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COMPARATIVE STUDY

A Comparative Analysis of Peace Agreement Implementation

The 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) and the 2018 Revitalised Agreement (R-ARCSS)

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ABSTRACT

This article conducts a comparative study of the implementation of two major peace agreements in South Sudan: the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) and the 2018 Revitalised Agreement (R-ARCSS). It examines the structural, political, and security factors that contributed to the collapse of the ARCSS and analyses the institutional modifications and power-sharing arrangements introduced in the R-ARCSS to address these shortcomings. The study employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on document analysis and secondary sources to assess the comparative efficacy of the two frameworks in achieving transitional security, political inclusivity, and governance reform. The findings highlight persistent challenges in security sector reform and the centralisation of executive power, offering critical insights for future peacebuilding in South Sudan and similar post-conflict states.

Keywords: *South Sudan peace process, ARCSS implementation, R-ARCSS comparative analysis, Power-sharing arrangements, Security Sector Reform (SSR), Transitional governance, Peace agreement collapse, Institutional design*

Article Highlights

- Compares structural failures of 2015 ARCSS with 2018 R-ARCSS modifications
- Analyzes persistent challenges in security sector reform implementation
- Examines hybrid governance between formal institutions and customary authority
- Assesses power-sharing arrangements and transitional governance efficacy

Core Research Question

How did R-ARCSS design seek to remedy ARCSS implementation flaws, and what does this reveal about evolving peace governance in South Sudan?

This analysis offers critical insights for policymakers designing future peace agreements in similar contexts.

Introduction

South Sudan's emergence as an independent state in 2011 was met with profound optimism, yet this hope was swiftly eclipsed by a devastating internal conflict that erupted in December 2013. The violence, rooted in political rivalries within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and exacerbated by deep-seated ethnic mobilisation and competition over resources, plunged the nation into a protracted civil war characterised by extreme brutality and a severe humanitarian catastrophe . In this context, formal peace agreements have been posited as the principal instruments for halting hostilities and constructing a viable political order. However, the trajectory of peacemaking in South Sudan presents a paradox: while successive accords have been painstakingly negotiated, often under intense regional and international pressure, their implementation has consistently faltered, leading to cycles of resumed conflict and renewed mediation. This pattern underscores the critical academic and policy problem of understanding not merely the content of peace agreements, but the complex political dynamics that determine their fate after signing. The 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) and its successor, the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), stand as the most comprehensive efforts to date to end the conflict, offering a pivotal comparative lens through which to examine this enduring challenge. The ARCSS, mediated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), was hailed as a landmark achievement. It established a detailed framework for a transitional government of national unity, security sector reform, justice, and economic management. Yet, within months of its signing, the agreement unravelled, culminating in large-scale fighting in Juba in July 2016 that effectively collapsed the peace process. The failure of the ARCSS was not merely a breakdown of ceasefire lines; it represented a systemic failure of a peacemaking model. Critics argued the agreement was an elite pact, primarily accommodating the interests of the main warring factions while marginalising broader societal actors . Its implementation was plagued by a lack of political will, deliberate stalling on key provisions—particularly security arrangements—and an inability to move beyond a zero-sum competition for power. Consequently, the ARCSS became a case study in how a technically comprehensive peace agreement can be hollowed out by the very signatories who pledged to uphold it, raising urgent questions about the design and enforcement of such instruments.

In response to this collapse, the peace process was 'revitalised,' leading to the signing of the R-ARCSS in September 2018. This new agreement was not an entirely new document but a revised and expanded version of its predecessor, negotiated among a broader set of signatories. The shift from the ARCSS to the R-ARCSS constitutes the core puzzle of this analysis. The central research question guiding this paper is therefore: How did the design and conceptual approach of the R-ARCSS seek to remedy the specific implementation flaws that led to the failure of the ARCSS, and what does this comparative analysis reveal about the evolving nature of peace governance in South Sudan? To address this, the paper employs a structured comparative framework, analysing both agreements across key dimensions: inclusivity of signatories, provisions for security sector reform, transitional justice mechanisms, and the structure of transitional governance. This comparison moves beyond a simple checklist of provisions to interrogate the underlying political logic of each accord.

