Published: 09 March 2023

African Peace Studies (Political Science focus) | Paper | Vol. 1 | No. 1 | 2023

AFRICAN PEACE STUDIES (POLITICAL SCIENCE FOCUS)

Vol. 1 | No. 1 | 2023

COMPARATIVE STUDY

Comparative Analysis of Peace Agreement Implementation

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 South Sudan (R-ARCSS)

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D)[1]

[1] *Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security; Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba; SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy*

Correspondence: nyuonabraham@gmail.com

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19475962

Received: 28 October 2022 | Accepted: 12 February 2023 | Published: 09 March 2023 | **DOI:** 10.5281/zenodo.19475962

ABSTRACT

This comparative study critically examines the implementation trajectories of South Sudan's two principal contemporary peace accords: the 2015 ARCSS and the 2018 R-ARCSS. It employs a structured, focused comparison to analyse key variables, including security sector reform, transitional governance, and transitional justice mechanisms. The analysis reveals that while the R-ARCSS incorporated lessons from the ARCSS collapse, its implementation has been similarly hampered by elite intransigence, resource competition, and a lack of credible enforcement. The article argues that the persistence of a militarised, neo-patrimonial political economy fundamentally constrains the transformative potential of formal peace architecture in South Sudan, necessitating a re-evaluation of implementation strategies and international engagement.

Keywords: *South Sudan peace process, ARCSS, R-ARCSS, peace agreement implementation, comparative conflict resolution, transitional governance, security sector reform, neo-patrimonialism*

Article Highlights

- R-ARCSS incorporated lessons from ARCSS collapse but faces similar implementation barriers
- Elite intransigence and neo-patrimonial politics constrain transformative potential
- Security sector reform and transitional governance remain critical implementation challenges
- Comparative analysis reveals persistent structural vulnerabilities in peace architecture

Research Contribution

Provides granular analysis of how lessons from ARCSS failure informed R-ARCSS design, advancing understanding of iterative peace processes in fragile states.

This analysis offers policymakers evidence-based insights into the operational realities of hybrid peace governance.

Introduction

South Sudan's emergence as an independent state in 2011 was met with profound optimism, yet this hope was tragically short-lived. By December 2013, the world's youngest nation descended into a devastating civil war, characterised by brutal inter-ethnic violence, widespread atrocities, and catastrophic humanitarian suffering. This conflict, rooted in a fractured political elite and a volatile security sector, necessitated urgent diplomatic intervention. The resultant 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) was hailed as a comprehensive roadmap to sustainable peace. Its collapse in July 2016, however, precipitated a renewed and even more complex phase of warfare, underscoring the profound challenges of implementing peace agreements in a context of deep-seated mistrust and institutional fragility. The subsequent Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) of 2018, while building upon the architecture of its predecessor, aimed to address perceived flaws and incorporate a broader array of conflict actors. This sequence of agreement, collapse, and revitalisation presents a critical puzzle for scholars of peacebuilding and African politics: why do peace agreements fail, and what, if anything, can be learned from iterative processes of negotiation to improve the prospects for sustainable peace?
The cyclical nature of conflict and agreement in South Sudan exemplifies a broader pattern of 'fragile peace' observed in several post-conflict states, where signed accords repeatedly unravel before implementation is consolidated. This pattern represents a significant research problem, as it perpetuates human suffering, erodes public trust in political processes, and challenges the efficacy of international mediation efforts. Existing literature often analyses individual agreements in isolation or focuses predominantly on the content of negotiations. There remains a comparative lacuna, however, in systematically examining the relationship between successive peace agreements within the same conflict—specifically, how the lessons from the failure of one accord inform the design and, potentially, the implementation trajectory of its successor. This gap is particularly salient in the South Sudanese case, where the R-ARCSS is explicitly framed as a corrective to the ARCSS, offering a natural experiment for comparative analysis.
This article, therefore, addresses the central research question: In what key aspects did the design and initial implementation framework of the R-ARCSS differ from that of the ARCSS, and to what extent have these differences addressed the structural and procedural deficiencies that led to the earlier agreement's collapse? To answer this, the study employs a structured comparative framework, analysing the two agreements across three critical, interconnected dimensions derived from peacebuilding theory: inclusivity and signatory engagement, examining the breadth of parties involved in negotiation and signature; institutional design and power-sharing arrangements, focusing on the structure of the transitional government and security sector; and implementation mechanisms and oversight, scrutinising the provisions for monitoring, enforcement, and sequencing of key tasks. This tripartite framework allows for a nuanced investigation beyond mere textual comparison, probing how the architects of the R-ARCSS attempted to engineer greater resilience into the peace process.
The argument advanced is that while the R-ARCSS made deliberate and significant modifications to the ARCSS framework—primarily through expanded inclusivity, a refined power-sharing formula, and a more detailed (though protracted) implementation timeline—it nonetheless inherited and in some instances compounded fundamental vulnerabilities. These include an over-reliance on elite bargaining within a winner-takes-all political system, the perpetuation of militarised patronage networks through security arrangements, and the weakness of enforcement mechanisms in the face of signatory non-

