

Understanding State Dysfunctionality: The Role of Political Elites in South Sudanese State-crafting and Failure

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Abstract

State crafting, dysfunctionality and failure is an interesting and an emerging area in political studies as well as international affairs. This area has been remotely examined by both African and Western scholars. The paper comprehensively examined state dysfunctionality in the context of state failure of South Sudan. The paper conceptualized state dysfunctionality as inability of the state to perform its functions of service delivery of public goods and particularly, security to its own citizens. While the paper surveyed the role of political elites in understanding state-crafting and failure of South Sudan, empirically, it argues that South Sudanese political elites, particularly, from Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM) and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) known today as South Sudanese People Defense Forces (SSPDF) have contributed to South Sudanese state failure than crafting. This is demonstrated through elites struggle over power, secretive ethnic politics and rewarding rebellions, corruption and resources usurp and protracted conflicts. The paper deployed primary and secondary sources in tapping the understanding of South Sudanese political elites in state-crafting and failure. It combines case study and process tracing methods to contextualize and validate causal chains and empirical casual processes. The study used a sample size of 200 respondents with persuasive and cluster sampling in understanding state dysfunctionality, the role political elites in South Sudanese state-crafting and failure. The findings indicated that political elites from Government of South Sudan and particularly, the party with majority seats in the government, SPLM and military wing, SPLA aka SSPDF have led to South Sudanese state failure. The tribal outfits such as the Jieng Council of Elders (JCE) have had a big hand in South Sudanese state failure. Finally, the paper draws conclusions that reversing South Sudanese state failure requires the political elites, the SPLM to eschew zero-sum power struggle, rent seeking rebellions, secretive ethnic politics, conflicts and corruption. This demands adherence to institutionalism and visionary leadership. The paper recommends further research to SPLM and SPLA elites to reverse state failure and rescue South Sudan from collapse.

Keywords: State; Dysfunctionality; Crafting; Failure; Political elite; Ethnic politics; Power struggle; Rebellions; Corruption; conflicts.

1. Introduction

State-crafting, dysfunctionality and failure has been a topical concept for the modern political scientists who have toiled to assess the emerged states' performance in offering political, social and economic liberties to their citizens and to ensure stability in regional and international system. Many states emerged after the World War II, Cold War and Post-Cold War periods to find their debuts. Some of these states crafted and consolidated themselves to prosperity while some wasted institutional opportunities for effective crafting, consolidation and became failed and collapsed states.

Upon independence, South Sudanese state delved into a lot of malpractices such as corruption, tribalism, nepotism, personal rule, political apathy and ethnic politics to mention but a few. These issues led the state to be viewed as a crumbling baby that has not been nurtured well. However, the state survived and continued to stand amidst the challenges of failure.

Given this staring decline in the state crafting, the Washington based Fund for Peace Research Think-tank in 2023 on Failed States Index (FSI) categorized South Sudan as 1st failed State and its 2023 report on fragile States ranked South Sudan as the most fragile state in the world based on social and economic indicators such as demographic pressures, group grievances, uneven economic development, refugees and Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs), brain-drain and human flight and poverty & economic decline. On the other hand, South Sudan state failure was also gauged on political and military indicators such as state legitimacy, human rights and rule of law, factionalized elites, public services, security apparatus and external intervention, replacing the long collapsed state of

Somalia in 2024 fragility index report (Riak, 2024). This state of affairs required critical study to understand South Sudan's state crafting, failure and the state survivability.

The paper therefore seeks to critically examine the dysfunctionality and failure of South Sudanese state through the role played by political elites. The paper is structured as follows: section one introduces the paper. Section two discusses the literature review. Section three discusses paper's methodology. Section four discusses the paper's results. Section five concludes and section six recommends future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Laying the Foundation: Understating State Dysfunctionality

State dysfunctionality is when the state doesn't fulfill its functions in providing public goods and services to the citizens. Robert Rotberg argues that the state's prime function is to provide the political goods such as security to prevent cross-border invasions, infiltrations, and loss of territory as follows:

- To eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure;
- To prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and
- To enable citizens to resolve their differences with the state and with their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion (Rotberg, 2004).

However, when the state fail to perform the above functions, then it is called a failed state. Hence, failed state is also known as limited statehood. For example, statehood can be limited territorially (state weakness in certain parts of a country); sectorally (weakness in particular policy areas); socially (weakness in the eyes of parts of the population); and temporally (temporary weakness) (Risse, 2011). The concept of limited statehood acknowledges that, despite reduced formal state capacity, even the most fragile states rarely remain ungoverned. The focus on state failure obscures the myriad ways in which societies organize themselves even in the absence of formal state structures (Risse, 2011).

2.2. South Sudanese State Failure

South Sudan typically fulfills the characteristics of a failed state. Since its inception, the country was borne as a malformed polity because of the very fragile and dysfunctional nature of the rump state-Sudan (D'Agoot, 2015). Since its proclamation of her independence on 9th July, 2011, the legion of its doubters prophesied, "globe's first pre-failed state was being ushered into existence" (Risse, 2011). This prophecy would become true. When the political contradictions within its SPLM escalated and ballooned into skirmishes on 15th December, 2013 and 8th July 2016, the country was sent on a free-fall making her unable to rise up amongst peaceful nation-states in the world. The nascent state is consumed by inter-ethnic violent conflicts, multi-rebellions against the government, national army defections that adversely its ranks and files, dissident voices of civilians covertly or overtly expressed and of which the government is unable to control. Broadly, however, a country's fragility is closely associated with its state capacity to manage conflict; make and implement public policy; and deliver essential services and its systemic resilience in maintain system coherence; societal cohesion; responding effectively to challenges and crises; and sustaining progressive development and quality of life (Messener, 2014).

To unpack the complexities of what failed states entailed, Brennan Kraxberger characterizes failed states into two main categories of effectiveness and legitimacy of political institutions. By "effectiveness", Kraxberger refers to the degree to which governments fulfill minimal expectations for delivering public goods and services, and the legitimacy addresses the amount of respect that citizens of a state have for state institutions (Kraberger, 2012). Fulfillment of minimal expectations and legitimacy lies on physical security, which is a core problem for fragile states as argues by Rotberg et al. Failed states are extremely violent places, though violence can come in different forms. Rebels or warlords may control large chunks of territory or engage in fighting with government forces and on the other hand, the government security personnel may prey upon ordinary citizens, whether due to greed, organized repression or poor training (Riak, 2021). Besides, failed states do not have functioning social services. Kraxberger argues that failed states provide very little in the field of education...for instance educational systems suffer from quantitative and qualitative deficiencies (Kraberger, 2012). Staff are not paid, and routinely absent from their posts; school buildings are in varying states of neglect or are often abandoned; school fees serve as an accessibility barrier and maybe squandered once collected and those students who do attend school often receive only a rudimentary primary education with few learning resources (Ibid). South Sudan educational system is facing institutional and infrastructural challenges with little motivation to the teachers and lecturers. At the time of writing this paper, the teachers and lecturers have not been paid for 13 months.