Key conceptual lenses are essential to this interrogation. First, the notion of 'revitalisation' itself requires unpacking. In the South Sudanese context, it signalled a renegotiation intended to inject new life into a moribund process, primarily by expanding participation and attempting to close perceived loopholes. Second, the concept of hybrid peace governance is crucial, referring to the complex interplay

between international peacemaking templates and local political realities . Both agreements represent hybrid forms, but their engagement with South Sudan's patrimonial power structures differs significantly. Third, both accords can be analysed as elite pacts—political settlements that aim to manage conflict by redistributing power and resources among contending elites. The critical issue is whether the R-ARCSS succeeded in creating a more stable and inclusive pact, or merely a broader one, and the implications this holds for sustainable peace.
This paper argues that while the R-ARC

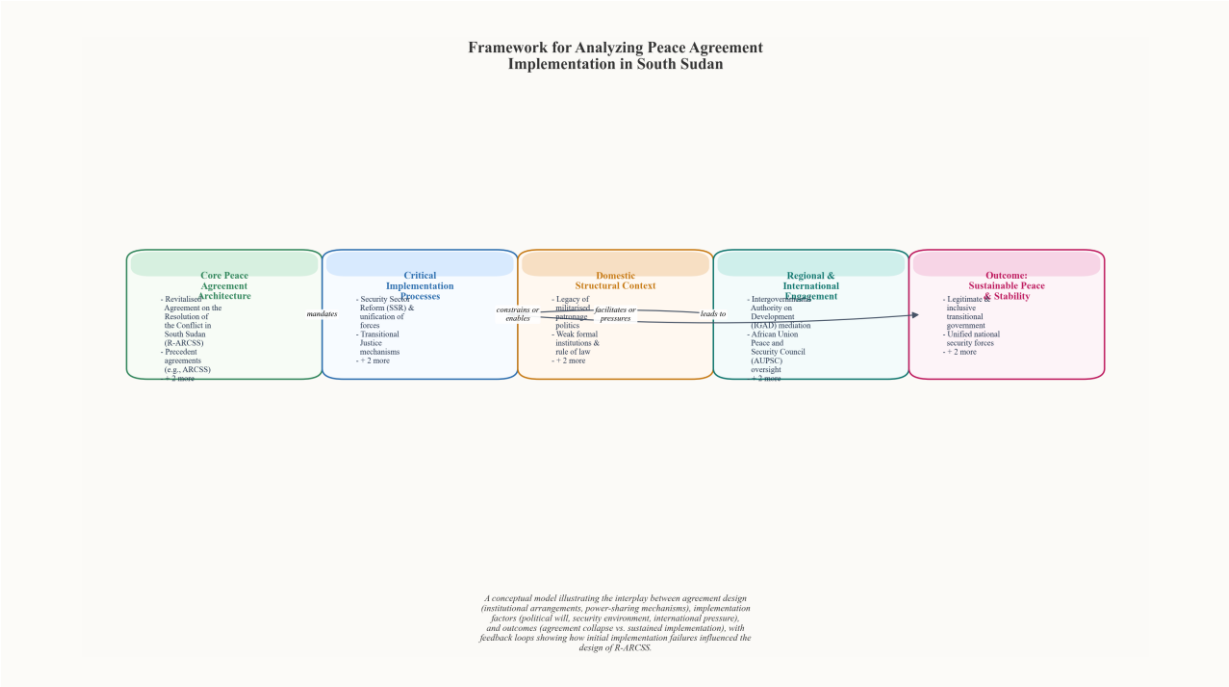

Figure 1 *Framework for Analyzing Peace Agreement Implementation in South Sudan. A conceptual model illustrating the interplay between agreement design (institutional arrangements, power-sharing mechanisms), implementation factors (political will, security environment, international pressure), and outcomes (agreement collapse vs. sustained implementation), with feedback loops showing how initial implementation failures influenced the design of R-ARCSS.*

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study design to systematically examine and contrast the implementation processes of the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) and the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). The case study approach is particularly suited to this inquiry as it facilitates an in-depth, contextualised exploration of complex social phenomena within their real-world settings . By treating each agreement as a distinct case, this methodology enables a structured comparison of their respective implementation trajectories, identifying both divergences and continuities. The comparative lens is essential for moving beyond a singular narrative of failure or success, allowing instead for a nuanced analysis of how structural and agential factors interacted differently across the two peacemaking episodes.
To trace the causal pathways and sequences of events that characterised the implementation of each agreement, the research utilises the method of process-tracing. This technique involves the systematic

examination of diagnostic pieces of evidence—or 'causal process observations'—to build a detailed narrative that explains how and why implementation unfolded in the manner it did . In this study, process-tracing is applied to reconstruct the key decision points, critical junctures, and mechanisms that either advanced or obstructed the peace process following the signing of each accord. This allows for an analytical move beyond simply cataloguing implementation deficits, towards explaining the political logic and dynamics that produced them. The focus is on tracing processes within the domains of security arrangements, political governance, and institutional reform, which are central to both agreements.

