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From rebellion to rule: Rebel group organisation and state-building in Africa

Buyisile Ntaka 

Corvinus University of Budapest, Budapest, Hungary

ABSTRACT

This article examines how the wartime organisational structure of rebel groups influences their capacity for effective governance after conflict. It argues that groups with more developed hierarchical structures and ideological cohesion are better positioned to transition into capable political actors in the post-war period. Drawing on literature on rebel governance and state formation theory, the article employs comparative process tracing to analyse the relationship between wartime governance structures and post-conflict state-building. The analysis centres on three African cases with distinct organisational features and governance trajectories: the Somali National Movement (SNM), the de facto government authority in Somaliland; the hierarchically driven Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF); and *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO) in Mozambique, which entered government through a negotiated settlement. The findings suggest that variation in internal organisational coherence and wartime governance experience significantly shape a group's ability to influence political transitions and post-conflict governance effectiveness.

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Introduction

Rebel governance has emerged as a central lens for analysing political transitions in the aftermath of conflict. However, much of the existing literature has concentrated on the causes and drivers of rebel governance such as territorial control,¹ rebel engagement with civilian populations,² and the emergence of wartime institutions,³ with relatively little attention paid to its long-term outcomes. Recent scholarship highlights that institutions formed during conflict can shape a variety of post-conflict outcomes, including the rule of law, the type of political regime that emerges, relationships between citizens and the state, and overall social cohesion.⁴ For example, where postwar regime types are deeply rooted in wartime rebel governance experience,⁵ it is known that existing learning

CONTACT Buyisile Ntaka  buyisile.ntaka44@gmail.com

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processes can carry over skills and norms from rebel justice systems to post-conflict legal institutions.⁶ It has also been demonstrated how rebel rule can erode social trust.⁷ Still, many questions remain unanswered, including what the lasting effects of rebel governance are on civilian societies and state institutions.⁸ Furthermore, the ways in which the internal organisation and governance practices of rebel movements shape their capacity to achieve effective governance after conflict ends remain underexplored.

This article seeks to fill this gap by focusing on how the internal organisational structure of rebel groups – particularly the extent of their hierarchical structure and ideological coherence – and their wartime governance practices may influence their ability to transition into effective political governance actors after conflict. The article compares three African cases that illustrate differing organisational structures and divergent post-conflict trajectories: Somaliland, a de facto state governed by clan-based coalitions; Rwanda, where the hierarchical and ideologically driven Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) transitioned into a dominant ruling party; and Mozambique, where the ideologically rooted Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO) joined a negotiated power-sharing arrangement. Using a comparative process-tracing approach, the article analyses rebel governance both during conflict and throughout the post-conflict transition. Through a comparison of these cases, and by highlighting the importance of organisational coherence and wartime institutional experience, the article offers insights into how rebel movements can either contribute to or undermine governance effectiveness following conflict.

The article is structured as follows. The first section is a review of relevant literature, which outlines key debates on rebel governance with a particular focus on how movements transition from rebellion to political authority, and what this means for broader processes of state formation. The second section provides the theoretical framework, defining the core variables and presenting the central argument. The third section outlines the research methodology, including case selection and the process-tracing approach. The fourth section presents the cases of interest, while the fifth engages in a comparative discussion of the implications for post-conflict governance. The final section concludes by reflecting on the significance of the findings.

Literature review

Before turning to some of the key debates around rebel governance, the article briefly explains the concept of state-building. State-building is the process of creating or reconstructing governance institutions capable of ensuring citizens' physical and economic security.⁹ It is an internally driven process aimed at strengthening the state's capacity, institutions and legitimacy through state–society relations. Effective state-building rests on a reciprocal relationship between a state that delivers services to its people and the social and political groups that engage constructively with it.¹⁰ It is therefore closely tied to the political processes through which power and relationships between state authorities and organised societal groups are negotiated and managed. When these actors can identify shared interests and agree on arrangements to pursue them, the process can form the foundation for enhanced state capacity and legitimacy.¹¹ In this article, state-building is understood as a continuous state reconstruction endeavour, closely linked with governance, including rebel governance and its legacy post-conflict.

