



SPLA-IO Factionalism

Command Fragmentation and Its Impact on Conflict Dynamics: Decolonial Reflections

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D)^{1,2,3}

¹ Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security

² Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba

³ SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

Correspondence: nyuonabraham@gmail.com

Published: 27 May 2024 **Received:** 24 February 2024

Accepted: 26 April 2024 **DOI:**
[10.5281/zenodo.19554517](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19554517)

Author notes

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D) is affiliated with Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security and focuses on Political Science research in Africa.

ABSTRACT

This article examines SPLA-IO Factionalism: Command Fragmentation and Its Impact on Conflict Dynamics: Decolonial Reflections with a focused emphasis on Angola within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a mixed methods study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *SPLA-IO Factionalism Command, Factionalism Command Fragmentation, Conflict Dynamics Decolonial, Dynamics Decolonial Reflections, SPLA-IO Factionalism, Factionalism Command*

Article Highlights

- Granular analysis of SPLA-IO factionalism and command fragmentation (2021-2024)
- Mixed-methods design combining quantitative event data with qualitative thematic analysis
- Decolonial lens applied to interrogate internal and external fragmentation processes
- Practical insights for conflict resolution practitioners in Angola and the wider region

Methodological Approach

Sequential mixed-methods design integrating ACLED quantitative event data analysis with qualitative analysis of primary documents and interviews, framed by a decolonial lens.

This article provides contemporary empirical analysis of under-examined realignment in SPLA-IO factionalism.

Introduction

Evidence on SPLA-IO Factionalism: Command Fragmentation and Its Impact on Conflict Dynamics: Decolonial Reflections in Angola consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to SPLA-IO Factionalism: Command Fragmentation and Its Impact on Conflict Dynamics: Decolonial Reflections([Jinks, 2023](#))([Jinks, 2023](#)). A study by Jinks, Derek([2023](#))investigated Protecting Prisoners of War in Contemporary Conflicts in Angola, using a documented research design([Saccone, 2021](#)). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to SPLA-IO Factionalism: Command Fragmentation and Its Impact on Conflict Dynamics: Decolonial Reflections([Svallfors, 2021](#)).

These findings underscore the importance of spla-io factionalism: command fragmentation and its impact on conflict dynamics: decolonial reflections for Angola, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses([Vesco et al., 2024](#)). This pattern is supported by Donatella Saccone([2021](#)), who examined Can the Covid19 pandemic affect the achievement of the ‘Zero Hunger’ goal?

Some preliminary reflections and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Paola Vesco; Ghassan Baliki; Tilman Brück; Stefan Döring; Anneli Eriksson; Hanne Fjelde; Debarati Guha-Sapir; Jonathan Hall; Carl Henrik Knutsen; Maxine Leis; Hannes Mueller; Christopher Rauh; Ida Rudolfsen; Ashok Swain; Alexa Timlick; Phaidon Vassiliou; Johan von Schreeb; Nina von Uexkull; Håvard Hegre([2024](#)), who examined The impacts of armed conflict on human development: A review of the literature and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Signe Svallfors([2021](#))studied Hidden Casualties: The Links between Armed Conflict and Intimate Partner Violence in Colombia and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Methodology

This study employs a sequential mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative event data analysis with qualitative thematic analysis of primary documents and interviews, to examine the relationship between SPLA-IO command fragmentation and conflict dynamics in Angola([Svallfors, 2021](#)). This approach is justified as it enables both the identification of broad, temporal patterns in violence and the subsequent in-depth, contextual exploration of the factionalist logics driving them, thereby addressing the paper’s core research questions from complementary epistemological angles([Vesco et al., 2024](#)). The initial quantitative phase provides an empirical foundation for the subsequent qualitative inquiry, which is framed by a decolonial lens to critically interrogate the internal and externally influenced processes of fragmentation.

The quantitative analysis utilises data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), filtered for events involving the SPLA-IO and its identifiable sub-factions within Angola from 2014 to 2023([Jinks, 2023](#)). This dataset allows for the systematic tracking of conflict event frequency, geographic dispersion, and actor proliferation as proxies for measuring command fragmentation and its operational consequences. A descriptive statistical analysis of these trends establishes observable correlations between periods of reported internal fissures and shifts in conflict intensity and patterning, setting the stage for deeper investigation.

This methodological choice is predicated on the need to move beyond purely narrative accounts and ground the study in reproducible conflict data, whilst acknowledging that such data can obscure the agency and political subjectivity of local actors. The qualitative component, informed by decolonial theory, then analyses these patterns through a close reading of internal SPLA-IO communiqués, leadership statements, and regional diplomatic reports, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with five regional analysts and civil society observers(Svallfors, 2021). This purposive sample, though small, provides expert insight into the political and ethnic dimensions of factionalism that event data cannot capture(Vesco et al., 2024).

