

## REBELLION OPTIMISM AND POLITICAL REFORMS IN SOUTH SUDAN

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### ABSTRACT

*After its 22-year war of independence, the Republic of South Sudan has survived numerous armed rebellions attempting to force political reforms. This has happened despite the availability of various peaceful options which have been used elsewhere in the world to introduce political reforms. These peaceful options include: peaceful protests, democratic elections, national dialogue, and parliamentary legislation. In South Sudan however, these options have never become a priority for political leaders seeking political reforms. Studies indicate that rebellions have led to infernal consequences such as the loss of human lives, wanton destruction property, massive civil displacement, economic crises, and the collapse of national institutions. Because these consequences are severe, the rebellions in South Sudan are arguably just—but taking different dynamics leading to further destruction and a risk of state failure, one wonders: what makes political leaders become optimistic in choosing rebellion over peaceful options to force political reforms? Choosing rebellion over peaceful alternatives is what this paper refers to as “rebellion optimism”. Leaders become positive about the potential outcomes of their choice of rebellion as a means of forcing the political reforms they desire. The paper is divided into three sections including: post-Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and post-independence political transition; post-CPA and post-independence military arrangements; and citizen participation in governance. The study argues that misgovernment has undermined security sector reforms and citizen participation in public affairs. This has resulted in the persistent increase of dissenting voices that give hope to political dissidents, who in turn offer the promise alternative government that can be achieved through rebellion. Rebellion optimists have exploited citizens’ dissatisfaction with wanting government services as a main tool to mobilize them to fight the government.*

**Keywords:** *Rebellion Optimism; Political Reforms; Peaceful Options; and Misgovernment.*

## INTRODUCTION

South Sudan achieved its independence from Sudan following the third phase of liberation struggle led by the then rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The SPLM/A was born when Southerners became discontented with the actions of Sudanese dictator Jaafar Nimeiri, who abrogated and dishonoured the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 that has ended Anya-nya II, a previous armed struggle by the Southerners (Arnold & LeRiche, 2013:16-17). On 16 May 1983, Major Kerubino Kuanyin Bol and his colleagues fired their first bullets on the Sudanese Army in Bor town to mark the start of a new armed rebellion, the SPLM/A (Malwal, 2014:157-158). Dr. John Garang, who later joined the new rebel movement along the Ethiopia border, emerged as the leader of the SPLM/A (Bayissa, 2007:22).

The SPLM/A aimed to emancipate the excluded, marginalized and oppressed Sudanese, the intended outcome being to free them from the repressive government in Khartoum and to establish a "reformed and united socialist Sudan" (Young, 2012:46-47). Rebellion optimism stemmed from the ideas of some SPLM/A leaders especially Samuel Gai Tut and Akuot Atem who opposed this new vision of the SPLM/A by insisting to fight for the independence of South Sudan. After the killing of Samuel Gai in May 1984 by the SPLM/A under John Garang, dissident supporters maintained Samuel Gai's Anya-nya II objective to fight for the independence of South Sudan (Yihun, 2013:41-42). In support of the SPLM/A vision, Nyaba (2019:67) argues that "SPLM/A leadership feigned socialist idiosyncrasies as a deceptive strategy to link itself to Ethiopia and the socialist fraternity in order to solicit political and military support".

After the fall of the supportive Ethiopian government of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1989, Garang and the SPLM/A had to find ways to establish political and military ties with the West and its allies in the region. However, separatist elements within the SPLM/A, led by Dr. Riek Machar and Dr. Lam Akol, aligned with the vision of Anya-nya II and saw this as an opportunity to fight for the independence of South Sudan (Johnson, 2014:305-306). Machar and Akol became optimistic that they could force political reforms within the leadership of the SPLM/A, and announced a major rebellion against the SPLM/A in 1991 (Brosché & Höglund, 2017:209). The Machar and Akol faction of the SPLM/A was identified as the "Nasir faction" while Garang's faction was referred to as the "Torit faction" (Douglas Hamilton Johnson, 2003:90-101). The changing dynamics of the war between these SPLM/A factions provided an opportunity for the Sudanese government in Khartoum to reorganize, launch offensives and recaptured some of the SPLM/A-controlled areas (Saul, 1993:1-4).

As the war between the SPLM/A factions intensified, the Nasir faction became weaker and opted to sign the Khartoum Peace Agreement in 1997 with the Sudanese Government (J. Young & Griffin, 2007:17). One of the key principles of the Khartoum Peace Agreement was self-determination for the people of South Sudan. In the process of implementing the agreement, Machar and Akol disagreed. Their disagreement led Akol to form his own "Fashoda faction" (Pospisil, 2014). This disagreement made both Machar and Akol less optimistic about their quest to achieve self-determination through the Khartoum Peace Agreement. However, on Garang's side, a negotiated peace agreement with the support of the United States and its allies became a preferable option for consideration. In 2002, Machar joined Garang's SPLM/A "Torit faction" with the objective of consolidating the struggle for peace (Tounsel, 2016).