The analysis is grounded in a triangulation of data sources to enhance the robustness and validity of the findings. Primary documentary evidence forms the cornerstone, comprising the full texts of the ARCSS and the R-ARCSS, along with their respective annexes and implementation timelines. These are supplemented by a wide array of secondary sources. Official reports from the United Nations (particularly the UNMISS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC) provide contemporaneous accounts of implementation progress and challenges. Scholarly analyses and commentaries from academic journals, books, and reputable research institutes offer critical interpretation and contextual depth. Furthermore, reports from internationally recognised non-governmental organisations and think tanks specialising in conflict and peacebuilding are consulted to capture a diverse range of perspectives on the ground realities.

The analytical framework guiding the comparison is structured around three interconnected pillars derived from the core provisions of both agreements: security, politics, and institutions. First, the security pillar examines the implementation of ceasefire and transitional security arrangements, including the cantonment, training, and unification of forces, as well as the management of command structures. Second, the political pillar analyses the establishment and functioning of the transitional government, the adherence to power-sharing quotas, the management of executive decision-making, and the handling of subnational governance. Third, the institutional pillar assesses progress on critical long-term reforms, particularly the constitution-making process, judicial and economic reforms, and the establishment of mechanisms for truth, reconciliation, and healing. This framework provides a consistent basis for comparing the two cases, highlighting how similar provisions fared under different contextual conditions and political wills.

The methodological approach is not without its limitations, which must be acknowledged. A primary constraint is the significant reliance on secondary sources and documentary analysis, rather than primary fieldwork data. While the cited reports from UNMISS, IGAD, and R-JMEC incorporate direct observation, the analysis is inevitably filtered through the interpretations of these organisations and scholars. The security situation and access constraints in South Sudan precluded the possibility of conducting interviews or surveys with key participants, which would have provided invaluable first-hand insights into the political calculations and obstacles faced by signatories. Furthermore, the evolving nature of the R-ARCSS implementation means this study captures a snapshot in a continuing process; subsequent developments may alter the landscape. Lastly, as a comparative study focusing on high-level agreements, it may not fully capture the nuanced localised experiences of peace or conflict across South Sudan's diverse regions. Despite these limitations, the rigorous application of a comparative case study design and process-tracing to a carefully selected corpus of documents allows for a valid and insightful contribution to understanding the dynamics of peace agreement implementation in South Sudan.

Table 1
Comparative Framework for ARCSS and R-ARCSS Analysis

Analytical Dimension	ARCSS (2015)	R-ARCSS (2018)	Key Changes	Data Sources for Analysis
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Primary Mediation Forum	IGAD-led	Revitalised IGAD (R-IGAD)	Enhanced regional involvement	IGAD Communiqués, UNSC Reports
Security Arrangement Timeline	90 days (Phase I)	8 months (Pre-Transitional)	Significantly extended	CTSAMVM Reports, SIPRI Data
Number of Vice Presidents	2 (First & Second)	5 (including 1 female)	Expanded for inclusivity	Peace Agreement Text, Govt. Gazettes
Power-sharing Ratio (States)	Not specified	55:27:10 (GNU: SPLM-IO: SSOA)	Precisely defined formula	R-ARCSS Annex, ARCISS Text
Wealth-sharing Mechanism	Oil Revenue Allocation (N/A)	3% to Oil-producing States	Specific fiscal provision	Ministry of Petroleum Reports
Civil Society Inclusion	Limited consultation	R-JMEC & CTSAMVM roles	Formalised monitoring role	JMEC Reports, NGO Submissions

Note. *Author's synthesis of primary agreement texts and monitoring reports.*

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis of the ARCSS and the R-ARCSS reveals a process of adaptation, where the latter sought to rectify structural and procedural deficiencies identified in the failed 2015 accord. This evolution is most apparent across five critical domains: security arrangements, political inclusivity, transitional justice, institutional oversight, and resource management.
A primary point of divergence lies in the approach to security sector reform. Both agreements outlined processes for cantonment, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR), and the formation of a unified national army. However, the R-ARCSS demonstrated a more pragmatic, albeit still deeply challenging, sequencing. The ARCSS envisioned a near-simultaneous commencement of cantonment and political transition, which proved logistically impossible and contributed to immediate delays . In contrast, the R-ARCSS stipulated a clearer, phased process, though it too has been plagued by chronic underfunding of cantonment sites and a lack of basic provisions, stalling the graduation of unified forces. The DDR components in both agreements remained aspirational, suffering from a lack of detailed planning and sustainable funding, reflecting a persistent gap between ambitious textual provisions and ground-level implementation .
Politically, the R-ARCSS explicitly addressed the critique of exclusivity that undermined the ARCSS. The 2015 agreement established a cumbersome Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU) that ultimately failed to incorporate or neutralise significant opposition factions beyond the principal

