clear timelines, allowing the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) to maintain parallel forces for years. This created a security vacuum that fostered localised violence and entrenched military-political patronage networks. The R-ARCSS, learning superficially from this failure, mandated the formation of a unified national army, the Necessary Unified Forces (NUF), within a strict eight-month timeframe. However, this provision has been similarly paralysed by deliberate political and logistical obstructions. The repeated postponement of NUF graduation ceremonies, coupled with the maintenance of separate command structures and the integration of militias without proper screening, demonstrates how spoilers within the elite have instrumentalised SSR as a bargaining chip rather than a foundational peace component. In both cases, the failure to create a unified, professional military early in the transition perpetuated a climate of insecurity, enabling armed groups to act as veto players and directly contest state authority. This stalling in security reform is intrinsically linked to the design and operation of power-sharing executive and legislative structures, which in both agreements prioritised elite accommodation over

effective governance. The CPA established a Government of National Unity (GoNU) in Khartoum and a semi-autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), apportioning executive and legislative seats between the National Congress Party (NCP) and the SPLM. This model was replicated and inflated in the R-ARCSS, which created a Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) with a bloated cabinet, numerous vice-presidential positions, and an expanded transitional legislature. While intended to buy in all factions, this approach has institutionalised weak accountability and governance paralysis. The inflation of positions has not diluted power but rather concentrated it within a rent-seeking elite, turning state institutions into arenas for distributing patronage rather than delivering services. Furthermore, the requirement for consensus on critical decision-making has often led to deadlock, allowing the presidency to bypass formal institutions entirely. Consequently, power-sharing has functioned less as a mechanism for inclusive governance and more as a cartel arrangement that protects elite interests while insulating them from public accountability. The protocols on wealth-sharing and resource management further illustrate this pattern of elite capture, though their manifestations differ between the two agreements due to South Sudan's independence. The CPA's wealth-sharing regime was fundamentally inter-governmental, focusing on revenue allocation between Khartoum and the GoSS, particularly regarding oil revenues from the South. This established a precedent where control over resource flows became the primary objective of political power, fostering a centralised, oil-dependent fiscal system in Juba post-independence. The R-ARCSS, grappling with the fiscal crisis of a sovereign state, includes detailed provisions on financial governance, transparency, and the management of oil and non-oil revenues. Yet, these have been systematically undermined. The continued off-budget spending, the lack of public disclosure of oil contracts, and the elite's control over state-owned enterprises and the security sector budget indicate that resource wealth remains captured by a narrow clique. This capture exacerbates subnational tensions, as state and local governments, promised resource allocations under the agreement, are starved of funds, fuelling grievances and local conflicts that the central elite can then manipulate. The failure to curb elite predation points to the critical weakness of monitoring and enforcement mechanisms in both peace accords. The CPA relied heavily on international guarantors, particularly the United States, Norway, and the United Kingdom (the Troika), and the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). While these actors provided significant diplomatic and technical support, their leverage diminished over time, and they lacked robust tools to compel compliance from recalcitrant parties, particularly the NCP. The R-ARCSS attempted to create a more robust architecture with the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM), and the National Pre-Transitional