Through the support of the United States and its European allies, the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) decided to encourage the Sudan Government and the SPLM/A to appreciate a negotiated settlement of what had now become Africa's longest civil war (Malwal, 2014:168). This engagement led to the signing of the Machakos Protocol on the Declaration of Principles, which included the principle of self-determination (Protocol, 2002). The "self-determination" was achieved through the exercise of referendum after a six- year interim period that led to the secession of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011 (Johnson, 2008:8). A Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in January 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya. The main rebel movements were included except a few holdout militias such as the South Sudan Defence

Forces (SSDF) led by Paulino Matip. The SSDF was initially an imminent threat to the CPA, but was later integrated into the SPLA through the Juba Declaration in 2006 (Young & Lebrun, 2006:9).

Other smaller rebel movements emerged in South Sudan as a consequence of activities preceding the exercise of the referendum such as general elections in 2010. These rebel movements included: the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army (SSDM/A) led by George Athor; the Cobra faction of the SSDM/A under David Yau Yau; and the South Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SSLM/A) led by Peter Gatdet (Brosché & Höglund, 2016:11). Other rebellions also emerged from differences around the constitution-making process. Dr. Riek Machar, who was Vice President of South Sudan and Deputy Chairman of the SPLM, indicated areas of concern in the proposed constitution, such as the heavy concentration of power in the executive (Rolandsen, 2015:166). These concerns by Machar brought differences amongst members of the SPLM's Political Bureau. President Salva Kiir, who is also the Chairman of the SPLM considered these concerns as an attempt to undermine his leadership (Blanchard, 2014:4-7).

Machar and some SPLM leaders sustained their criticism of President Kiir's government and the SPLM party. These criticisms exacerbated political differences within the SPLM and triggered the 2013 crisis (Nyadera, 2018:71). Many South Sudanese from Machar's Nuer ethnic identity were killed in Juba by government forces. As a consequence, Machar reacted to the situation by declaring armed rebellion against the government in order to force political reforms (Craze, Tubiana, & Gramizzi, 2016:39-97). President Kiir and his government defended the status quo (Young, 2015:26). Both sides experienced further splits and defections including: the new rebel movements under General Peter Gatdet Yak, General Gabriel Tanginye, General Gathoth Gatkouth, Changson Leaw Chang, and General Thomas Cirilo Swaka (Kindersley & Rolandsen, 2017:315-316). General Paul Malong Awan and General Bapiny Muntuil also defected from the government and formed new rebel movements (Boswell, 2019:3-11). During the re-negotiation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), a majority of the newly formed rebel movements merged to form the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA) (Gebremichael, Kifle, & Kidane, 2018:6).

## **CONCEPTUALIZING REBELLION**

Political rebellion can be described as action taken by a group of people to show their dissatisfaction or dissension against oppressive regimes. A group can for instance constitute members of an ethnic community, members of a political party, or a common class who subscribe to a shared opinion. Rebellion encompasses both armed and non-armed conflict. Lewis argues that armed conflict occurs when a group of people form a nascent organization and begin to use violence against a State, with the objective of changing the authority of the incumbent government. Such a group would be considered "rebel" when it establishes a "command and control structure, and committed or planned to commit an act of violence against the State" (Lewis, 2017:1421-1422). Unarmed rebellion involves the application of maximum pressure against a State. In some instances, it emerges as spontaneous social or political movement aimed at exerting maximum pressure on the authority to accept reforms or succumb to such pressure. This include class revolt in the form of civil rights movement such as the "Organization of Afro-American Unity" (OAAU) in the United States. The OAAU was founded by Malcolm X in 1964 to challenge the persistent poverty among the African-Americans in the United States (Sales Jr & Sales, 1994:1-7). Taylor explicates racism and persistent structural inequality in the United States such as the skewed incarceration and unemployment of black Americans. The Black Lives Matter movement is a global unarmed resistance against discrimination and marginalization of black people (Taylor, 2016).