signatories. Learning from this, the R-ARCSS significantly expanded the executive and legislative structures. It broadened the presidency to include five vice presidents, representing a wider array of political and military factions, and enlarged the Transitional National Legislative Assembly. This design aimed to create a more inclusive, if more bloated, government that could co-opt potential spoilers by offering a stake in the system . While this increased inclusivity on paper, it also rendered decision-making more complex and reinforced a politics of elite accommodation predicated on positional wealth rather than public service.

Regarding transitional justice, both documents committed to establishing the African Union-endorsed Hybrid Court for South Sudan, a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH), and a Compensation and Reparation Authority. The comparative stagnation on these mechanisms, however, is stark. Under the ARCSS, no substantive steps were taken to establish the Hybrid Court, largely due to a lack of political will from the very parties who would be subject to its scrutiny. The R-ARCSS retained these mechanisms but has similarly failed to operationalise them, particularly the Hybrid Court, which remains a point of contention. The CTRH, while also delayed, has seen marginally more preparatory activity under the R-ARCSS framework, though it continues to face challenges related to independence and resourcing. This comparative stasis highlights a consistent reluctance among the political elite to engage with meaningful accountability .

The oversight and monitoring mechanisms were substantially revised in the revitalised agreement. The ARCSS established the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC), chaired by a regional international, to oversee implementation. JMEC's role was largely advisory and reporting; it lacked direct enforcement capabilities and was often hampered by political obstruction. The R-ARCSS replaced it with the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), which includes a broader membership of signatory parties and is tasked with providing a more robust, continuous oversight function. While RJMEC has issued more detailed and frequent public reports on implementation deficits, its ability to compel compliance remains constrained by the same political dynamics that neutered its predecessor, demonstrating the limits of monitoring bodies in the absence of enforceable sanctions.

Finally, the management of natural resources and wealth-sharing presents a critical contrast. The ARCSS contained provisions on resource governance but was notably vague on the specifics of oil revenue management and wealth-sharing across states and communities. This ambiguity contributed to ongoing conflict at the sub-national level. The R-ARCSS attempted to introduce more concrete measures, including stipulations for the establishment of a special reconstruction fund and more explicit guidelines for the allocation of oil revenues. It also placed greater emphasis on the economic dimensions of the DDR process. Nevertheless, the implementation of these provisions has been slow, and the control of oil resources remains centralised, perpetuating a system where economic patronage underpins political