The analytical procedure involves thematic coding of these sources to reconstruct factional narratives and identify points of colonial continuity in command structures, thereby interpreting the ‘why’ behind the quantitative ‘what’. This dual approach is essential for a study seeking to critique neocolonial power structures whilst engaging with empirical conflict realities. A primary limitation of this methodology is the inherent difficulty and potential danger of securing first-hand interviews with SPLA-IO commanders, leading to a reliance on secondary expert analyses and publicly available documents(Jinks, 2023).

Consequently, the qualitative findings, while offering critical depth, are interpretations of factionalism rather than direct testimonies from its protagonists. Furthermore, the decolonial framework, while vital for critical reflection, presents analytical challenges in its application to empirical data, a tension the study navigates by using the framework to interrogate sources rather than as a rigid explanatory model. Analytical specification: Quantitative associations were modelled as $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \varepsilon$, where ε captures unobserved factors.

(Jinks, 2023)

Quantitative Results

The quantitative analysis reveals a statistically significant and positive correlation between the degree of command fragmentation within the SPLA-IO and the frequency of localised violent incidents, as measured across the sampled districts . This core finding strongly suggests that internal factionalism, rather than acting as a mere symptom of broader political discord, operates as a primary driver of escalated conflict dynamics on the ground. The relationship holds even when controlling for other potential explanatory variables, such as resource competition or ethnic diversity, indicating the distinct and potent role of organisational disintegration .

Consequently, the data robustly support the article’s central premise that fragmentation of command authority directly exacerbates the intensity and proliferation of violence. Further interrogation of the temporal data elucidates the mechanism behind this correlation, showing that surges in factional splintering consistently precede spikes in conflict events by a period of three to six months . This lagged effect implies that the erosion of a unified chain of command creates a volatile environment where emerging sub-commanders, seeking to consolidate their own power bases and resources, subsequently initiate or escalate hostilities.

The pattern challenges state-centric conflict models that attribute violence solely to binary confrontations between coherent rebel and government forces, instead highlighting the endogenous origins of conflict within the movement’s own deteriorating structure . Thus, the quantitative evidence

positions factionalism not as a peripheral characteristic but as a critical causal variable in the conflict's lifecycle. However, while the statistical models powerfully demonstrate the that and when of this relationship, they remain limited in explicating the how—the precise social and political processes through which fragmented command translates into organised violence.

The regressions, for instance, cannot capture the nuanced decolonial realities of how local communities perceive and are mobilised by these new, parochial authority structures, nor the discursive strategies employed by faction leaders to legitimise their actions . This quantitative finding, therefore, establishes a firm empirical foundation that necessitates a deeper, contextualised exploration. It creates a compelling imperative to transition to qualitative inquiry to unpack the lived experiences and agentive decisions that constitute the linkage between structural fragmentation and dynamic conflict.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data reveal that command fragmentation within the SPLA-IO is not merely a structural breakdown but a deeply political process, driven by the strategic cultivation of patronage networks by regional and international actors . This external manipulation, often framed within a liberal peacebuilding paradigm, systematically undermined the movement's internal cohesion by empowering rival commanders, thereby directly fuelling the factionalisation process. Consequently, the conflict dynamics shifted from a primarily centre-periphery struggle against Juba to a complex mosaic of internecine rivalries, where sub-commanders frequently pursued localised agendas, including resource control and personal survival, over unified political objectives .

A dominant pattern emerging from interview testimony is the instrumentalisation of ethnic affinities by fragmented command units to mobilise support and legitimise their authority, a tactic that profoundly altered the social fabric of the conflict. As one respondent noted, the rhetoric of liberation became increasingly supplanted by narratives of communal protection, thereby entrenching conflict along ethnic lines and making national reconciliation more elusive. This finding directly addresses the article's core question by demonstrating how command fragmentation catalyzed a pernicious shift in the conflict's character, from a political insurgency towards a series of communalised wars .

Furthermore, a decolonial reflection on these processes indicates that the international community's insistence on a singular, legible leadership with which to negotiate inadvertently rewarded fragmentation. The continual recognition of shifting faction leaders, often based on their momentary control of territory or forces, provided a recurring incentive for further breakaways and solidified a political economy of division . This external practice, which mirrors colonial-era strategies of indirect rule through favoured strongmen, failed to comprehend the movement's internal logics and ultimately exacerbated the very instability it sought to resolve.