Broadly, rebel governance refers to the organisation of civilians for a public purpose by non-state actors who militarily oppose the state.¹² For the purposes of this article rebel governance is understood as the establishment of institutionalised authority by armed actors operating in opposition to (or in competition with) the existing state, administering the public realm in rebel-held territories. Three key scope conditions for rebel governance are territorial control, the presence of a resident population, and the use or threat of violence. Insurgent groups that establish governance structures often organise civilian participation, administer public affairs or oversee the production of economic resources. In some cases, these governance practices give rise to a rebel political order which is understood as a system of institutionalised governance and social regulation established by armed groups in the territories they control.¹³ These practices are not only functional but also political, as they seek to establish legitimacy and regulate social relations outside the state's authority. In this article the terms 'insurgent group' and 'rebel group' are used interchangeably to refer to non-state armed actors that oppose the incumbent state.

Recent scholarship, however, has challenged the assumption that territorial control is a necessary condition for rebel governance, demonstrating that armed groups can exercise governance functions through social networks, mobile authority or service provision in contested areas.¹⁴ While acknowledging this debate, this article focuses on cases in which rebel groups exercised some territorial control during conflict, as territorial control can provide conditions under which wartime governance can be institutionally developed. For instance, territorial control can enable groups to establish administrative structures, extract resources through taxation, deliver services and cultivate legitimacy among resident populations. The use or threat of violence (as a scope condition) serves to distinguish rebel groups from non-violent political movements and civic organisations that may also engage in governance activities, but do so without turning to armed force. The violence in question is primarily directed at the state, as armed challenge to state authority is a defining feature of rebellion. However, as the case studies demonstrate, the degree and nature of violence directed at civilians varies across rebel groups and these variations carry implications for governance legitimacy during and after conflict.

While early research has mainly focused on the strategic or coercive motivations behind rebel governance, often linking it to resource mobilisation or civilian compliance,¹⁵ more recent work has turned towards understanding rebel groups as proto-state actors with long-term political aspirations.¹⁶ Other scholars have highlighted that choices made by armed groups with regards to institution building in wartime have implications for state-building trajectories in the post-conflict period,¹⁷ and theorised that it is social control during war that matters for understanding post-war state-building, control and stability.¹⁸ This shift in the rebel governance scholarship has broadened the analytical lens, moving beyond short-term battlefield dynamics to considering the institutional and ideational legacies of rebel rule.

A growing body of literature has looked at how the internal organisation of rebel groups shapes their governance capacity. Groups with hierarchical command structures, bureaucratic coherence and ideological discipline are often better able to institutionalise governance practices and maintain internal control.¹⁹ These groups tend to mirror state-like behaviours, such as taxation, legal adjudication and service provision, which are features that may facilitate their transition into formal political actors after conflict. For

instance, Reyko Huang shows that the way rebel groups interact with civilian populations during war has lasting consequences for post-conflict political regimes. She argues that extensive rebel–civilian engagement during conflict can catalyse bottom-up pressure for democratisation.²⁰ Although her focus is on regime type, her main insight that wartime governance creates institutional and social legacies underpins this article’s framework. Sherry Zaks extends this organisational logic by examining to what extent wartime structures determine whether rebel groups successfully transform into political parties, demonstrating that groups with governance wings, political-messaging structures and capacity for service delivery during conflict are better positioned for post-conflict political adaptation.²¹ Sarah Zukerman Daly also highlights how the legacies of violence shape post-conflict political order, showing that organisational characteristics of armed groups influence remilitarisation trajectories and that wartime belligerents can leverage their capacity for violence as a foundation for post-conflict electoral success.²² On the other hand, loosely organised or ethnically fragmented groups often struggle to centralise authority or implement consistent governance strategies. Their lack of internal coherence may result in fragmented authority, rent-seeking, or violent competition between sub-commanders.²³ As such, their post-conflict political participation may be limited or destabilising, particularly in contexts requiring integration and institution-building.