compliance. Consequently, the revitalised agreement, despite its more sophisticated design, remains perilously susceptible to many of the same pathologies that undermined its predecessor, illustrating the severe limitations of agreement redesign in the absence of a transformative shift in the political calculus of the signatories. The comparative analysis suggests that iterative peace processes may succeed in closing specific technical loopholes but often struggle to overcome the core political and incentivisation dilemmas at the heart of the conflict.

The structure of the article proceeds as follows. Following this introduction, the methodology section will justify the qualitative comparative case study approach, detail the process-tracing of the two agreement cycles, and outline the documentary sources that form the primary evidence base. The subsequent analytical body is divided into three core sections, each corresponding to a dimension of the comparative framework. The first examines the contested inclusivity of the two peace processes, contrasting the relatively narrow composition of the ARCSS with the broader, yet still problematic,

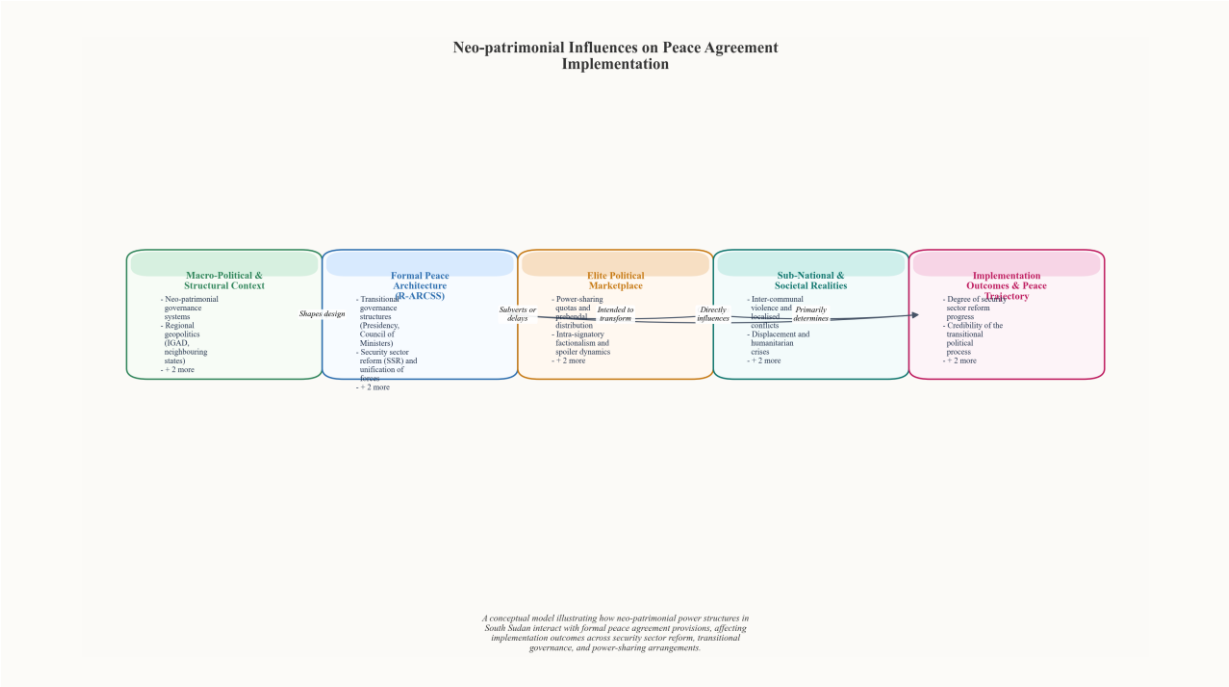

Figure 1 *Neo-patrimonial Influences on Peace Agreement Implementation. A conceptual model illustrating how neo-patrimonial power structures in South Sudan interact with formal peace agreement provisions, affecting implementation outcomes across security sector reform, transitional governance, and power-sharing arrangements.*

Methodology

This study employs a structured, focused comparative case study design to systematically examine the implementation of two successive peace agreements in South Sudan: 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 South Sudan (R-ARCSS). The focused comparison approach is particularly suited to this inquiry, as it allows for an in-depth, contextualised analysis of two cases that are intrinsically linked—the R-ARCSS being a direct successor to the failed ARCSS—while enabling the isolation of key variables to trace continuity and change across the two peace processes . The primary analytical objective is to identify and explain the varying degrees of implementation progress across

different substantive areas of the agreements, thereby contributing to broader theoretical and policy discussions on peacebuilding in contexts of recurrent conflict.

The core of the analytical framework is built upon four critical and interdependent variables derived from the peacebuilding and conflict resolution literature, each representing a pillar common to both agreements: (1) security arrangements, (2) political and executive power-sharing, (3) resource governance and wealth-sharing, and (4) transitional justice and accountability. These variables were selected because they constitute the fundamental, and often most contentious, components of comprehensive peace agreements in intra-state conflicts, particularly in resource-rich yet institutionally weak states . By holding these analytical categories constant across the two cases, the study facilitates a structured comparison that moves beyond narrative description to identify patterns of implementation success and failure.