Perturbing health outcomes is another common reality of failed states. Though data can be spotty, health indicators reveal much about the ineffectiveness of dysfunctional states; Adult life expectancy, maternal mortality, and under-five mortality rates are three indicators that can paint a grim picture (Riak, 2021). Failed states typically have far too few physicians, very limited access to clinics and hospitals in rural areas, and an uneven quality of care in cities (Kraberger, 2012). South Sudan poor health care speaks volumes of the reality of failed system that needs rebooting. Hence, limited health access is a phenomenon in South Sudan quality and accessible health sojourn.

Moreover, poor transportation and road linkages characterize many failed states. Movement of people and goods into failed states is typically quite difficult given that roads may be all but impassable for whole seasons (Riak, 2021). In South Sudan, only 202 km² of road from Juba-Bor is tarmacked by the African Resources Corporation (ARC) through government funding via oil for roads project. However, given poor quality during constructions, this road will not last longer without being eroded and worn out. Moreover, the inter-states roads

including capital Juba are either non-existence or have been poorly dilapidated with gravels, which is easily washed away during the rainy season and with no maintenance.

Although many residents of failed states are poorly served by publicly supported transportation, they also often lack access to minimally effective judiciary services. When informal means of conflict resolutions are insufficient, clean and efficient courts can fairly resolve these disputes much of time and the judiciary is a linchpin in keeping criminality in check (Kraberger, 2012). The tradition is that South Sudan judiciary is controlled by the executive with the ubiquitous of personal rule rather than a rule of law. A huge back-gagged of cases is yet to be cleared from the judiciary and all the courts of law.

On the other hand, in failed states, direct taxation of citizens is very minimal and disorganized because people may refuse and abscond taxes to the authorities on the ground of lack of trust to the state. They regard the state as corrupt, wasteful, inefficient, repressive or unimportant to their lives, and they do not readily pay taxes (Riak, 2021). In this revelation, public officials may extract revenues from citizens, but this is mostly through the use of force. Corruption flourishes in an unimaginable rate, living standard of its citizens deteriorate considerably and human right is subjected to arbitrary abuse by security forces (Yach, 2015). Government institutions are infested with dreadful malpractices with impunity. A scam by clandestine workers of the central bank of South Sudan, which siphoned off millions of dollars into the parallel market to the detriment of the state, has gone unnoticed (Akech, 2014). Moreover, in failed state, economy doesn't work. There exist hyperinflation and Dutch disease. South Sudanese economy is captured by elites and hyperinflation has rocked the country, making the purchasing power of the citizens very weak and to the extreme, non-existence. The South Sudanese Pound (SSP) has depreciated drastically un-enabling the citizens to barely buy nothing. Policies, laws and regulations are passed and not implemented. Amin Gamal, professor of economics at the American University in Cairo, has dubbed this phenomenon as the 'soft state' as he argues:

A soft state is a state that passes laws but does not enforce them. The elites can afford to ignore the law because their power protects them from it, while others pay bribes to work round it. Everything is up for sale, be it building permits for illegal construction, licenses to import illicit goods, or underhanded tax rebates and deferrals. The rules are made to be broken and to enrich those who break them, and taxes are often evaded. People clamor for positions of influence so that they may turn them to personal gain. Favors are sold or dispensed to protégés, relatives and sycophants (Gamal, 2011).

Such "legal weakness of the state encourages corruption and state failure" (Chayes, 2015). However, Augustino Ting argues that clearly, 'failure' is a relative concept derived from 'success' associated with, among others, history (Ting, 2013). That means that South Sudan State failure has a strong explanation of being part of Sudan that has been categorized as successful failed state. But Augustino Ting further disputes this assertion by arguing the events that encircled the President intimidating the peoples' house into endorsing his speaker's nominee, suppression of dissent within the ruling party, dismissal of elected officials on political grounds, expulsion of a UN human rights observer on whims, the killing of an innocent Kenyan teacher over a flag, the intimidation by some security agents of political commentators and journalists, and the murder of a formidable political analyst, Isaiah Abraham, surely distort the country's image (Riak, 2021). All of this is Sudan in practice, and aintaining such an unflattering feature ultimately sustains South Sudan's state failure in perhaps in most contexts.

To be sure, after its secession, the structures as well as maladministration practices make the state of South Sudan an imported system from Sudan. Negligence of public goods and services, intimidation and discriminating policies still pervade the country. Self-contradictions among the ruling elites and sizeable portion of citizens create a legitimacy gap in the country. In the event where the external and international legitimacy gap is on rise, civil unrest and strife are inevitable. Furthermore, when state institutions are ill-prepared or weak enough to withstand inter-conflict, the state easily descends into a debacle as South Sudan has been experiencing since December 15th 2013. Power wrangling among ruling elites presents an impression that the state lacks any system, which can streamline the power (Yach, 2015). However, Ference David Marko argues that South Sudan is not a failed state since it makes the best passports in the region through modern biometric (Marko, 2016).

However, South Sudanese state-crafting is necessity to build the institutions to prosperity.

Indeed, Francis Fukuyama further defines state-crafting as the creation of new government institutions and the strengthening of the existing ones (Fukuyama, 2004). In other words, Fukuyama sees the state-crafting as an institution process that enhances institutional building, transition and consolidation. However, South Sudanese political elites have not crafted South Sudanese state but have failed it. The political elites have failed South Sudanese in different ways as discussed below.

2.3. Understanding Political Elites in Power Struggle and State Failure

By a way of a definition, an examination of the concept of elite is necessary. While elite is defined differently in the social science inquiry, an elite is a selected and small group of citizens and/or organizations that controls a large amount of power (Garrido, 2013). Based on the social distinction with regard to other groups of lower strata, most of these selected groups are constantly searching differentiation as well as separation from the rest of society (Daloz, 2010). Normally, the concept of elite is used to analyse the groups that either control or are situated at the top of societies. The creation of an elite is also the result of their evolution throughout the history of humanity. Several groups are constantly seeking different social resources in order to define their specificity.