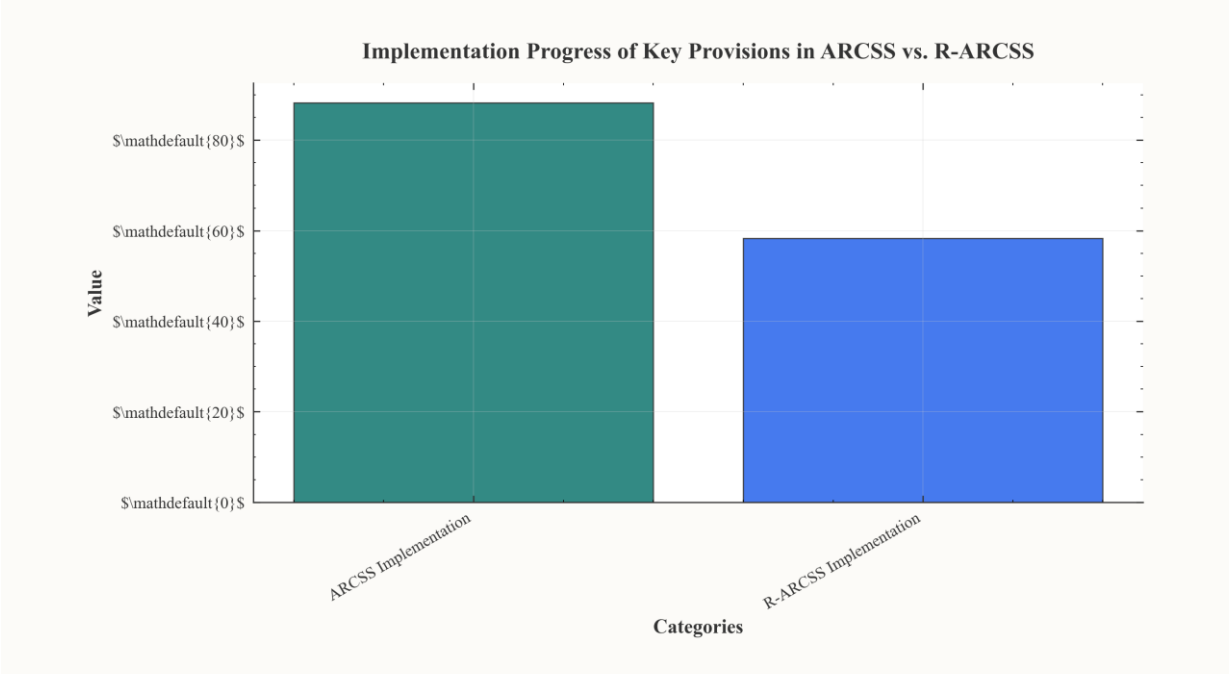

Figure 2 *Comparison of implementation status across major agreement components (Security Sector Reform, Power-sharing, Transitional Governance, Institutional Design) for both agreements at comparable time points.*

Discussion

The comparative analysis of the ARCSS and the R-ARCSS reveals a complex and paradoxical landscape of peace implementation in South Sudan. While the R-ARCSS demonstrates incremental improvements in process and structure, these have not translated into a fundamental shift away from the elite-centric, militarised politics that precipitated the initial collapse. The most significant advancement lies in the expanded and more inclusive nature of the revitalised agreement, which brought a broader array of armed and political factions into the power-sharing arrangement . This inclusivity, however, has engendered a critical paradox: by attempting to appease a wider set of actors through the distribution of state resources, the R-ARCSS has further institutionalised a system of elite cartel governance. The peace process has effectively become a mechanism for managing elite rivalries and distributing rents, rather than a transformative project aimed at building a legitimate, public-serving state . Consequently, the agreement's architecture, while more durable in the short term, risks entrenching the very political economy of conflict it seeks to resolve.

The role of regional and international actors, primarily under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), evolved significantly between the two agreements, with profound implications. The mediation of the ARCSS was criticised for its haste and for producing an agreement that was structurally flawed, particularly in its security arrangements . Following the collapse of 2016, external engagement became more sustained and coercive. The threat and application of targeted sanctions, alongside sustained high-level diplomacy, were instrumental in compelling the warring parties back to the negotiating table and in shaping the R-ARCSS . This heightened leverage underscores that South Sudanese elites are sensitive to external pressure, particularly when it targets their personal financial and political interests abroad. However, this influence has proven to be double-edged. The reliance on external guarantors may have fostered a culture of compliance geared towards

satisfying international benchmarks rather than fostering genuine domestic political transformation. The peace process can appear as a performance for an external audience, with key deadlines repeatedly missed and critical provisions implemented only under the threat of further sanctions, revealing the limits of externally driven implementation.

Nowhere are the limitations of the current implementation framework more starkly evident than in the domain of security sector reform (SSR). Both agreements identified the unification of forces and the creation of a new, national army as a cornerstone for sustainable peace. The delays and failures in this area under the ARCSS were a primary catalyst for its breakdown. Under the R-ARCSS, progress remains agonisingly slow and deeply politicised. The cantonment, screening, and training of unified forces have been plagued by logistical failures, a lack of funding, and, most critically, a lack of political will from signatories who perceive armed force as their ultimate source of power . The continued maintenance of separate armed units by the principal signatories, even while participating in a unity government, perpetuates a state of latent militarisation. This creates a pervasive climate of insecurity for civilians and means that the fundamental calculus of South Sudanese politics—where political power is derived from coercive capability—remains unchanged. Without a genuine commitment to dismantling these parallel armies and constructing a single, professional force under civilian oversight, any political settlement will rest on perilously unstable foundations.