In Eastern Europe, ethnic secessionist emerged after the collapse of Soviet Union. They were armed and violence. Laitin (2001) posits that their emergence was informed by cultural antipathies and the uncertainties arising from the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Ethnic minorities felt their needs could no longer be met by the central government. They chose to rebel and demanded sovereignty ( 842-860). In 1968, Western Europe

experienced a series of popular rebellions. Citizens chose to encounter imperialism, capitalism, bureaucracy, autocracy and authoritarianism through individual and collective liberation efforts. The aim of their rebellion was to uproot all forms of hierarchical thinking and topple economic and political elites to pave ways for a new society where people become masters of their own destinies (Horn, 2007:83-238). Individuals or groups rebel for purposes of achieving varying goals, including proclamations of independence, societal transformation, the restoration of peace and resistance against oppressive regimes (Rugeley, 2009:12-63).

In Africa, rebellion originated from the concept of national liberation movements (NLMs). The concept of NLMs emanated from anti-colonial armed and unarmed movements emerging as a result of the reaction to colonial rule. In either form, the objectives revolved around territorial sovereignty, self-determination/autonomy, and democratic reforms. Some common triggers of contemporary rebellion in Africa include: tension between dominant ruling parties that govern in disregard of the principles of democracy, dissatisfaction with election results, and the [mis]use of State power against opponents by authoritarian regimes (Southall, 2013:2-7). Other liberation movements emerged as a result of bad governance by regimes which inherited the colonial institutions and administrative practices. Fanon (1961) described these types of leaders as native bourgeoisie who lack intellectual resources, and primarily aim to accumulate wealth and transfer resources in the name of nationalization and Africanization. Fanon argued that many NLMs have opted for self-enrichment than transforming their societies.

Bereketeab argues that African liberation struggles were informed by the experience of domination, exploitation, colonization and enslavement by the colonizers. Africans wanted freedom from oppressive and marginalizing colonial administrations. Their primary objectives were to achieve political, economic, social, cultural, and ultimately, territorial independence from the imperialist powers. Some subsequent African liberation movements fought to topple African-led authoritarian and oppressive regimes that inherited colonial systems of governance and continued to exploit their fellow Africans. Liberators aimed to force political, economic and social reforms by overhauling oppressive and exclusionary state structures to achieve equitable representation for the pluralist identities. African's choices of liberation struggle were limited to armed and political liberation (Bereketeab, 2017:8-11). Roessler and Verhoeven defined liberation as an inversion of societal power. In this case, the excluded seized control of the State and were motivated by the promise to build a more inclusive, representative and autonomous political regime (Roessler & Verhoeven, 2017:11). For liberation movements that choose insurgency or armed struggle, they do so to stop the oppression and marginalization of society by the incumbent government. Both armed and unarmed liberation struggles are characterized by high mass mobilization that give them popular support (p. 12-13)

Whether rebellion or liberation movements, their overall objective is to emancipate or liberate politically, economically, socially and culturally oppressed and marginalized societies. Whether the liberators fought against colonizers/imperialist, and or existing regimes that have inherited colonial tendencies, their struggle involved opposing identities (Young , 2003).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was based on secondary data to gain an understanding about rebellion optimism. It aims to find answers on why South Sudan's political leaders often choose rebellion in their quest for political reforms. This was a review study that relied only on reviewing literature that has been published by accredited institutions and individual scholars. The review concentrated on books and journal articles (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The literature reviewed was organized into three main thematic sections including: post- Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the post-independence political transitions; post-CPA and post-independence military arrangements; and the participation of South Sudanese citizens in governance (Slevitch, 2011:76-78).

Emerging themes from the three sections of reviewed literature have been synthesized. Areas of convergence have been identified and gaps have been established. Some conclusive statements have been

drawn based on the original interpretation by the original authors. However, based on the subjective nature of the method used, the views of the researcher can be identified as part of the conclusion. In the end, the study proposes scientific investigation to be conducted in the field to compare the outcome with the current desktop study to establish the gaps or confirm the findings (Cronin, Ryan, & Coughlan, 2008). This paper has been structured into six main headings 1) Introduction; 2) Conceptualizing rebellion; 3) Methodology; 4) Thematic sections; 5) Thematic Discussion; and 5) Conclusion.

## **THEMATIC SECTIONS**

### **Section 1: Post-CPA and Post-Independence Political Transition**

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 gave the SPLM the mandate to form the interim government of Southern Sudan. It had the mandate to organize and establish structures of government and institutions of governance as part of its commitment to prepare the Southerners for referendum. This was also an opportunity for the SPLM to demonstrate its ability to provide alternative leadership as opposed to the old Sudan. However, Nyaba asserts that “the people of Southern Sudan have been in dire straits due to misgovernment” (Nyaba, 2016:83). Through popular commitment and demand by the people of South Sudan, a referendum vote was guaranteed with 98.83 percent of the South Sudanese population voting for secession from Sudan (Vidmar, 2011:553). Wassara argues that South Sudan’s sovereignty has been challenged at its infancy. Stressing that instead of establishing government institutions to deliver services to the people, the SPLM was already fragmented into various factions of political and armed rebels in competition for power and the control of national resources. Each faction claimed to be rewarded for their participation in the liberation struggle. In the end, the factional wars compromised the government’s ability to establish strong political, economic and social institutions of governance. He avers that this demonstrates the failure of the SPLM to adhere to international norms of statebuilding (Wassara, 2015:635).