Whereas a political elite from look of it activity can be defined as a group of people, corporations, political parties and/or any other kind of civil society organization who manage and organize government and all the

manifestations of political power, John Higley defines elite as person who, by virtue of his strategic location in large or otherwise pivotal organization and movement, is able to affect political outcome regularly and substantially (Hegley, 2008).

Moreover Vilfredo Pareto a refined sociologist defines the concept of ruling elites to consist of a small and selected political group of people with superior personal qualities that govern the “*mass of society*”, which Pareto considered as unintelligent, irrational and therefore, poorly organized (Pareto, 2010). Hence, Pareto argues that under these conditions, it is completely possible for the ruling élite to manipulate them through political propaganda of “*carefully used*” (Ibid).

Political elites and power struggle are often related due to the fact that these groups are constantly searching to control government. In successful state crafting, political authorities have to represent the interests of citizens based on the citizens’ demands and decisions. To win elections, politicians must succeed in convincing electors and electorates thus political life is not merely the making of arbitrary choices, nor merely the resultant of bargaining between separate groups, private and individual wants. It is always a combination of bargaining and compromise where there are irresolute and conflicting commitments and common deliberation about public policy, to which facts and rational arguments are relevant (Pitkin, 1967). Politicians frequently balance between the “mandate” of the post and the interests of people they represent. Currently, these interests are expressed by public opinion polls. Political elites have to deal with power institutions and “shape” the political system. In some cases the elites elaborate strong rules in order to maintain their power, avoiding political competition. In other cases, the elites must compete among themselves and/or with others citizens. Thus, is society always controlled by a small group of insiders? This is the paradox of political elites: between political representation, power struggle and the maximization of their interests (Garrido, 2013).

However, since the beginning of the 1990s, several scholars studied the links amongst elites regarding political regimes and stability. This perspective has been useful for studying political transitions, most of all, regarding the cases of the countries from Eastern Europe and Latin America. According to this theoretical viewpoint, the basic condition for having a solid and stable regime is the “unity” of the different elites, which must be expressed mandatory at institutional level. In other words, democratic consolidation requires the achievement of elite “consensual unity”, which is an agreement between all politically important elites on the meaning of existing democratic institutions as well as the respect for democratic “rules of the game”, coupled with increased “structural integration” among those elites (Vanden and Provost, 2002).

2.4. The Role of Political Elites in South Sudanese State-Crafting and Failure

2.4.1. Secretive Ethnic Politics and Rewarding of Rebellions

Despite “consensual unity” which should exist as bone of political elites’ drive to state crafting and prosperity, South Sudanese political elites have rather taken a U-turn indulging themselves in divisive politics of power struggle and spirited loyalty. This state of affairs has instituted what has become as ‘secret politics’ in South Sudanese society, projecting ‘*zolkabir*’ (big man) space in the powerful decisions making quarters of the government. The sacrosanct of political elites’ hands in public decisions making has excluded and alienated majority of South Sudanese in political life of the nascent state. The fundamental condition of class-based domination manifested in the rule of the gun-class of liberators and former counterinsurgent warlords-often in alliance with sectarian forces of regionalists and ethnic chauvinists-has remained as a new culture in South Sudan (D’ Agoot, 2015). To be sure, the elites have drowned the young nation into wars and rent seeking rebellions. However, South Sudanese political elites would have taken a leaf from Victor Asal (2014) argument:

Elites have much to gain by parceling out the state and working together to maintain their hold on power. But they also have a lot to lose if any faction defects from this bargain and conspires to usurp power. Without assurances otherwise, each side maneuvers to protect its share and safeguard against others’ first- strike capabilities. Reciprocal maneuvering, however, reinforces suspicion within the regime, often triggering an internal security dilemma that destroys trust and makes eliminating one’s rival a vital imperative. Amidst this escalating internal conflict, rulers employ an exclusive strategy to neutralize the existential threat posed by those inside their regime and to secure their grip on power. But the cost of such a strategy, especially when carried out along ethnic lines, is that it forfeits the central government’s societal control, leaving it vulnerable to civil war (Asal, 2014).

It is a common argument that the post 2013 deadly political violence in South Sudan was neither cultural nor natural. It was a political one triggered by the failure of political elites who ignored reconciling their narrow vested political and economic interests (Idris, 2015). Instead of cultivating a common national belonging to the new state, the political elites began to think of themselves as ethnic beings. They forgot that leadership is about the quality of an individual vision, and turned ethnicity into powerful tool to secure public resources and political power (Ibid). Upon his ascent to SPLM leadership in July 2005, Salva Kiir pursued an unwieldy ‘*Big Tent Policy*’ of courting militias through amnesties and accommodation-which relatively helped in establishing temporary peace (D’ Agoot, 2015). However, this did not help in uniting the South Sudanese elites and Peter Adwok Nyaba in his book “*South Sudan the State We Aspire To*” reinforced this point by arguing that political divisions among the southern elites have always been blamed on the dominant northern political elites but this could only be true in as far as the *anciens regimes*, whether colonial or national, were concerned (Nyaba, 2011). Moreover, Nyaba further articulated that now that southerners are in full command of theirs affairs, who should be blamed for mess caused by political elites? He elucidates ‘we must find explanation for this somewhere within the southern social and political configuration’

(Ibid). It true that the fight against Arabs was the only united factor for southerners. Given that Arabs went with Sudan with the independence of Southern Sudan into Republic of South Sudan on 9th July 2011, South Sudanese could not unite anymore.

But the biggest predicament of SPLM has been sharp divisions along ethnocentric lines. Ethnic affiliation in the public domain is what registers as ‘tribalism’ that is nothing but a petty bourgeois ideology of trans-class solidarity. Thus, the current rise of ethnic and regional sentiments in South Sudan represents a direct response to the government’s policies and attitudes toward the excluded and marginalized ethnic groups (Idris, 2015). The main means of ensuring fairness in distribution is the ethnic quota system, whereby different groups are guaranteed government posts, or are given additional posts in response to complaints of under-representation, however, this mechanism has been abused by ambitious people to develop ethnic backing (Edward, 2015). All the attention is now focused on the causes and strategies of the manipulation of ethnicity by the elites, and too little mention is given to the people who perpetrated the violence or to the social structures that allowed such processes to be set in motion (Uvin, 1998). Acting within the increased power distance in the discharge of authority, these elites frittered away the opportunity to transform the country (D’ Agoot, 2015). In effect, tenuous relationships between various elites became antagonistic and the effect of distance decay between the centre and peripheries became apparent (Ibid). In truth, government goals were prioritized in a topsy-turvy manner with pernicious tendency for perversity (Riak, 2021).