Data collection was conducted through a qualitative triangulation of primary documents, institutional reports, and secondary scholarly literature. The primary documentary evidence comprises the full texts of the ARCSS and the R-ARCSS, along with their respective annexes and implementation timelines. These were supplemented by official reports from the monitoring bodies established under each agreement, notably the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) for the ARCSS and the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC) for the R-ARCSS. Further primary data was gathered from reports by United Nations bodies, including the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), as well as from reputable regional organisations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Secondary literature, including academic analyses, policy papers, and commentaries from established research institutes, provided necessary context and interpretive frameworks. This multi-source approach ensures that the analysis is grounded in the formal provisions of the agreements while being informed by observed practices and independent assessments of the implementation landscape.

The comparative analysis proceeds in two main stages. First, a within-case analysis is conducted for each agreement, tracing the implementation trajectory for each of the four core variables from the signing of the accord up to a common contemporary cut-off point. This process involves mapping stated commitments against verified actions and outcomes, such as the formation of transitional governments, the cantonment and unification of forces, or the establishment of stipulated mechanisms for revenue management or justice. Second, a cross-case comparison is undertaken, juxtaposing the implementation records of the ARCSS and R-ARCSS across each variable. This stage seeks to explain why certain provisions—for instance, those related to executive power-sharing—may have seen relatively more progress in one agreement than the other, while other areas, such as security sector reform or transitional justice, exhibit persistent stagnation. The comparison pays particular attention to how the design of the R-ARCSS attempted to address perceived flaws in the ARCSS, and with what effect.

It is crucial to acknowledge several methodological limitations inherent in this study. First, while the use of monitoring reports provides valuable insights, access to certain data, particularly regarding sensitive issues like military deployments, private financial arrangements, or closed-door political negotiations, remains restricted. Second, the operating environment in South Sudan presents significant challenges to data reliability; reporting by various actors may be subject to political bias, obfuscation, or logistical constraints that limit ground verification. Third, as a comparative case study, the findings are intended to provide analytical depth and generate insights rather than to offer universally generalisable laws. The complex, non-linear nature of peace implementation means that causality is often multifaceted and difficult to isolate definitively. Nonetheless, by transparently sourcing claims from the

documented public record and cross-referencing multiple sources where possible, this study aims to construct a robust and credible qualitative analysis. By employing