Before and after the independence referendum, South Sudan has continued to witness violent conflicts inside the country and along its borders with Sudan. In South Sudan, Warrap, Unity, Jonglei, Upper Nile and Lakes states were all experiencing communal and politically-motivated violent conflicts. Zambakari observes that peace in South Sudan after secession will depend on its relations with Sudan. The durability of peace between Sudan and South Sudan depends on the comprehensive resolution of outstanding issues between the two countries. These outstanding issues include: border demarcation; allocation of oil revenues; movement of nomadic groups across borders; debt sharing; and the status of Abyei, South Kordofan and Blue Nile (Zambakari, 2013:43-53). Despite achieving independence on 9 July 2011, members of the SPLM/A have always reminded themselves of the 1991 split. The 1991 split birthed connotations of betrayers and defenders of the liberation movement. This makes leaders become more inclined to their negative past rather than focus on nation-building. As a result, the SPLM leadership has failed to institutionalize a uniting political system. This constituted immediate causes of the current crises in South Sudan and mistrust among political leaders who have more faith in their ethnic associates than in other compatriots (Wassara, 2014).

Ethnicity and corrupt wealth accumulation are among the primary causes of the ongoing conflict in South Sudan. When ethnicity is entrenched in national institutions, it compromises the practice of governance thereby promoting exclusion in the system. Pinaud maintains that ethnicity and predatory wealth accumulation was key in fostering ethnic group entitlement in South Sudan (Pinaud, 2021:2). Pinaud argues that when a group assumes entitlement, the next step is for it to claim legitimacy and worth. “The more wealth an ethnic faction accumulated, especially under international auspices, the more entitled it felt and the more intolerant it became toward ethnic competitors” (p.3). As South Sudanese continue to identify themselves largely on the basis of ethnicity, it compromises their national identity. When ethnic identity thrives, national identity shrinks. This conflict weakens the sense of national unity and affects legitimacy. Fukuyama asserts that a weak sense of national identity is a major obstacle to development in sub-Saharan Africa (Fukuyama, 2018).

Emphasizing that “national identity begins with shared belief in the legitimacy of the country’s political system, whether that system is democratic or not” (p.126).

A part from ethnic identification, SPLM has also struggled to contain divisions after 1991 split. After the death of John Garang, differences emerged between senior members of the SPLM/A. Salva Kiir, who assumed the chairmanship of the SPLM/A had to continue working with Riek Machar, who via the 2002 Nairobi merger, assumed the position of the third deputy of the SPLM (Nyaba, 2016). After independence, South Sudan embarked on a permanent constitution making process that finally delivered the transitional constitution of South Sudan 2011. Riek Machar showed his dissatisfaction with the way in which President Kiir was pushing for a constitution that concentrated power in the hands of the president (Kimenyi, 2012). Machar and Garang’s loyalists began to challenge Kiir’s leadership due to a lack of development, corruption in the ruling SPLM party and the government, failure in foreign policy, insecurity in the countryside, and the loss of vision and direction by the SPLM. Kiir felt isolated, insubordinated and undermined. On 23 July 2013, Kiir sacked the whole cabinet including Vice President Machar and replaced them with newly co-opted National Congress Party (NCP) associates who helped in mending relations with Sudan. On 15 December 2013, Machar guards clashed with President Kiir’s guards in Tiger Division Headquarters. This became the trigger for the deadliest war. Machar escaped the capital, Juba, and became a rebel leader fighting President Kiir’s government as he saw no possibility peaceful resolution of the conflict except to overthrow the government through military takeover (Douglas H Johnson, 2014b).

## **Section 2: Post-CPA and Post-Independence Military Arrangements**

In the interest of consolidating peace and to pave way for development, the CPA provided for a Security Arrangement Mechanism that created a Joint Integrated Unit (JIU) comprising of units from the SPLA and units of Sudan’s Defence Forces (SAF). Other divisions of the SPLA and all factional forces and Other Armed Groups (OAGs) were meant to be organized and integrated within the then autonomous region of Southern Sudan ahead of 2011 referendum. There were two categories of forces to be integrated into the SPLA. These included the forces under the command of Riek Machar, and several OAGs comprising ethnic or regional militiamen. Warner argues that SPLA did not have proper mechanisms and sufficient resources to operationalize the integration of former combatants. It however managed to integrate a majority of these combatants using the available resources, but found it difficult to build internal cohesion and to eliminate tribalism (Warner, 2018:175). Rands contends that the SPLA had no formal written comprehensive defence strategy with a detailed implementation plan. Such lack of coherent defence strategy has frustrated military transformation. This gap, coupled with lack of accountability, logistics and training, has constrained the SPLA’s ability to contain the newly integrated forces. In the end, this fluid situation became the source of ethnic and regional rivalries within the newly united army (Rands, 2010:8).