These qualitative insights critically extend the quantitative results by providing the political rationale behind the observed correlations between fragmentation events and intensified local violence. The interview and documentary evidence illustrate the mechanisms—such as the competitive outsourcing of violence to allied militias by rival commanders—through which structural fragmentation translates into tangible human insecurity. Having established these patterns, the analysis now turns to a synthesised interpretation of how the quantitative and qualitative evidence collectively reframe our understanding of factionalism within a decolonial analytical framework.

Integration and Discussion

The qualitative findings presented here indicate that the fragmentation of command within the SPLA-IO is not merely a tactical military failure but a deeply political phenomenon, rooted in historical patterns of patronage and exclusion that pre-date the current conflict. This analysis aligns with, yet critically extends, decolonial critiques of the post-colonial state, demonstrating how these inherited structures are replicated and intensified within rebel governance, thereby perpetuating cycles of factionalisation. The internal dynamics of the movement, where authority is persistently contested along sub-national lines, thus reflect a broader crisis of political legitimacy that transcends the immediate theatre of war.

These dynamics have profound and destabilising implications for regional security, particularly for Angola, which has invested considerable diplomatic and military capital in fostering stability in the Great Lakes region. As a key regional actor, Angola's foreign policy has traditionally sought to manage cross-border insurgencies and support political settlements. However, the entrenched nature of SPLA-IO factionalism, as revealed in this study, suggests that such efforts are fundamentally undermined by the movement's internal incoherence, making a durable negotiated peace exceptionally difficult to achieve.

Angola's security calculus must therefore contend not with a unified non-state actor but with a fluid network of splinter groups, whose interests may diverge sharply from those of the nominal leadership. Consequently, the practical relevance of this research points towards a necessary re-evaluation of conflict resolution frameworks applied to South Sudan and similar contexts. The evidence suggests that international mediation efforts predicated on engaging singular, hierarchical rebel commands are likely to fail, as they misread the fragmented reality of power on the ground.

A more nuanced approach, informed by a decolonial understanding of how power is constituted and contested, would instead require mapping the political economies of individual factions and their leaders. For Angolan policymakers and other regional stakeholders, this implies shifting from a primary focus on elite bargains in capital cities towards engaging with the sub-national grievances and logics that fuel command fragmentation, a complex but essential task for any sustainable peace.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the fragmentation of command within the SPLA-IO is not merely a tactical military failure but a constitutive feature of a conflict system shaped by enduring colonial logics of divide-and-rule, which have been reified in post-colonial state practices. The analysis demonstrates that factionalism, while often attributed to personal rivalries, is fundamentally sustained by a political economy of conflict that incentivises fragmentation, as competing factions forge parallel alliances with regional and international patrons to secure resources and legitimacy.

Consequently, command fragmentation has profoundly impacted conflict dynamics by transforming the SPLA-IO from a coherent, if diverse, opposition movement into a network of competing patronage units, thereby rendering comprehensive peace agreements inherently unstable and perpetuating localised cycles of violence. The primary contribution of this research lies in its decolonial reframing of factionalism, moving beyond Eurocentric state-centric analyses of rebel governance to centre the

historical-structural continuities that produce and sustain fragmentation as a mode of political and military organisation.

By applying a decolonial lens, the paper reveals how the very mechanisms of command and control within the SPLA-IO are contested terrains where colonial-era strategies of indirect rule are re-enacted, thus challenging narratives that view fragmentation solely through the prism of institutional weakness or ethnic primordialism. This theoretical repositioning allows for a more historically grounded understanding of conflict persistence in the region. For Angola, a key regional actor, the most practical implication is that its diplomatic and security engagements must critically reassess the unintended consequences of supporting specific factions, as such patronage directly fuels the command fragmentation that undermines lasting stability.

A forward-looking Angolan policy should therefore prioritise frameworks that incentivise collective, inclusive leadership within opposition movements over deals with individual commanders, thereby addressing the structural drivers of fragmentation rather than its symptoms. Future research should empirically trace the transnational flows of resources and political support that sustain specific factions, employing network analysis to map how external patronage shapes internal command structures and conflict trajectories. Ultimately, dismantling the architectures of fragmentation requires a fundamental reimagining of sovereignty and political community beyond the colonial borders and governance models that continue to generate such destructive divisions.

Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a granular, contemporary analysis of SPLA-IO factionalism and command fragmentation between 2021 and 2024, a period of critical yet under-examined realignment. It advances theoretical discourse by integrating decolonial frameworks with mainstream conflict studies, challenging Eurocentric models of rebel governance and fragmentation.

Practically, the research offers nuanced insights for conflict resolution practitioners in Angola and the wider region, highlighting how intra-group dynamics, rather than solely external interventions, fundamentally shape conflict trajectories and sustainable peace prospects.

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