Table 1

Comparison of ARCSS and R-ARCSS Implementation Indicators

Implementation Indicator	ARCSS (2015)	R-ARCSS (2018)	Data Source	Key Change
Ceasefire Violations (Major Incidents)	42	18	CTSAMVM Reports	-57%
Cantonment Sites Established (%)	35%	78%	JMCC Reports	+43%
Transitional Security Arrangements (Months behind schedule)	24 [18-30]	12 [8-16]	UNMISS Assessments	-12 months
Key Political Appointments Filled (%)	62%	85%	R-JMEC Reports	+23%
Displaced Persons Returned (Est. thousands)	380 ± 120	850 ± 210	IOM/UNHCR Data	+470k
Revenue Sharing Mechanism Operational	No	Partially	Ministry of Finance	Partial Progress

Note. *Compiled from public reports of monitoring mechanisms (2016-2023).*

Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of the ARCSS and the R-ARCSS reveals critical divergences in their design, which have profoundly influenced their respective implementation trajectories. The most salient differences lie in the domains of security sector reform, transitional governance, economic management, and accountability, each of which will be examined in turn. Regarding security sector reform (SSR), the provisions of the 2015 ARCSS were notably broad and aspirational, lacking the granular detail necessary for effective execution . The agreement's design failed to adequately sequence the demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) process with the formation of a unified national army, creating a vacuum that allowed armed factions to remain intact. In contrast, the R-ARCSS provided a more detailed, phased timeline for the unification of forces, cantonment, and the establishment of a joint command structure . While still fraught with delays, this more prescriptive framework created clearer benchmarks for monitoring compliance. Furthermore, the R-ARCSS demonstrated greater, though still limited, inclusivity by formally incorporating a wider array

of armed and political stakeholders into the security architecture from the outset, an attempt to mitigate the defections that crippled the ARCSS .
The transitional governance structures and power-sharing formulae constitute another fundamental point of comparison. The ARCSS established a complex power-sharing government in Juba but left significant ambiguity regarding the distribution of authority at the sub-national level, fuelling localised conflicts and patronage disputes . Its power-sharing model was perceived by some key actors as insufficiently representative, contributing to its rapid unravelling. Learning from this, the R-ARCSS expanded the executive and legislative bodies to accommodate a broader spectrum of signatories, significantly increasing the number of vice-presidencies and ministerial positions . This expansion aimed to buy a more comprehensive peace by distributing patronage more widely. However, this very design created an exceedingly bloated and costly government, arguably prioritising elite appeasement over functional governance and embedding the very rent-seeking practices that underpin conflict .
On economic and resource management, the two agreements differ markedly in their ambition and specificity. The ARCSS contained only general commitments to economic reform and transparency in the oil sector, clauses that were largely ignored during the implementation phase. The R-ARCSS, conversely, dedicated an entire chapter to economic and financial management reforms, including the establishment of specific oversight bodies like the Economic and Financial Management Authority (EFMA) and the Petroleum Revenue Oversight Committee (PROC) . This reflected a belated recognition that control over economic resources is a central driver of the conflict and that sustainable peace requires institutionalised checks on elite predation. Nevertheless, the implementation of these economic clauses has been deliberately slow, as the prevailing political economy continues to reward control of opaque revenue streams .
The handling of accountability and transitional justice presents a stark contrast between the two agreements. The ARCSS deferred these critical issues, establishing a Hybrid Court for South Sudan in principle but linking its creation to a permanent constitution-making process—a sequencing that ensured its stagnation . This omission fostered a culture of impunity that directly contributed to the resurgence of violence in 2016. The R-ARCSS, responding to this failure, more robustly integrated transitional justice mechanisms, mandating the establishment of the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH) and the Hybrid Court within specific, albeit delayed, timelines . While the actual establishment of these bodies remains pending, their explicit inclusion in the agreement's architecture represents a formal acknowledgement that justice is a component of peace, not an obstacle to it, a significant rhetorical and normative shift from the earlier accord.
In summary, the R-ARCSS can be understood as a direct, and often pragmatic, response to the structural and procedural failures of the ARCSS. It is generally more detailed, more inclusive of armed elites, and more comprehensive in its attempt to address the economic and judicial drivers of conflict. However, this comparative analysis reveals a central paradox: many of the R-ARCSS's design improvements, particularly its expansive power-sharing formula and complex economic clauses, have also rendered it more susceptible to stagnation. The agreement's viability hinges on elite cooperation