The incomplete integration of various armed groups, and persistent ethnically-motivated rivalries within the integrated army have been exploited by political elites in South Sudan, who divided the army on ethnic lines to secure their political positions (Krause, 2019). Omoleye and Joshua observed that division between political elites from the three historical regional groupings of South Sudan (Bhar el Gazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile), as well as the greed and selfishness of South Sudanese leaders have undoubtedly contributed to national disintegration. They argue that the implications of ethnicity and power struggle have exacerbated conflict-hence, affecting national unity. Rival politicians compete over power and economic resources in order to safeguard the interests of their ethnic groups. This competition has constrained the country’s ability to establish strong national institutions of governance. They emphasize that due to weak national institutions of governance, any efforts to enforce accountability have been thwarted by leaders who practice corruption and nepotism (Omoleye & Joshua, 2018:79-89).

In South Sudan a class of military elites who usually commonly refer to themselves as “the liberators” have amassed financial resources by corrupting the system of governance from the army to political institutions

(Kindersley & Rolandsen, 2016). They have captured the State and its resources, catapulting them into a dominant class. Pinaud argues that the formation of this dominant class ushered in a “new autocracy” which has been sponsored with resources accumulated through wartime predation and corrupt dealings in the incumbent government. Corruption and widespread nepotism compromise national integrity and cohesion, risk state survival, and provoke ethnic conflict. He explicates that the formation of kinship networks with an aim of amassing resources to benefit a dominant class is a true manifestation of ideological deficit and the lack of national agenda. The final results is the hindrance of the success of security sector agencies (Clemence Pinaud, 2014).

The security sector institutions are exploited by political elites. Breitung, Paes and Vondervoort argue that South Sudan’s military has been used as a tool by political leaders to secure their positions and advance the interests of their ethnic groups. Each of the ethnic groupings fight to bring wealth and recognition to their members. They assert that handling these patronage networks has proven difficult for the current regime to guarantee its survival (Breitung, Paes, & Vondervoort, 2016). The proliferation of illegal firearms into the hands of civilian populations in South Sudan has hindered security sector arrangements. Cross border proxy wars between Sudan and South Sudan and the existence of militia groups in both countries have further contributed to the proliferation of firearms. In an attempt to contain arms proliferation, South Sudan’s government authorized civilian disarmament in 2006 and 2008. O’Brien argues that the government’s intention was not to consolidate authority, but to eliminate firearms from the hands of rival power bases. He underscores that the proliferation of arms was exacerbated by the SPLA’s lack of command and control over poorly disciplined soldiers (O’Brien, 2009).

### **Section 3: Participation of Citizens in Governance**

Citizens participation in governance is determined by their confidence in their government. Their confidence is guaranteed when the government allows them to exercise their sovereign rights by electing leaders of their choice in free and fair elections. They can also develop additional confidence in government if such government provides security, social services, protects human rights, unites its citizens, and promotes equal access to economic opportunities (Katherine Almquist Knopf, 2016:20). Knopf describes the Sudanese general elections of 2010 as dubious, suggesting that the elections were a contributing factor to rebellion in South Sudan. New rebel groups received support from their communities and the Sudanese Government. They accused the SPLM government of having manipulated the elections. South Sudan Government’s response to rebel insurgencies has resulted in the killing of civilian population and the creation of sharp ethnic divisions which have been exploited by the Sudanese Government. Knopf argues that ,in South Sudan, the killing of civilians, the government’s inhibition of accountability, intimidation and outright attacks on journalists and human rights advocates, and the denial of access to independence information through media and civil society organizations have all contributed to the reasons why civilians have lost confidence in their government- thereby making them to be easily manipulated by the rebel movements (Knopf, 2013:1-3).

Inclusivity is a key indicator of a democratic system of governance. It encourages equitable representation of all sections of society. However, Omia and Obonyo argue that inclusivity in South Sudan has been hindered by the existing practice of rewarding “warlords” christened as “freedom fighters” with positions at the expense of participatory civilian structures. This system of rewarding “warlords” has encouraged ethnic factionalism over nationalism. In essence, one of the main hindrance of citizens’ participation has been centralized nomination of candidates by political parties. This has created tension between central institutions of governance and the citizenry. Other factors that actualized civilian exclusion include: the militarization of the public service, ethnic favouritism in all sectors of employment, and unequal sharing of national resources (Omia & Obonyo, 2015).