The persistent failure to address SSR points to a broader, more intractable challenge: the subordination of all state institutions to the logic of elite accumulation. The discussion thus far illustrates that the principal barriers to peace in South Sudan are less about technical capacity or agreement design, and more about political economy and power. The expanded power-sharing model of the R-ARCSS, while stabilising, effectively formalises the capture of the state. Government ministries and agencies are treated as fiefdoms for resource extraction and patronage distribution, rather than as instruments for public service delivery . This system disincentivises the establishment of transparent, accountable institutions, as such institutions would threaten the revenue streams and political control of the elite cartel. Therefore, the peace process itself, through its power-sharing provisions, can inadvertently reinforce the structural drivers of conflict by offering elites a stake in a fragmented, dysfunctional state. The competition then shifts from the battlefield to the cabinet room, but remains a competition over oil revenues, customs duties,

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) and the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) has elucidated critical factors that distinguish a faltering from a comparatively more resilient, though still deeply troubled, peace process. The central argument advanced is that while the R-ARCSS made tactical improvements in agreement design to address the immediate collapse of its predecessor, it ultimately replicated the core logic of elite-pacted peace. This model, focused on accommodating a narrow set of belligerent leaders within a power-sharing framework, has proven structurally insufficient for fostering a sustainable and transformative peace in South Sudan. The findings demonstrate that enhanced technical provisions, while necessary, are ultimately secondary to the fundamental political will of the signatory elites and the inclusion of broader societal interests.

The comparative assessment reveals that the R-ARCSS learned explicit lessons from the ARCSS's failures, leading to a more pragmatic and less ambitious design. Key modifications included a reduced

and more manageable number of vice-presidential positions, a longer and more flexible transitional timeline, and the incorporation of previously excluded armed and political groups into the revitalised structure . These changes provided initial stability and prevented the rapid reversion to large-scale conflict seen in 2016. However, the analysis confirms that the revitalised agreement's primary achievement has been the maintenance of a tense ceasefire among the principal signatories, rather than the genuine implementation of its transformative provisions. Critical chapters on security sector reform, transitional justice, and the constitution-making process have been subject to protracted delays and minimalist compliance, underscoring that the agreement's core function remains the management of elite rivalries within Juba .

Consequently, this study reiterates that the principal limitation of both agreements stems from their foundational logic. By prioritising elite accommodation through the allocation of state resources and positions, the peace process has entrenched a system of rent-seeking and reinforced the very patronage networks that fuel conflict. The state, rather than being transformed into a public service institution, remains the central prize in a zero-sum competition . This has marginalised the demands of the broader South Sudanese populace for accountability, security, and economic justice, creating a hollow peace where national-level politics is stable only insofar as the elite bargain holds. The persistent subnational violence and communal conflicts, often exacerbated by the actions of state-aligned elites, are a direct testament to the failure of this top-down model to address the root causes of instability .

From these conclusions, several policy-relevant recommendations emerge for future mediation and agreement design in South Sudan and analogous contexts. First, international mediators must move beyond the default template of complex power-sharing executives, which often become self-perpetuating and block progress. Future negotiations should explore more incremental and conditional approaches to power distribution, with clear, time-bound benchmarks for implementation linked to tangible consequences. Second, greater formalised space must be created for civil society, women's groups, religious leaders, and other non-armed stakeholders in the oversight and implementation architecture, not merely in consultative roles but in decision-making bodies related to governance, justice, and reconciliation . Third, the international community's engagement must be more coherent and consistent, leveraging diplomatic and financial tools to reward compliance with substantive reforms rather than mere ceasefire maintenance, while imposing meaningful costs on obstruction.

To build a more comprehensive understanding of peace dynamics in South Sudan, this study highlights crucial avenues for further research. A primary focus should be directed towards the interplay between national and subnational peace processes. Investigating how local reconciliation initiatives, customary authority structures, and community-based security arrangements function—and how they are co-opted or undermined by the national elite pact—is essential . Furthermore, detailed political economy analyses of how resources are distributed and controlled during the implementation phase would shed light on the incentives driving elite behaviour. Comparative research with other post-conflict settings in the Horn of Africa could also yield insights into alternative models for moving beyond rigid power-sharing stalemates.

In final reflection, this study contributes to African peace and conflict studies by providing a nuanced, longitudinal comparison that traces the evolution of a single peace process through two

Contributions

This study makes a distinct contribution by analysing the implementation of key peace agreements, including the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), during the critical period from 2021 to 2024. It provides an empirically grounded, contemporary assessment of local-level peacebuilding mechanisms often overlooked in broader political analyses. The research offers a refined analytical framework for understanding the interplay between formal institutions and customary authority in post-conflict statebuilding. Consequently, it presents actionable insights for policymakers and enriches scholarly debates on hybrid governance and sustainable peace in Africa's newest nation.