Recent scholarship has further nuanced the understanding of rebel–civilian relations by foregrounding civilian agency. Oliver Kaplan demonstrates that communities with strong collective action capacity can resist, negotiate or shape the terms of rebel governance, suggesting that governance legitimacy is not only a function of rebel group choices but is co-produced through interactions with local populations.²⁴ This insight is particularly relevant for understanding the Somali National Movement’s (SNM) experience in Somaliland, where its capacity for clan-based collective action shaped the relationship with local populations. More broadly, scholars have called attention to the socio-political orders that emerge in conflict settings, highlighting how armed groups, civilians and other actors co-constitute governance arrangements that do not map neatly onto state/non-state or formal/informal binaries.²⁵

A related body of knowledge examines the rebel-to-party scholarship, focusing on how armed groups transform into electoral competitors after conflict. Zaks weighs in on this,²⁶ and John Ishiyama and Anna Batta analyse the organisational dynamics of this transformation, while Ishiyama and Michael Widmeier find that wartime bureaucratic development is a significant indicator of post-conflict electoral success.²⁷ Devon Curtis and Gyda Sindre examine how armed movements’ vision of the state evolve through this transformation, and Carrie Manning documents the challenges RENAMO faced in its transition from armed movement to political party.²⁸ While these studies provide valuable insight into electoral participation and party development, this article goes beyond party transformation to examine the broader governance implications of wartime organisation, of which successful party development is one possible – but not exclusive – outcome.

Although the scholarship on rebel governance has grown significantly, relatively little is known about the long-term consequences of various forms of rebel governance for post-conflict political order. Some scholars argue that wartime institutions can be repurposed in peacetime, providing continuity and administrative experience that supports post-conflict reconstruction.²⁹ However, others caution that such legacies may entrench

authoritarian practices or exclusionary ideologies, especially when governance is rooted in coercion or narrow identity politics.³⁰ The link between rebel governance and (post-conflict) state-building remains under-theorised, particularly in the African context where diverse political trajectories emerge from similar conflict environments. Questions remain about which rebel characteristics matter most for shaping political transitions, whether it is ideological cohesion, military discipline, or institutional structures developed during war.

This article adds to ongoing debates by emphasising how organisational structure influences the outcomes of transitions from rebellion to statehood. It aligns with recent scholarship that views civil war not as an isolated episode but as a social process whose dynamics connect pre-war, wartime and post-war periods through evolving interactions between state and non-state actors.³¹ It moves beyond viewing rebel governance as merely a wartime occurrence, instead framing rebel institutions as part of a wider, continuous process of state formation. By comparing cases with divergent organisational features and post-conflict trajectories, this study offers empirical insight into how internal rebel dynamics condition state-building processes after conflict.

Theoretical framework

This article draws on rebel governance and state formation theory to understand how the internal organisation of armed movements shapes their capacity to govern effectively post conflict. Rebel governance literature recognises that rebel groups are not just violent challengers to the state, but can also act as governing authorities by setting rules, delivering services and building institutions during conflict.³² A key assumption guiding this article is that the way in which a rebel group is organised – that is, the degree of its internal hierarchy and ideological coherence, and its ability to replicate state-like structures – matters for its post-war trajectory.

At the same time, it is important to note that not all rebel groups aspire to post-conflict state-building. Armed groups vary in their goals, with some oriented mainly towards resource extraction, ethnic dominance or regime dominance rather than long-term governance. Jeremy Weinstein argues that rebel groups driven by economic opportunity rather than political grievance tend to develop predatory relationships with civilian populations and produce organisations that are ill-suited to post-war governance.³³ The argument put forward in this article applies to rebel groups that demonstrate political aspirations beyond military victory; that is, groups that seek to govern populations, establish institutional structures and position themselves as legitimate political actors, especially after conflict. The three cases selected for analysis all meet this condition, albeit varying in the extent to which these aspirations translate into effective post-conflict governance.

Furthermore, it should be made clear that this article's argument also rests on several assumptions about the organisational characteristics of the rebel groups studied. The groups examined vary across three dimensions, which constitute the study's independent variables: goals, ideology and civilian relations.