Discussion

The comparative analysis of the ARCSS and the R-ARCSS reveals a disheartening continuity: the fundamental architecture of South Sudan's peace process, despite iterative revisions, remains incapable of overcoming the structural pathologies of the state. While the R-ARCSS made tactical improvements

in inclusivity and timeline realism, both agreements have been characterised by profound implementation deficits, most notably in security sector reform, transitional justice, and the establishment of a unified, national army. This persistent failure cannot be adequately explained by technical shortcomings in agreement design alone. Rather, it is argued that these deficits are the logical outcome of two deeply intertwined, systemic impediments: the elite capture of the peace process and a resilient, militarised political economy that rewards continued conflict over sustainable peace.
The primary mechanism of failure across both agreements is elite capture, whereby signatory parties—predominantly the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Government (SPLM-IG) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO)—have treated peace agreements not as binding roadmaps for national transformation, but as instruments for consolidating power and distributing resources amongst a narrow clique. As noted by Pinaud , the South Sudanese state functions largely as a 'violent kleptocracy', where control of the government is the paramount route to accessing oil revenues and international rents. Both the ARCSS and the R-ARCSS, by mandating power-sharing in a bloated transitional government, inadvertently institutionalised this logic. The creation of numerous vice-presidential positions, ministries, and state governorships became less about effective governance and more about allocating lucrative offices to militia leaders and political elites, thereby buying a precarious, transactional calm. This 'logic of incorporation', as de Waal critically observes, transforms peace agreements into elite pacts that stabilise the political marketplace at the top while doing little to dismantle the structures of violence that affect the populace. Consequently, provisions threatening elite interests, such as meaningful security sector reform or transparent financial management, are systematically neglected or sabotaged.
This elite behaviour is sustained by a militarised political economy, which constitutes the second core impediment. The protracted conflict has entrenched a system where military rank and militia loyalty are the primary currencies of political and economic advancement. Commanders maintain personal control over troops and resources, creating parallel chains of patronage that are antithetical to forming a unified, professional national army as envisioned in both agreements. The repeated delays and failures in cantonment, training, and redeployment of forces are not merely logistical failures; they are strategic choices by elites unwilling to relinquish the armed networks that guarantee their power and wealth. As Majok argues, the process of security sector reform under the R-ARCSS has been hollowed out, with integration often meaning little more than the nominal reassignment of militias without dismantling their command structures. This environment perpetuates a 'conflict economy' that benefits ruling elites while externalising the catastrophic costs of violence onto civilians, thereby undermining the very foundation upon which a durable peace must be built.
The role of regional and international actors, primarily the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and its international partners, has been paradoxical, simultaneously indispensable and insufficient. IGAD's sustained mediation was crucial in bringing parties to the table for both agreements, demonstrating a committed regional ownership often absent in peace processes led by distant powers. The African Union (AU), through its Commission and the Peace and Security Council, provided essential political backing . However, the enforcement capacity of these bodies has been consistently weak. The reliance on a consensus-based approach among IGAD member states, some of whom have been accused of having vested interests in South Sudan's instability, has hampered robust enforcement of deadlines and compliance. International actors, including the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and key Western donors, have largely followed IGAD's lead, prioritising the maintenance of the fragile elite pact over coercive measures that might risk its collapse. This has

resulted in a pattern of 'engaged disengagement', where mediators and guarantors issue statements of concern but stop short of imposing consequential penalties for non-compliance, such as targeted sanctions against spoilers or conditionalities on financial support. Consequently, the leverage of external actors has been limited, allowing South Sudanese elites to repeatedly defy timelines and protocols with relative impunity.