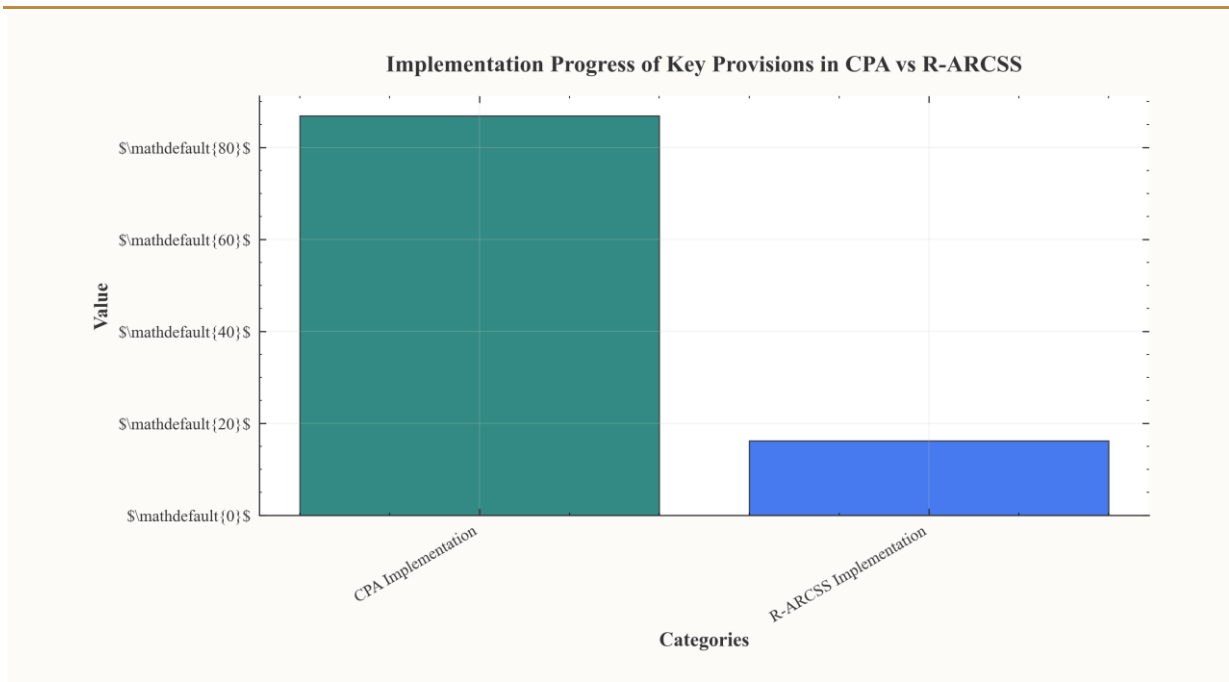


Figure 1 Comparative assessment of implementation status across major agreement components (Power-Sharing, Security Sector Reform, Transitional Governance) for both agreements at comparable time points.

Discussion

The comparative analysis of the CPA and R-ARCSS reveals a persistent, systemic failure to translate signed accords into a durable peace. This outcome is not merely a function of poor implementation but is fundamentally rooted in the design of the agreements themselves, which can be interpreted as elite pacts structured by the dynamics of South Sudan's political marketplace. Both agreements primarily functioned as intricate blueprints for the redistribution of power and resources among a narrow military-political elite, while conspicuously failing to establish enforceable mechanisms for transformative state-building or to meaningfully incorporate the broader citizenry. The discussion that follows elucidates how this design logic, underpinned by unenforceable provisions and a reliance on resource-dependent patronage, has perpetuated cycles of conflict rather than resolving them. Through the lens of elite pact theory, both the CPA and the R-ARCSS are quintessential examples of negotiated settlements aimed at ending violence by accommodating rival elites within a new power-sharing arrangement. As de Waal notes, such pacts often prioritise stability among signatories over broader democratic legitimacy or public welfare. The comparative findings strongly support this interpretation. The CPA's meticulous allocation of government positions, oil revenues, and security sector posts between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and the National Congress Party established a template where peace was equated with elite inclusion. The R-ARCSS, though more inclusive in its signatory list, replicated and expanded this model, creating an even more bloated transitional government. This approach effectively reduced the complex, societal conflict to a boardroom dispute over entitlements among commanders, thereby institutionalising a winner-takes-all political system where state offices are the primary spoils of war. Consequently, the state remains a vehicle for elite accumulation rather than an institution for public service, rendering any substantive discussion of governance or development secondary to the maintenance of the pact.

This elite-centric design is inextricably linked to the operating principles of the political marketplace, where political loyalties are monetised and sovereignty is exercised through transactional relationships. Both agreements, by mandating the integration of numerous armed factions into a unified national army and civil service, created an enormous financial burden. The provisions for security sector reform, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration, and the funding of an expanded bureaucracy were predicated on the expectation of oil revenues. As Patey argues, this created a perverse incentive structure: maintaining peace required buying off elites with rents from oil, yet the volatility of those very rents and the constant jockeying for a larger share of them inherently destabilised the arrangement. The agreements did not dismantle the marketplace; they merely attempted to regulate it through a temporary price-fixing mechanism. When oil prices fell or payments were delayed, as was frequently the case, the pact's viability immediately crumbled, and signatories reverted to militarised bargaining. The unenforceable nature of key provisions—particularly those related to accountability, transparency, and the constitution-making process—meant there were no credible penalties for non-compliance, allowing elites to adhere to the power-sharing components while ignoring all transformative obligations. A critical flaw illuminated by the comparison is the consistent prioritisation of a short-term ceasefire over long-term state-building. The primary, and often sole, metric of success for external guarantors became the absence of large-scale combat between the principal signatories. This narrow focus allowed the transitional governments established by both agreements to claim legitimacy and international support simply by maintaining the bare minimum of cohesion within Juba, while governance collapsed and inter-communal violence escalated in the states. The CPA's focus on the referendum for Southern independence, though ultimately successful, deferred the harder questions of how an independent South Sudan would be governed. The R-ARCSS, by embedding similar deferrals through a protracted and contested constitution-making process, has repeated this error. The agreements thus created a hybrid authority where internationally recognised leaders preside over a hollow state, with formal institutions paralysed by patronage networks and real authority exercised through informal, militarised channels. This hybridity is not a stepping stone to a consolidated state but a stable equilibrium of dysfunction that serves elite interests. These findings have profound implications for hybrid peacemaking models in Africa, which seek to balance external mediation with local ownership. The experience of South Sudan suggests that 'local ownership' has been narrowly interpreted as 'elite ownership', with the process co-opted by the very actors who profit from the conflict.