Inclusivity is an integral part of democratic practice. Its absence directly impedes the successful implementation of participatory democratic reforms in post-conflict States (Banks, 2007). Gender parity is one

of the key components of participatory governance. South Sudan's Transitional Constitution of 2011 provides for a quota system of 25 percent representation for women at executive and legislative levels. Arguably, this opens up opportunities for women's political and economic empowerment (Ali, 2011). While appreciating the importance of the role of women in peacebuilding, Mai is concerned of the patriarchal nature of South Sudanese's society, which impedes women's representation in modern institutions of governance. Women in South Sudan are seen as trivial in peacebuilding, a claim that has been backed by the high level illiteracy among women and girl children. This is coupled with militarized political appointments, ethnic perceptions and a lack of political will by the national leadership to implement legal provisions and institutional frameworks that increase women participation in peacebuilding (Mai & James, 2015:8-10). However, in state building, Mjøen argues that women in South Sudan, Rwanda and Nepal have attained higher representation at national and local decision-making levels (Mjøen, 2015).

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in South Sudan are key role players in peacebuilding. During peace negotiations in Addis Ababa in 2015, Civil Society engaged various parties to the conflict, international and region actors to bring about lasting peace. On domestic matters, CSOs are the primary advocates for good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law. They also advocate for political reforms and participate in local peacebuilding initiatives with the objective of ending intern-ethnic violence to restore trust and promote social cohesion among the local communities. However, to some extent, CSOs in South Sudan have been divided along political lines. This was first seen during Addis Ababa Peace Negotiation in 2015 (Virk & Nganje, 2016). Despite such challenges, CSOs in South Sudan have been persistent in advocating for citizens' participation in public affairs. In *National Democratic Reforms in Africa, Challenges and Challenges*, Zambakari argues that South Sudan needs to learn from the failures of its neighbours to build a modern democratic nation that reflects the diversity of its society. Beyond this, South Sudan needs to ensure consultations with its population on important matters at national and local levels. This is to avoid circumventing agreed legal procedures that are enshrined in the nation's constitution (Adejumobi, 2015:119).

## **THEMATIC DISCUSSION**

### **On Political Transition**

Various scholars have identified some of the key issues that have affected the people of South Sudan before and after independence. Among these are greed for power, ethnicity, misgovernment and political exclusion. There is no doubt that these issues have contributed to the ongoing conflict in South Sudan. Effective government means providing political leadership, prudent management of the national economy, provision of security and social services, the development of foreign policy, and ultimately, the establishment of working, citizen-focussed government structures and institutions of governance. Partial establishment of these institutions of governance and failure to provide necessary services to the citizens is what Nyaba (2016) refers to as "misgovernment". In the context of South Sudan, misgovernment has offered fertile ground for breeding impunity, rebellion and corruption.

The SPLM government continues to struggle in an attempt to fulfil the objectives of its liberation agenda. It can hardly protect the citizens and deliver the much needed services. Redie (2018) describes this as a disappointment to the people it claims to liberate as it struggles to heal from the incurable greed for power and economic resources. In order to guarantee power, which of course guarantees instance access to public resources, political leaders have immersed themselves into unhealthy political competition to secure power. Wassara (2014 & 2015) believes that such competition has made these leaders employ various strategies to secure political positions. These include: corrupt accumulation of financial resources from public coffers, ethnic factionalism, and nepotism. Some of the outcomes include weak institutions of governance, armed and political rebellion, mistrust among political leaders, economic and social crises, and the failure of government to provide security to its citizens. The inward-looking stance of the SPLM government has offered an



opportunity for the Sudan's government to exploit political dissidents, helping breed rebellion in South Sudan. Zambakari (2013) underscores that peace in South Sudan depends on its relations with Sudan.

Ethnicity has proven to be one of the most dangerous strategy of competition for power and resources in South Sudan. The mistrust among politicians have made them to rely heavily on their ethnic networks. They believe that access to political power and survival can only be guaranteed through reliance on their tribesmen and the resources they have amassed through corrupt dealings. Pinaud (2021) asserts that when one of the ethnic groups in South Sudan ascend to power, they accumulate wealth, claim entitlement, legitimacy and worth. They act like they own the country. This is a dangerous perception that has brought the country to its knees and threatens its sovereignty. When leaders identify with their ethnic communities, they lose their sense of national identity. Fukuyama (2018) argues that a weak sense of national identity is an obstacle to development. He further explicates that "national identity" begins with shared beliefs in the legitimacy of the country's political system, whether that system is democratic or not". Losing the sense of national identity in itself entails the absence of national ideology. In the case of South Sudan, where SPLM enjoys the legacy of liberation, developing a national ideology is prerequisite to ensuring national unity.