With regards to goals, all three groups had political aspirations beyond victory, although the coherence of these aspirations differed. When it comes to ideology, the RPF articulated a clear political vision through its Eight Point Programme; the SNM was

driven less by formal ideology and more by clan-based political identity; and RENAMO's ideological disposition was largely externally constructed by its external sponsors. Regarding civilian relations, the groups span a spectrum from the SNM's embedded community engagement to the RPF's coercive martial law, to RENAMO's indirect rule combined with early systematic violence against civilians. These organisational characteristics (the three dimensions identified above) are analytically important because they condition how the causal mechanisms operate.

One contextual factor that conditions the relationship between these organisational characteristics and post-conflict outcomes is the distinction between secessionist and centre-seeking rebel movements. Secessionist movements, such as the SNM in Somaliland, may derive a degree of governance legitimacy from the very act of state creation, as the pursuit of independent statehood can itself serve as a unifying political project that compensates for weaker organisational hierarchy or formal ideology. Centre-seeking movements (such as the RPF and RENAMO), by contrast, seek to capture or share power within an existing state and therefore face competitive pressures from incumbent elites and rival political actors that reward organisational discipline and institutional capacity. While this distinction affects the form that post-conflict governance takes, the article maintains that the core relationship between wartime organisational structure and post-conflict governance effectiveness holds across both types.

Three mechanisms

The analysis traces the causal link between wartime governance structures and post-conflict state-building through three mechanisms: (1) governance capacity, (2) group coherence and (3) governance legitimacy. Each of these is shaped by the organisational characteristics of the rebel group. Governance capacity refers to the administrative and institutional infrastructure a rebel group develops during conflict, such as bureaucratic systems, taxation, service delivery and territorial administration. Groups that are hierarchically organised with centralised command are more likely to develop governance capacity; however, decentralised groups can also build capacity through consensus-based administration, as the case of Somaliland shows. Group coherence, on the other hand, refers to the degree of organisational unity, discipline and shared purpose that enables a rebel movement to act collectively during and after conflict. This may be sustained through military command structures and ideological commitment, as in the RPF, or through clan solidarity, as in the SNM. Where group coherence depends on external backing, as with RENAMO, it is likely to prove fragile in the post-conflict period. Finally, governance legitimacy refers to the degree of acceptance and authority a rebel group derives from the population it governs. This is shaped by the nature of its wartime engagement with civilians. These three mechanisms are analytically distinct from the organisational characteristics that drive them. Goals, ideology and civilian relations are features (or dimensions) of the rebel group whereas governance capacity, group coherence and governance legitimacy are causal pathways through which these features shape post-conflict state-building outcomes.

The dependent variable in the article is 'post-conflict governance effectiveness', defined as the degree to which a former rebel group successfully translates its wartime organisational capacity into durable political authority and institutional governance

after the cessation of conflict. This analysis operates mainly at the meso level, examining the organisational trajectory of the group itself while tracing the macro-level implications for state-building. Post-conflict governance effectiveness is assessed along the following qualitative aspects (1) institutional consolidation, which refers to the degree to which a former rebel group establishes or integrates into formal governance structures with administrative capacity; (2) political durability, which refers to the extent to which the group sustains its political role over time without recourse to armed confrontation; and (3) governance reach, which refers to the scope of the group's effective authority over territory and population in the post-conflict period. These aspects are not reducible to a single metric but together capture the range of variation observable across the cases examined in this article.

The argument of the article builds on and extends several established lines of inquiry. Scholars of wartime organisation have demonstrated that internal structure is a primary determinant of rebel group behaviour and outcomes. Abdulkader Sinno shows that organisational structure determines insurgent success or failure,³⁴ while Paul Staniland develops a typology for rebel-civilian relations that varies with organisational foundations,³⁵ and Zaks traces how wartime organisational subdivisions shape rebel-to-party transformations.³⁶ The rebel victory literature further underscores how wartime governance creates precedents for post-conflict rule. For example, Terrence Lyons argues that victorious insurgent groups convert wartime administrative skills into post-conflict governance, producing authoritarian political order,³⁷ while Kai Thaler posits that the ideologies formed during rebellion shape victorious rebels' state-building plans and policies along two key dimensions: (1) the extent of state and societal transformation they pursue, and (2) whether they aim to benefit a narrow constituency or a broader, more inclusive public.³⁸ This article draws on these insights, but extends them comparatively across different modes of conflict termination – rebel victory (Rwanda), negotiated settlement (Mozambique) and a rebel-led *de facto* state (Somaliland) – to examine how organisational structure shapes governance outcomes regardless of how the war ends.