2.4.2. Political Elites, Resources Usurp and State Failure

No any state that does not comprises of political elites whose power is based on controlling access to political and economic resources and redistributing them in support of their clientelistic base. This kind of political-economic regime is both self-perpetuating and self-destructive. On one hand, it perpetuates itself through the de-politicization of participation and the organization of citizens into ethnic constituencies (Ndulo and Grieco, 2010). On the other hand, it destroys itself through an imbalance power distribution, manifest in the form of unequal access to resources, which is bound contestable by excluded groups in times of crisis (Ibid). Strengthening false relationships among the elites on politics and economic power, Carl Kadushin who investigated the French financial elites, found out that most of the financial elites were linked by significant ties of friendship-which certainly allow them to construct and maintain a certain level of similarity (Kadushin, 2011). This tendency is maintained through manipulation of the country resources.

2.4.3. South Sudanese Political Elites Corruption and State Failure

Since independence, a small rotating set of elites who move seamlessly between positions in government and the frontlines of the rebellion, as political situations change has controlled South Sudan (Clooney, 2015). The country’s elites have built a kleptocratic regime that controls all sectors of the economy, and have squandered a historic chance for the development of a functional state (Ibid). These predatory economic networks play a central role in the December 2013 civil war, because much of the conflict was driven by elites attempting to re-negotiate their share of the politico-economic power balance through violence.

To be sure, political elites have usurped national resources for individual gains in tandem of political corruption. They have encouraged fragmentation of communities to create a phenomenon of community gurus as champions, protectors and philanthropists of their communities through looted resources.

Nadir A. L. Mohammed, critiquing Mansour Khalid’s book: *The Government they deserve: The Role of the Elite in Sudan’s Political Economy* once notes:

While it is true that the colonial administration and the first national government were to be blamed for the civil unrest in the South, it has to be said that the southern elites must also be held responsible. Southern leaders were disunited, many of their politicians were corrupt and their loyalties were constantly and still are, continuously conflicting (Nadir, 2003).

This state of South corruption affair reached its apogee when the former Minister of Finance-Arthur Akuein Chol was accused of misappropriating millions of dollars through overpayment of contracts of the purchase of first government’s V8 cars from Al cardinal foreign company in 2006 (Riak, 2021). Immediately, his successor Kuol Athian Mawein was accused for the disappearance of about USD 1.5 billion through payment of contracts of unsupplied grains to the ten states of South Sudan to curb catastrophic hunger, a malpractice that became famously known as “Grains (Dura) Saga”. In addition, Wikileaks made public in 2012 an alleged corruption at the John Garang Military Academy. According to the report, the government allocated 30 million dollars for the construction of this academy, but only 2 million dollars was actually accounted for and the rest of the money was allegedly spent without a trace (Awolic, 2013). In June 2013, another corruption practice of USD 7.9 million came to the public domain. The two former Ministers, Deng Alor Kuol of Cabinet Affairs and Kosti Manibe Ngai of Finance were relieved by the President for allegedly authorizing the transfer of USD 7.9 million to Daffy Co-Ltd in Kenya to procure anti-fire safes without adherence to procurement regulations, and above all, without endorsement of the Council of Ministers and the National Assembly (Riak, 2021).

In deepening the den of corruption, President Salva Kiir Mayardit, courageously came out and accused 75 former and current government officials of stealing public funds to the tune of USD 4 billion and asked them to return the loots through specified bank accounts (Awolic, 2013). Ted Dagne, hired by the UN to advise Kiir on anti-corruption policy and international relations, played a key role in the preparation of the May 2012 letter, which was made public by President Salva Kiir to embarrass the officials who were accused of stealing four billion dollars (Riak, 2021). No empirical evident can substantiate whether some of undisclosed government officials have either

returned some money or not. However, the assumption is that no fund has been returned to the public coffers by the senior officials accused by the President. Instead, President Kiir got exposed by U.S. based enough project Sentry report in September 2016 as the allegedly most corrupt person together with his family, former Vice President Dr. Riek Machar, former Chief of General Staff, Gen. Paul Malong and four other senior commanders of SPLA in South Sudan (Clooney, 2016). Corruption was also performed at the doorstep of President Kiir by his aides, who looted over 1 billion of South Sudanese pounds and over 30 million United States dollars from the office of President. The 16 accused, some of which got convicted and released by the Court of Appeal, were majorly from Dinka ethnic group. Out of the 16 accused, 10 were from Dinka, making 63% of the convicts. Of the 6 acquitted in October 2017, all were from Dinka ethnic group (Riak, 2021).

Although investigations were carried out in recovering these stolen funds, no single money has been recovered. But was South Sudanese political elite palatable wealth greed just emerged from thin air? In their study of national corruption during these years, the Sudanese economists El-Wathig Kameir and Ibrahim Kursany note:

Against this background, the elite in the South wanted to enrich themselves as quickly as possible so as to be on a level with their colleagues in the North. This is why they have resorted to corruption as the quickest way of acquiring money and this has led to primitive accumulation of toxic wealth (Kameir and Kursany, 1995).

The result of the auditing of the then Government of Southern Sudan accounts from 2005 to 2006, released by the Auditor General and presented to the parliament in February 2012 revealed that over \$1 billion US dollars 'disappeared' in that period alone and could not be accounted for (Riak, 2021). No any other auditing has been done again and corruption from petty to grand has become political elites game in towns of South Sudan. Indeed, corruption in the country was permeating in every spectrum of the society, causing global worries. J. Peter Pham, an analyst at the Atlantic Council and an adviser to the Defense Department's U.S. Africa Command would charge that: "Salva Kiir's government is notoriously corrupt." (Oren, 2017).