When ethnicity is entrenched in national institutions, the outcome is obviously the exclusion of "the others" and nepotism. When certain groups or ethnic communities have been excluded from decision making, they can both restrain and wait for their "bonanza" or rebel to enforce the change they desire. A country with active rebels or insurgencies can hardly achieve development. The next step would be the conflict among the leaders, with certain collectives accepting the failures, and others defending the status quo. Nepotism has the greatest negative effect in the functioning of national institutions in South Sudan. This is because it compromises accountability and transparency thereby rendering institutions weak and inactive (Rands, 2010). In the absence of accountability, the country can hardly experience development. When there is no development, citizens undoubtedly lose confidence in their government. When they withdraw confidence in their incumbent government, they begin to look for an alternative government. In South Sudan, dissatisfied citizens can easily support rebellion. This gives hopes to political dissidents to exploit citizens to fight for them to secure their political positions (Kimenyi, 2012).

### **On Military Arrangement**

Military activities during the CPA (2005-2011) —the interim period of autonomy in the South before the 2011 referendum on independence—mostly focussed on integrating factions of the SPLA and Other Armed Groups (OAGs), providing training, orientation, and transforming the soldiers into a national army. Warner (2018), and Krause (2019) argue that SPLA lacked the mechanisms and resources to accomplish integration. Given the composition of the forces being integrated, any attempt to integrate some while leaving others was perceived as a strategy to exclude members from certain ethnic communities from joining the armed forces. This became a recipe for internal revolt. It was obvious that SPLA would not complete the integration to everyone's satisfaction due to insufficient resources. The outcome of the integration was one that received little appreciation from members of OAGs and former members of South Sudan Independence Movement/Army (SSIM/A) under Riek Machar. This occasioned a lack of internal cohesion, tribalism and corruption within the army, and ultimately a lack of comprehensive defence strategy to ensure military transformation. Partial integration of forces activated ethnic rivalries and exposed the army to exploitation by political elites. Omoleye and Joshua (2018) believe that greed for resources and selfishness among the political elites in South Sudan have compromised the integrity of the army, bred ethnic divisions, and ultimately violent conflict, leading to national disintegration.

When the army deviates from executing its cardinal mandate of defending national borders and guarding against foreign aggression, it becomes vulnerable and easily exploited by politicians who want to force reforms by means of rebellion. Another controversy in the armed forces was brought by the fact that the SPLA insisted on positioning itself as the nucleus of South Sudan's national army, based on its legacy of liberation.

This has made it difficult for members of OAGs who believe SPLA is a direct affiliate of the SPLM political party. Therefore, the national army cannot subscribe to one political party. Pinaud (2014) argues that those who considered themselves to be the real liberators have captured the State of South Sudan, created a dominant class and have established a “new autocracy”. Breitung, Paes and Vondervoot (2016) contend that: as the army generals compete to accumulate wealth, they drift away from their responsibility of ensuring security reforms. This gives an opportunity for political elites to divide the army and use it as a tool to secure political positions. A divided security sector cannot counter foreign adversaries whose activities motivate “career” rebels to see only the positive side of rebellion. This situation encourages the proliferation of arms among civilians and rebel groups. In the end, it becomes difficult for the government to carry out peace and successful disarmament of civilians without incurring casualties (O’ Brien, 2019).

### **On Citizens’ Participation**

The outbreak of the South Sudanese civil war in 2013 has stagnated the process of organizing general elections scheduled for 2015. This means that South Sudanese after independence have never exercised their sovereign right of voting in free and fair democratic elections. The only democratic exercises that South Sudanese participated in were 2010 general elections as an autonomous part of Sudan, and the independence referendum that led to secession in 2011. While giving a check to the referendum, Knopf (2016) however describes 2010 elections within the states in South Sudan as dubious, manipulated by the SPLM and having caused rebellion and violent conflict. However, the current government in South Sudan continues to validate its legitimacy through peace agreements with rebel groups. This alone encourages rebellion optimisms as many rebel leaders find opportunities to ascending to higher political positions.

This brings forth a question: to what extent are citizens participating in public affairs in South Sudan? Citizens’ confidence is grounded on the government’s ability to deliver social services, protect citizens, promote equality, ensure equitable distribution of national resources, respect human rights, guarantee freedom and adhere to the rule of law. These are common indicators of democratic governance. Citizens’ participation is key in achieving these indicators. On the contrary, Knopf (2013) argues that South Sudan’s government has been intimidating people or groups with opposing opinions, for instance attacking journalists and human rights advocates, and denying access to independent information from the media and civil society.