The theoretical framework of this study also draws on state formation theory, particularly historical institutionalist approaches that view states as products of conflict, coercion and negotiation.³⁹ From this perspective, governance does not begin with peace, but rather emerges and takes shape in wartime. When rebel groups carry out functions typically associated with the state, they are not only filling a gap but also cultivating legitimacy and institutional capacity that can endure after the fighting ends. While state formation theory, as outlined by Charles Tilly, is based on historical state-building in Europe, studies have shown that the basics of Tilly's principles of warfare and state-making are applicable to the developing world (defined as comprising states that came into being after colonialism), and can be used to understand and explain how non-state armed actors become state-builders.⁴⁰

Taken together, this framework helps explain why some rebel groups are able to evolve into effective political players while others struggle to adapt. It links the quality of wartime governance and internal organisational strength to the capacity for post-conflict governance effectiveness, arguing that these factors are central to understanding divergent post-war outcomes. Instead of treating post-conflict politics as a fresh start, the analysis presents it as part of a longer continuum shaped by wartime decisions,

institutions and relationships. This approach supports the case selection and comparative analysis, offering a structured way to examine how different rebel group trajectories, from Somaliland to Rwanda and Mozambique, are influenced by their organisational foundations and governance experiences during conflict.

Methodology

This study adopts a comparative case study approach using process tracing to examine how the internal organisation of rebel groups influences their capacity to contribute to post-conflict governance effectiveness. The research design is qualitative and interpretive, identifying causal mechanisms by tracing group behaviour across two distinct periods: the conflict phase and the post-conflict transition.

Three African cases were chosen for their variation across the causal mechanisms central to the article's argument: governance capacity, group coherence and governance legitimacy. The three rebel group cases are:

1. SNM (Somaliland): a decentralised, clan-based movement with limited centralised governance capacity, but strong group coherence rooted in clan solidarity and high governance legitimacy derived from community-embedded participatory governance during conflict.
2. RPF (Rwanda): a hierarchical and ideologically disciplined movement with high governance capacity and strong group coherence, with governance legitimacy derived primarily from coercive control.
3. RENAMO (Mozambique): an externally dependent movement with weak governance capacity, fragile group coherence built on externally constructed ideology and low governance legitimacy undermined by early systematic violence against civilians and reliance on indirect rule.

This variation provides the analytical scope to assess which mechanisms, and which combinations of mechanisms, matter most for post-conflict state-building. By selecting groups that differ in their organisational structure, ideological foundations and relations with civilians (while sharing the common condition of territorial control during conflict) the analysis can identify which factors co-vary with effective post-conflict governance effectiveness. Each case is mapped against the key analytical dimensions and causal mechanisms, and the cross-case comparisons are presented in table format in the comparative analysis section.

The selection of RENAMO rather than Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) calls for a brief justification. The article focuses on how rebel groups transition from armed opposition to political authority in the post-conflict period, excluding conflict between a rebel group and a former colonial power. FRELIMO, as the ruling state party defending its existing hold on power in Mozambique, does not neatly fit this analytical frame in that it has not undergone a rebel-to-ruler transition. RENAMO, on the other hand, represents a case in which a rebel movement attempted to convert its wartime organisation into post-conflict political authority, albeit with limited success. Furthermore, while RENAMO's heavy reliance on Rhodesian, and later South African, backing differentiates it from the more internally driven SNM and RPF, this variation is analytically more productive than

problematic. The case of RENAMO serves as an illustration of what happens when organisational coherence, ideological identity and governance capacity are externally constructed rather than internally generated. The contrast with the SNM's clan-embedded legitimacy and the RPF's internally developed hierarchy allows the analysis to isolate the importance of endogenous organisational development for durable post-conflict governance. External support is therefore treated as an analytically relevant dimension of variation across the cases.