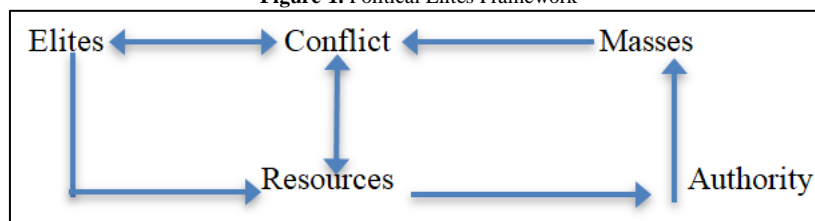
The President dictum of "zero tolerance" and terming political elite's corruption as cancer has remained in speeches and the action is yet to be seen. Lack of institutional respect and political will to punish the perpetrators set a precedence of usual business in South Sudan. Due to reward of wrong doings, some political elites have taken violence form in what Alex de Waal termed in Small Arms Survey as "rent seeking rebellion", namely the mutiny of army commanders or local political leaders with armed constituents, seeking a larger share of the resources dispensed by the government (Small Arms Survey Report, 2013). Today, to think of various security institutions in South Sudan as subordinate appendages to the state is to fundamentally misunderstand the country (D' Agoot, 2015). In essence, South Sudan is not a country with a military, rather; it is a military with a country.

Members of the South Sudanese political elite, in their desire to acquire wealth as fast as possible, and determination to prevent the northern government from renting the allegiance of southern militia and thereby jeopardizing the SPLM's secessionist project, created a governing system even less regulated and no less brutal than its northern counterpart (De Waal, 2014). One of the most troubling characteristics of government is that contending elites use of violence as a means of bargaining. A commander or a provincial leader can lay claim to a stake of state resources (rents) through mutiny or rebellion permitting members of political elites to view it as instrument of governance and thus join the kleptocratic club (Riak, 2021). The country achieved independence after a confused security situation in which various wartime militia groups engaged in agitation as a strategy for integration into the government machinery (Wassara, 2015). As a result, security sector swelled in size and became top-heavy at the command level- and underscored by shaky loyalties, which often followed ethnic fault lines (D' Agoot, 2015). Alex De' Waal argues that President Kiir was at the top of the system but not in control of it, and, as he later noted, 'once there is corruption, there is insecurity' (De Waal, 2014).

The political calculus of the SPLM leaders was based on elite factors: their own resources and interests (Riak, 2021). Thus, they felt able to act in a manner without any reference to the welfare of the citizens of their country. The poor decision to close down the entire national oil production by 2012 caught donors and oil companies entirely by surprise. A World Bank team, visiting Juba one month later, met with the government and then briefed international donors:

The World Bank has never seen a situation as dramatic as the one faced by South Sudan. In (Mr. Guigale's) view, neither the president nor senior ministers present in the meeting were aware of the economic implications of the shutdown. He candidly said that the decision was shocking and that the officials present (at the previous meeting) had not internalized nor understood the consequences of the decision (Guigale, 2012).

Figure-1. Political Elites Framework



Source: Author

As shows above, political elites are constantly controlling power and financial resources over the masses. The elites have power over the state, the civil organization of power. Even though they could have conflicts with masses,

which constantly can affect political decisions form “top down” to “bottom up”, political elites have authority that they use to manage these conflicts (Easterly, 2008). However, political elites use their authority to mobilize the masses for their ethnic gains conflicts.

In analyzing the above framework, Vilfredo Pareto’s *circulation of elites theory* helps a great deal. Vilfredo Pareto thought that it would have been wonderful if the elites could move about freely so that the capable would rise and the incapable sink (Marcoglou, 1955). He distinguished and identified two types of elites. Between them, there was an important difference. The “speculator” was always after wealth and new economic combination, while the “rentier” had a “fixed income” and lived within its limit (Ibid). The society of “speculators” was religious, military, and conservative and used force as its method. The circulation of elites is slow and economic stimulus weak. In the opposite case, economic interests supersede military ones. The costs of government maintenance are high but so its economic stimulus; the conservative virtues decline and finally the leading class, degenerating into humanitarianism proves unable to keep the political power (Borkenau, 1936). Pareto is certain that “there is a continuous change between these two forms of government”. Pareto meant by “speculators” the irresponsible and undesirable elements in a “democratic” society, who would not stop before any means or methods in order to enlarge their wealth and fortunes at the expenses of the class of “rentiers”. By “rentiers” he described many groups of people such as employees, small businessmen, laborers, farmers who were forced to live within the limits of a fixed income (Marcoglou, 1955). One could easily understand the hatred, which this group feels for the “speculators” who by different maneuvers and combinations, and by playing the stock market, could jeopardize the happiness and economic well being of their class. The “rentier” would be the first victims in any economic crisis (Riak, 2021).

This is typically the argument of Vilfredo Pareto in his seminal work “*The Rise and fall of Elites*” that it is possible for political elites to manipulate the masses through political propaganda of carefully used (Pareto, 2010). The ultimate losers in this framework are the both the elites and masses. While the masses are set to slaughter one another, the political elites pat each other back, hug cheerfully in fancy hotels and finally feel the economic challenges of the protracted conflict.

2.4.4. Problematic Elite-SPLM/SPLA, Conflicts and State Failure

Members of SPLM/SPLA elites have turned as the problematic elites in conflicts instigation. In hatching conflicts, President Kiir through visible and invisible hands of SPLM political elite advisors announced the postponement of elections in May 2013 arguing that peace and reconciliation were to be prioritized amongst the South Sudanese citizens. As if this was not enough, President Kiir having been challenged by Dr. Riek Machar, Pag’an Amum and Rebecca Nyandeng De’ Mabior to contest the SPLM Chairperson elections, turned to using his executive power, with an implicit threat of coercion. In July 2013, he fired Riek Machar and the majority of his cabinet and brought in others who were not very ambitious. Alex De’ Waal argues that the dissenters refused his invitation to form different political party to contest elections, well aware that SPLM membership was the only guaranteed ticket to being a member of the ruling club (De’ Waal, 2014). A second reason for staying in the SPLM was that they hoped to manage internal elite political competition in non-violent way (Riak, 2021).