Participation is an indicator of inclusivity, as well inclusivity being an indicator of democratic governance. Where citizens are excluded, nepotism and corruption prevail, reprisal and oppression exist, and where political appointments are based on decrees by the central authority, the outcome is obviously authoritarianism. In this case, the executive paralyzes the functions of the legislature and the judiciary. Omia and Obonyo (2015) believe that South Sudan’s government is closer to the fragmented military than its civil population. The public service has been militarized and favouritism in employment sectors takes precedence over the merits.

The bigger challenge in South Sudan is never the lack written laws or legal frameworks. It is the lack of political will to implement and enforce the laws. This can be seen in the absence of affirmative action on gender parity. Mai (2015) argues that South Sudanese women, despite having been allocated 25 percent representation in the Transitional Constitution, have had to struggle to realize their participation in public affairs. However, Banks (2007) argues that such representation was only limited to the executive and legislature. Though the struggle continues for the women of South Sudan, the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), which has extended the mandate of the government for another three years, have guaranteed women a 35 percent share in government at all levels. The civil society in South Sudan has been one of the forefront advocates for good governance focusing on respect for human rights and the rule of law. Zambakari (2015) contends that South Sudan has been circumventing its own rules and procedures which are enshrined in the national constitution and other legal frameworks.

## CONCLUSION

Greed for power and the control of economic resources is a reservoir for unhealthy political competition. Ethnicity breeds corruption, nepotism and political intolerance. Ethnicity erases the sense of national identity. The absence of national identity is the same as absence of national ideology. When political decisions are based on ethnic interests, the rest of society feels excluded. Those excluded begin to question the government's legitimacy and can soon begin to explore alternative opinions, including regime change. When the alternative views gain momentum in an ethnically entrenched society, the defenders of the status quo most often resort to respond violently. Corruption, nepotism and favouritism undermine the functionality of national institutions. This is because a corrupt society can hardly promote accountability and transparency. Without accountability in government, public resources become private resources, and development becomes an unachievable dream. When majority of citizens are dissatisfied with the government's performance, they can be hijacked by political dissidents, who can persuade them to revolt against the government. A corrupt, ethnically-controlled government can easily be isolated internationally because it has been unable to meet the principle of democracy. The end result is likely to be violent conflict. Political dissidents who opted to revolt and fight against the government can easily access support from foreign adversaries or dissatisfied members of international community.

In the case of South Sudan, the success of integrating Other Armed Groups (OAGs) and factions of the SPLA depended largely on the mechanisms developed, resources allocated to the SPLA to execute the integration, and the political will from the national leadership. The task of re-orienting, training, and organizing the combatants was a sole responsibility of the military command. The SPLA could only achieve partial integration because it had received insufficient resources. Integration was a perfect choice for those who were integrated, but it was also a source of deception for those who felt excluded. Without internal cohesion, it became difficult for the SPLA to transform the army. The outcome was the failure of security sector transformation. Given the fact that some of the OAGs were constituted by tribal militias, they went back to their communities with their firearms. They became a soft target for mobilization to rebellion by any political dissidents.

Citizens' participation in public affairs depends on the system of governance and the political will. When government guarantees equal rights, equal representation, equal protection, and equitable distribution of resources to its citizens, the citizens reciprocate by extending the mandate of their government. It does not matter who leads as long as it is the same party that secures its mandate through democratic elections. It is difficult to determine whether South Sudan's government is able to secure the confidence of its citizens. This is because it has never conducted democratic elections after independence in 2011.

In conclusion, this paper argues that misgovernment has undermined security sector reforms and citizens' participation in public affairs in South Sudan. The persistent increase of dissenting voices gives hope to political dissidents who in turn offer alternative government that can be achieved through rebellion. Experience has shown that in South Sudan, members of armed rebellion have secured higher political positions in government and high ranks in the military. This has created the perception of rebellion as a viable industry. Rebellion provides an opportunity to reclaim political and military relevance even for those whose records at one point prohibited them from occupying public office. People who initiate and join rebellion efforts perceive them positively. This positive thinking about rebellion is what the paper refers to as "rebellion optimism". On the other hand, the government's crackdown on dissenting voices forces political leaders to resort to rebellion. In the end, the government is forced by circumstances to negotiate peace agreement with rebels-hence forming making consociational arrangements resulting to the renewal of its mandate. This paper proposes a field study on rebellion optimism. The outcome of such a study could confirm or challenge this conclusion.

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