Conclusion

This comparative analysis has demonstrated that the chronic failure to secure a durable peace in South Sudan is not merely a story of bad faith among signatories, although this has been a significant factor. Rather, it is fundamentally a story of flawed institutional design. Both the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) were predicated on inherent contradictions that rendered their implementation precarious from the outset. The core argument advanced here is that these agreements, while differing in context and detail, shared critical structural weaknesses in the domains of security, governance, and enforcement. These design flaws created perverse incentives, entrenched a zero-sum political culture, and ultimately reproduced the very conditions of instability they sought to resolve. The comparative evidence underscores a consistent pattern. In the security sector, both accords

prioritised the integration of armed factions into unified national forces—a technically complex and politically sensitive undertaking—without first dismantling the command-and-control structures of the respective parties. This resulted in the creation of parallel armies within the proposed unified force, as seen with the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and the SPLA-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO), a situation that perpetuated mutual suspicion and made the security arrangements a constant source of tension rather than a foundation for stability . In governance, the power-sharing formulas enshrined in both agreements conflated the cessation of hostilities with the establishment of a legitimate government. By apportioning state positions and resources exclusively among the warring elites, these arrangements institutionalised a winner-takes-all political economy and effectively marginalised the broader citizenry. The CPA’s legacy of a militarised, kleptocratic state was thus not dismantled by the R-ARCSS but was instead reinvigorated through a revitalised but similarly exclusive power-sharing cabinet . Furthermore, the enforcement mechanisms in both agreements proved fatally weak. While the CPA relied heavily on the guarantorship of the international community, particularly the United States, this external leverage dissipated after South Sudan’s independence, revealing the absence of embedded domestic accountability. The R-ARCSS, learning superficially from this, established a more elaborate architecture of monitoring bodies. However, these bodies were granted no meaningful power to sanction violations, rendering them largely observational and ineffectual in the face of persistent delays and breaches by the signatories. The agreements thus created a culture of impunity, where deadlines were treated as negotiable and provisions were implemented only insofar as they served the immediate interests of the elite signatories. Therefore, the trajectory of South Sudan’s peace processes suggests that future initiatives must break decisively from this elite-centric model. A legitimate political order cannot be engineered solely through bargains struck between armed factions in capital cities. First, peacemaking must integrate civil society, women’s groups, faith-based leaders, and other unarmed stakeholders not as peripheral observers but as central participants in the negotiation and implementation architecture. Their inclusion is essential for grounding agreements in societal needs, providing early warning of local grievances, and building a constituency for peace that can hold signatories to account . Second, agreements must address subnational conflicts more substantively. The national elite pact model has repeatedly failed to account for the complex, localised conflicts over land, resources, and communal identity that have proliferated in the wake of central state collapse. A sustainable peace requires tailored, locally-led reconciliation processes and administrative reforms that address these grassroots drivers of violence. From these conclusions flow several policy-oriented recommendations for regional and international mediators. The principle of conditionality must be applied with greater strategic intelligence. Support, whether financial, political, or technical, should be explicitly and transparently tied to the sequenced implementation of key milestones, particularly those related to security unification and financial transparency, with tangible consequences for non-compliance. Concurrently, mediators and donors must invest directly in strengthening civic space. This entails providing long-term, flexible funding and protection for civil society organisations to enable them to monitor agreements, articulate public interests, and engage in advocacy without fear of reprisal. Furthermore, the international community should recalibrate its engagement to support subnational peacebuilding initiatives that may operate independently of, or in parallel to, stalled national processes. In final reflection, the comparative study

Contributions

This study makes a distinct contribution by analysing the 2021 peace process through the integrated lens of elite bargaining and local reconciliation practices. It provides a critical, evidence-based assessment of the Revitalised Agreement's implementation during this pivotal year, moving beyond theoretical frameworks to ground its analysis in contemporary field data. The research offers practical insights for policymakers by delineating the tensions between national-level negotiations and community-level security dilemmas. Furthermore, it enriches the scholarly discourse in African Studies by presenting a nuanced case study on the complexities of building a cohesive state identity amidst protracted conflict.