However, each side knew that it would need to threaten through the use of force, at the minimum, to maintain its leverage. But President Kiir political management was inept. By dismissing all his challengers at one time he pushed them together into a single bloc that putatively commanded a majority in the SPLM Political Bureau. He then declared his intention to suspend all SPLM organs other than the Chairman’s office (his own position), but partially reversed this by agreeing to a meeting of the National Liberation Council (NLC), the SPLM quasi-Legislature body (in which he would win a majority) (Riak, 2021). In NLC, differences were poorly managed; President Kiir perhaps acting on the advice of coterie political elite at his backyard gave a threatening speech and assigned Mr. Michael Makuei Lueth (Minister of Information) who moderated the NLC meeting meant to pass SPLM Constitution, Manifesto and Code of Conduct. As the meeting began, members of NLC were not given time to deliberate on the documents, instead, acclamations were done by allied political elites to the President. This strategy failed as Riek Machar camp left the meeting having secretly prepared for political violence and thus at around 9:00pm on 15th December 2013 fighting amongst the Presidential Guards ensued leading to the sporadic rebellions. Machar declared rebellion and waged resistance against the government. The root causes of the political violence are presented through various accounts: government and opposition. However, one of the root causes was the political elite political profiteering and patronage to the SPLM leader who they failed to tell the reality of state failure.

Mediation of political violence by IGAD was thwarted by intermittent of political elites as argued by Alex de Waal:

Members of the South Sudanese elite, within the government and opposition and including the larger number who identify with their own interests have attempted to suborn the peace negotiations established by IGAD immediately after the conflict exploded, and turned it into an arena for tactical bargaining. For them, the negotiating forum is entirely subordinate to both cash-based patronage bargaining and the logic of force, as well providing an opportunity for rest and recreation. The principal function of the mediation exercise is that it will be on hand when the South Sudanese leaders decide to make a deal, and legitimize the new bargain among kleptocrats (Greek word for ruling thieves). This point was poignantly expressed by Jok Madut Jok, head of the Sudd Institute: ‘the men (Kiir and Machar) will eventually sit down, resolve their differences, laugh for the cameras, and the thousands of civilians who have died will not be accounted for (De Waal, 2014).

Thus, when factional elites engage in deadlock and brinkmanship for political gain, this undermines the social

contract that includes pressures and measures related to power struggles, defectors, flawed elections and political competition (Messener, 2014). Instead of addressing South Sudanese contradictions, the SPLM moved them into the arguments about administrative boundaries and post allocations, which are at center of real politics in South Sudan. The 2010 elections were moment when the SPLM elite could have used its potential as a mass movement to start to address the dilemmas of representation and allocation of resources in a society increasing structured around ethnicity (Edward, 2015).

So, the overall thirst for resources by SPLM political elites lies on the perceived entitlement and it is manifested itself as ‘curse of liberation’ (Clapham, 2018). The SPLM and SPLA elites believe that all resources in South Sudan belong to them including the oil underneath. This has deepened corruption and has tarnished the image of the nascent state. The leitmotif has remained as the ‘politics of belly’ and state failure of the coveted new Republic.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Research design is a very important method that determines the research path. It is a torch that light the research road. This paper used mixed research design that bring out qualitative and quantitative paths which assisted in the deepest analysis and discussions of the results.

3.2. Research Site

The study was carried out in Juba, South Sudan. Juba is an advanced and the largest city as well as the seat of the Government of South Sudan. It is also the hub of intellectuals with many universities located there where academic exchanges take place. Debates on such topics such as role of political elites in state-crafting and failure of South Sudan continued in earnest.

3.3. Sources of Data

The paper used both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary source of data was acquired through interviews and surveys. On the other hand, secondary source of data was acquired through reviewing of empirical literatures from various books and journal articles sources.

3.4. Targeted Population

The study targeted population of 400 respondents from Juba, South Sudan.

3.5. Sampling Types

The study used persuasive and cluster sampling types. Persuasive sampling type was chosen because of the necessity to target those respondents with knowledge on the role of political elites on South Sudanese state-crafting and failure. These respondents were later clustered around those working at the Government of South Sudan, academics, researchers and general intellectuals in Juba, South Sudan.

3.6. Determination of Sample Size

The sample size of this study was determined using a formula advanced by Taro Yamane (1967) with 95% level of confidence and when the size of the target population is known (Yamane, 1967). The size (n) is determined based on the formula below:

N

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + (e)^2}$$

Where N= population size, e=level of precision (0.05), n= sample size

$$n = \frac{400}{1 + 400(0.05^2)}$$

$$n = \frac{400}{1 + 400(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{400}{1 + 1}$$

$$n = \frac{400}{2} = 200$$

Hence, the sample size of this study is 200 respondents.

3.7. Procedure of Data Collection and Instruments

The study deployed data collection instruments such as questionnaires and interview guides/schedules to collect the data on the role of political elites on South Sudanese state-crafting and failure in Juba, South Sudan. Questionnaires, interview guides/schedules were administered successfully.

3.8. Piloting of Research Instruments

Questionnaires and interview guides were piloted to ensure that they were correct and compatible. A 10% sample size (20) that came to 20 questionnaires and interview guides were distributed to 20 respondents. The outcome of piloting is that questions that were poorly drafted were corrected immediately paving away for successful data collection.

3.9. Quality/Error Control

The study ensured that quality and error control was prioritized and errors committed during data collection were avoided. Validity and reliability mechanisms of data collection were administered and 200 sample size was collected without any error or delay.

3.10. Validity

The validity of research tools was assessed using expert judgments such as professional opinions from supervisors and peers (Kothari, 2004). Five experts were contacted and they critically evaluated the validity of the instruments. The experts were asked to rate questions depending on their relevancy. The Content Validity Index (C.V.I) was established by dividing the number of items rated relevant and total number of items. It is clear that CVI was 0.795 which was above 0.7 and thus research tools were considered valid.

3.11. Reliability

A Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient (CARC) of 0.805 was acquired which is above 0.7. Thus, the research tools were found to be reliable. Cronbach Alpha is used to determine the internal consistency and reliability of any study. Cronbach Alpha is therefore calculated by correlating the score of each scale item with the total score for each determination (normally surveyed respondents or test takers) and then comparing that to the variance for all respondents item scores.

3.12. Data Processing and Analysis

The study used data processing and analysis applications such as SPSS 2.1, charts, excel and above all descriptive analysis where data was interpreted and presented. Data cleaning was conducted and analysis were presented appropriately.

3.13. Ethics in Research

The study was carried out under highest ethical standards. For examples, ethics in research such as integrity, confidentiality, assent, consent, anonymity and benevolence were applied during the entire research process. All respondents that were surveyed and interviewed were considered and were treated with confidentiality. There were no any ethical conundrum encountered during the entire research process.