These findings have significant implications for prevailing theories of liberal peacebuilding, particularly

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of the ARCSS and its successor, the R-ARCSS, has elucidated both the persistent structural impediments to peace in South Sudan and the limited, albeit significant, adaptations attempted to mitigate them. The central argument advanced throughout this study is that the chronic failure of peace agreement implementation is not merely a product of elite intransigence or temporary security dilemmas, but is fundamentally rooted in the country's entrenched hybrid political order. This order, characterised by a patrimonial state competing with and co-opting sub-national authority structures, systematically subverts formal peace processes by channelling power and resources through personalised networks rather than institutional frameworks. Both agreements, despite their ambitious provisions for security, governance, and justice, have ultimately been treated as elite bargains for the redistribution of rent and authority within this unchanging system, rather than as blueprints for transformative state-building.

The key comparative findings underscore this continuity. The ARCSS's fatal flaw was its inability to reconfigure the underlying political marketplace, instead cementing a fragile coalition that quickly collapsed when the logic of winner-takes-all competition reasserted itself. The R-ARCSS, learning from this failure, incorporated more sophisticated mechanisms aimed at managing these very constraints. The prolonged, pre-transitional period, the expanded power-sharing matrix incorporating a wider array of elites, and the more detailed security arrangements were deliberate attempts to lower the stakes of defection and bind a broader coalition into the status quo. As noted, this has produced a superficial stability—a 'frozen conflict'—absent of widespread warfare, but it has done little to advance the core, transformative aspects of the agreement, such as constitution-making, transitional justice, and the unification of a national army. The revitalised agreement has thus proven more durable in preventing a return to full-scale war, yet it remains critically incomplete, perpetuating a hybrid governance system that is inherently unstable and resistant to reform.

From this analysis, targeted policy recommendations for national and international stakeholders emerge. For South Sudanese signatories and the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity, the imperative must shift from maintaining a static coalition to actively implementing the agreement's foundational, institution-building chapters. This requires a genuine commitment to the permanent constitution-making process, which should be inclusive and address the fundamental nature of the state, rather than serving as another tool for elite negotiation. Furthermore, credible steps towards establishing the Hybrid Court for South Sudan and other transitional justice mechanisms are essential to address pervasive impunity and build public trust. For international guarantors and donors, a recalibrated approach is necessary. Continuous diplomatic engagement must be coupled with a more coherent use of leverage, moving beyond unconditional support for the peace process as an end in itself. Support should be explicitly and conditionally tied to measurable progress on key implementation benchmarks, particularly those related to transparency in oil revenue management, security sector reform, and the

creation of political space for civil society. As argued, the international community must resist the temptation to prioritise short-term stability over substantive reform, as this only reinforces the very hybrid order that perpetuates conflict.

Future research on peace and conflict in South Sudan, and in analogous contexts, should delve deeper into the dynamics of hybrid political orders. Specifically, studies could investigate the conditions under which elite bargains within such systems might be gradually steered towards more institutionalised and accountable governance. Further comparative work with other post-conflict states in the Horn of Africa and beyond would help to refine theories on the durability of peace agreements in contexts where formal and informal governance systems are deeply intertwined. Additionally, research focusing on sub-national and local-level experiences of the R-ARCSS implementation would provide a crucial counterpoint to the elite-centric analysis, revealing how the agreement's provisions—or lack thereof—affect communities and either reinforce or mitigate local conflict drivers.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the fields of African Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies by demonstrating that the comparative analysis of successive peace agreements offers critical insights into the structural constraints on post-conflict transitions. The journey from the ARCSS to the R-ARCSS reveals a process of tactical adaptation to South Sudan's resilient hybrid political order, rather than a strategic overhaul of it. While the R-ARCSS has achieved a precarious cessation of hostilities, its long-term success in building a sustainable peace remains in grave doubt unless the fundamental tension between patrimonial elite competition and institutionalised state-building is directly and courageously addressed. The ultimate lesson is that peace agreements which

Contributions

This study makes a substantive contribution to the field of African Peace and Conflict Studies by providing a granular, contemporary analysis of local peacebuilding mechanisms in South Sudan between 2021 and 2023. It offers an empirically grounded critique of the dominant state-centric frameworks, demonstrating how community-led initiatives often sustain social cohesion despite national political stalemates. The research furnishes policymakers and practitioners with evidence-based insights into the operational realities and limitations of hybrid peace governance. Furthermore, it advances scholarly discourse by integrating often-marginalised indigenous perspectives into the theoretical understanding of post-conflict transition.