3.14. Anticipated Methodological Constraints

Instruments of data collection such as questionnaires and interviews were not affected by low levels of literacy in South Sudan. More importantly, low knowledge on the role of political elites in South Sudanese state-crafting and failure in South Sudan did not constraint the data collection process as the study focused on government officials and intellectuals in South Sudan. Misconceptions about the study to be a threat to South Sudan national security since it is sensitive study focusing on elites and their failures in crafting South Sudanese state did not affect the study. Hence, the questionnaire and interviews were sufficient and the findings/results of the study were achieved.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Political Elites in South Sudanese State Crafting and Failure

The 200-surveyed respondents provided interesting views on this question. Majority of the respondents consented that South Sudanese political elites have caused South Sudan state failure. They cited that the elites have no vision and mission for South Sudan prosperity. They argued that the elites have planted hatred and enmity across the communities leading to polarization and setting up of the communities against one another in South Sudan. They noted that the elites are not loyal to the South Sudan but have betrayed the citizens by sensitizing them with wrong philosophy and ideas of nation-states' failure.

The respondents reiterated that the elites are egocentric, greedy and have established extractive system for quest of primitive accumulation of power and wealth and have no country at hearts. They have robbed the country of meager resources with huge scandals such as 'dura or grains' 4 USD billion, 75 List of corrupted political and

military leaders, Crisis Management Committee (CMC), VIP of Foreign Affairs and Office of the President (Oop) scandals. These are parts of corruption practices covered extensively in literature review section. The elites, respondents argued, have turned South Sudan as ‘man eats man society with nothing’. None of these elites has been prosecuted over these grave scandals, except the sentencing of ordinary 16 persons to life in prison for treason, forgery and thefts in the name of President Salva Kiir. However, the Court of Appeal released 6 out of 16 in October 2017. Another 4 were later released through the order of Court of Appeal coupled with presidential clemency. Respondents moreover added that the elites failed to promote nationalism and patriotism by ensuring that South Sudan remained as an individualized state. Besides, the elites both political and economic (business tycoons and patronage networkers) have caused South Sudanese state failure by dividing the citizens into three classes: 1st class, who are the richest; 2nd class, the paid workers and 3rd class the unpaid workers (proletariats). This deliberate division has caused societal fracture, inequality and social dysfunction to national unity.

Furthermore, the respondents emphasized that the political elites have failed to stage and sustained critical debates for the direction of the country by remaining as tribal elites instead of genuine political elites. Hence, creating tribal councils such as Jieng Council of Elders (JCE), Nuer Council of Elders (NCE) and Equatoria Council of Elders (ECE). Respondents added that the Jieng Council of Elders has remained problematic, influential and divisive self-appointed individuals who have tainted Jieng’s name. The JCE has deeply polarized the communities and South Sudanese state. In addition, the respondents noticed that political elites failed to build strong institutions and culture and hence the weakness of the institutions and lack of culture to respect laws and regulations has led to wide spread rebellions, graduating to ‘rent-seeking rebellion’. This is due to negligence to build strong security sector in South Sudan.

However, few respondents argued that political elites have tried to craft South Sudanese state but the conundrum has been lack of cooperation from the top leadership as far as national issues are concerned in nascent state.

After having analyzed the role of political elites in South Sudan state crafting and failure, we now move to the classification of elites.

4.2. Classification of South Sudanese Political Elites

In tapping the views of the surveyed respondents on the classification of political elites. Overwhelming majority of respondents agreed on the classification of elites into original SPLM/SPLA elite, NCP-turned SPLM/SPLA elite and the coterie of businessmen and women who thrive on patronage. They argued that these groups have dominated government and have wielded a lot of power in South Sudanese politics. They further argued that all these groups played a great role in the independence of South Sudan. On a severe note, the respondents accentuated that these groups have looted the country with impunity claiming that they fought fiercely in previous wars and as a result they liberated the country.

Besides, the respondents noted that because these elites have enormous money from the loots and corrupted personal businesses and they have influenced the political system through bribery and intimidation. Although they do not have common ideology, they have converged over the ideology of system frustration and failure given that they are conglomeration of soldiers from the bush, civilized and goons from Khartoum coupled with the corrupted businessmen and women from South Sudan.

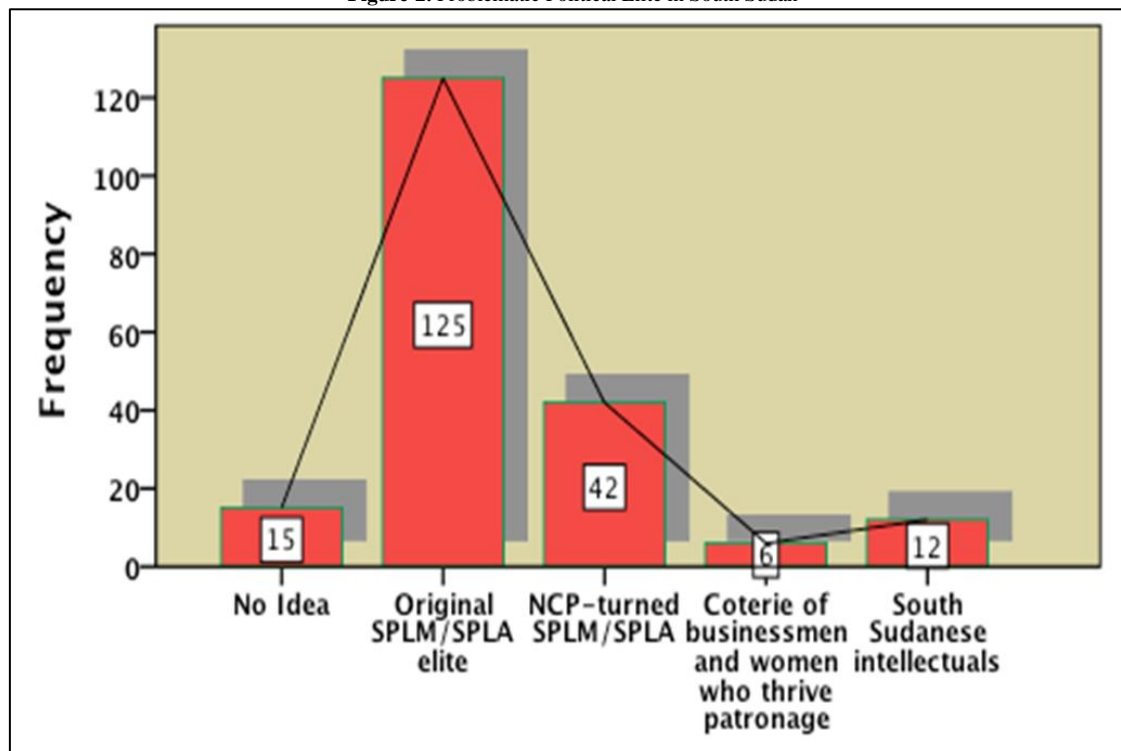
Nonetheless, few of the respondents did not agree with classification on the reason that the classification has failed to include elites from other parties such as African National Congress Party (ANC), Sudan African National Union (SANU), South Sudan Democratic Alliance (SSDA), People’s Liberal Party (PLP), amongst others.

Table-1. Problematic Political Elite in South Sudanese State failure

Categories	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No Idea	15	7.5	7.5	7.5
Original SPLM/SPLA elite	125	62.5	62.5	70.0
NCP-turned SPLM/SPLA	42	21.0	21.0	91.0
Coterie of businessmen and women who thrive on patronage	6	3.0	3.0	94.0
South Sudanese intellectuals	12	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork

Figure-2. Problematic Political Elite in South Sudan



Source: Author

Table 1 and figure 2 have analyzed a critical question of the most influential and notorious elite in South Sudan state failure. 125 respondents, representing 63% argued that it is original SPLM/SPLA elite that has a serious hand in the failure of South Sudan. They cited reasons such as cancerous corruption, rent-seeking rebellions and breakdown of the rule of law as attributed to this group. Besides, 42 respondents representing 21% noted that it is NCP turned SPLM/SPLA elite that has caused South Sudan state failure citing the intense lobbying, political gossiping and worship of the President by the group. They also added that these converts have hostage President Salva Kiir while spying on him and continued to send confidential security and political reports to Sudanese government and the NCP cohorts.

Moreover, 6 respondents, representing 3% said that it is the coterie of businessmen and women who thrive on patronage that have caused the state failure. They numerated reasons such as the robust client-patronage that have caused relationship between this group and the presidency, particularly, on the appointment of constitutional post holders, especially in the finance and petroleum sectors. This group continues to scoop state contracts without delivering goods and services and they are powerful given that they use money to influence the system through bribes and kickbacks.

Furthermore, 12 respondents, representing 6% argue that it is the South Sudanese intellectuals that have notoriously failed the nascent state. They cited their reasons such as lack of critical analysis to inform the public policies, biasness of these informed class and allegiance to ethnic extractions by the group. This according to the respondents has hampered impartiality and objectivity of the group. Finally, 15 respondents, representing 7% did not have any idea on the question asked.

After the analysis of the most notorious elites, the next level is to critically analyse the role of tribal councils in state crafting and failure.

4.3. Role of Tribal and Regional Council of Elders in South Sudanese State-crafting and Failure

The 200 surveyed- respondents unanimously consented that the activities of the tribal council of elders such as Jieng Council of Elders (JCE), Nuer Council of Elders (NCE), Equatoria Council of Elders (ECE) have planted hatred and polarized the South Sudanese communities in lieu of promoting unity. They cited the preaching of tribalism and nepotism by the tribal councils given that they recoil to their ethnic backyards. Respondents moreover added that these councils have captured the state, abused national power and offered unsolicited advice to the leaders on the helm. Amongst the dishonourable tribal councils, is the Jieng Council of Elders (JCE) that has publicly issued sensitive tribal statements against anyone who oppose President Salva Kiir and had shown its prowess to protect the Jieng people and the President at all cost. Though their activities have scaled down, they had been vocal in the previous years.

Besides, respondents noted that since the JCE had not been publicly rebuked, disbanded or reprimanded, it demonstrates the sense that tribalism has been legalized in South Sudan. The respondents argued that although these tribal councils should exist, they should be confined to address social issues such as local conflict resolutions and peace building efforts in the rural areas where Jieng communities reside rather staying and lobbying in Juba, where

the seat of the Government of Republic of South Sudan is anchored. Hence, respondents added that these councils should not be allowed to influence the government policies.

Finally, given that the members of the councils, who are former and current political and military leaders were not elected or nominated by the communities they purportedly seemed to be representing, they have so far resorted to gossiping, fueling rebellions and causing civil war as trick of staying relevant. They have frustrated the August 2015 peace deal and they are usurping public resources for their self-interests. Thus, respondents agreed that these tribal councils of elders should be abolished.

4.4. Role of Ethnic-Based Militias in South Sudanese State-Crafting and Failure

All the 200-surveyed respondents have categorically said that these ethnic-based militias such as White Army of Nuer (Jiech Mabor), Gelweng of Dinka, Akwelek of Chollo, Arrow Boys of Azande, Monymiji of Otuho and Maban Grassroots Defense Forces among others are dangerous to the South Sudanese state given that they spread violence across the country. They lamented that there must be one national army with national character built on one military doctrine to eschew the disappearance of the state. The respondents added that the existence of these ethnic-based militias has led to the commercialization of security and rebellions and hence this is dangerous to the state and nation building given that it compromises the rule of law. Moreover, the respondents noted that the mushrooming of these ethnic-based militias outfit has caused tribalism, polarization, discrimination and disrespect for national army. The outcome has been that the ethnic-based militias are loyal to individuals than state and the hungry politicians are capitalizing on this ugly scenario causing South Sudan state failure.

However, respondents emphasized that these ethnic-based outfits have just emerged to fill the security vacuum created by the ineffectiveness of the Government of the Republic South Sudan to provide security for all.

5. Conclusions

The paper has advanced a plausible argument on the role of political elites, particularly, SPLM/SPLA in South Sudanese state-crafting and failure. It conceptualizes state dysfunctionality, crafting and failure. It argues that South Sudanese political elites have caused South Sudanese state failure than crafting. This has been demonstrated in the empirical literature through elites power struggle, secretive ethnic politics, rewarding of rebellions, corruption and intermittent conflicts. With detailed empirical evidence and in-depth arguments presented in the paper, it is plausible to conclude that political elites in South Sudan, particularly, SPLM/SPLA elite have caused state failure than crafting. Reversing South Sudanese state failure requires the political elites, the SPLM to eschew zero-sum power struggle, rent seeking rebellions, secretive ethnic politics, conflicts and corruption. This demands adherence to institutionalism and visionary leadership.

6. Recommendation for future research

While I don't assumed to have exhausted the role of South Sudanese political elites, particularly, SPLM in state failure, I would recommend future empirical research on the role of SPLM and SPLA elites in reversing state failure and rescuing South Sudan from collapse.

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