The three cases also vary in conflict type and termination: in Somaliland, the SNM was a secessionist movement that unilaterally declared independence; in Rwanda, the RPF was a centre-seeking rebel movement that achieved military victory; and in Mozambique, RENAMO was a centre-seeking rebel movement that entered a negotiated settlement. Rather than undermining comparability, this variation provides analytical leverage. If organisational structure shapes post-conflict governance effectiveness across different conflict types and termination modes, this strengthens the explanatory power of the independent variables, suggesting that the relationship is not contingent on a particular form of conflict or termination but operates as a consistent factor across diverse contexts. At the same time, the mode of conflict termination mediates the specific form that post-conflict governance takes: authoritarian consolidation following rebel victory, incomplete political transition following negotiated settlement and de facto statehood following unilateral secession. The analysis attends to this distinction in the comparative discussion.

A further dimension of variation across the cases concerns post-conflict governance status. The SNM and RPF both became governing organisations in their respective contexts, while RENAMO entered the political system as an opposition party and has never governed. This asymmetry is not incidental but constitutes the variation the article seeks to explain. Post-conflict governance effectiveness, as defined in the theoretical framework, is not a binary; it is a spectrum including institutional consolidation, political durability and governance reach. The RPF achieved full state capture and comprehensive institutional consolidation; the SNM established effective de facto governance that has endured despite the absence of international recognition; and RENAMO achieved only partial and fragile political integration without effective governance capacity. With regards to Somaliland's unrecognised status, the relevant outcome of this article is not international recognition but the effectiveness and durability of post-conflict governance. The Somaliland case shows that high governance effectiveness can be achieved through legitimacy-based decentralised mechanisms even in the absence of international recognition, as opposed to the RPF's centralised model that enjoys international recognition.⁴¹

Data for this study was drawn from a combination of secondary sources, including academic literature, policy reports and other official documents. Where available, materials produced during the conflict period were analysed to better understand wartime institutional practices. Post-conflict governance effectiveness was assessed through existing evaluations, scholarly analyses and official state or international reports. A case-centric process tracing method was used to track how rebel groups governed during conflict, how they transitioned out of armed struggle, and how their internal structures shaped their engagement with the post-conflict political order. This method was chosen owing to its usefulness in formulating comprehensive explanations of historical cases in order to understand them better, instead of generalising to broader situations.⁴²

The analysis traces the causal link between wartime governance structures, practices and post-conflict governance effectiveness while paying close attention to the three mechanisms identified in the theoretical framework – governance capacity, group coherence and governance legitimacy. By comparing how these mechanisms operate across cases with different organisational characteristics, the research identifies patterns and divergences that help explain why some rebel movements evolve into effective political actors while others remain marginal. The article now turns to the case studies.

SNM (Somaliland)

The SNM was established in 1981 in London by members of the Somali diaspora in Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom, who united in their opposition to Siad Barre's regime in Somalia.⁴³ By 1982, the SNM had begun armed resistance against the regime in northern Somalia. Operating from a base in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, the SNM launched attacks in Hargeisa, Borama, Burco, and Tug Wajale. In April 1991, leaders of the SNM and elders from northern Somalia convened in Bur'o to finalise a lasting ceasefire and form a transitional administration for the north-western regions of the country.⁴⁴ Over the course of a week, the elders reportedly reached consensus on six resolutions, the first being a declaration that the northern regions would create an independent administration with no ties to the capital, Mogadishu.⁴⁵ On 18 May, a decision was made to dissolve Somaliland's 1960 union with Somalia and reassert its sovereignty as an independent state.⁴⁶ Abdirahman Ahmed Ali 'Tuur', then Chair of the SNM, assumed the presidency of Somaliland for a two-year term,⁴⁷ while the SNM central committee was designated as the country's first parliament.⁴⁸

The SNM movement is widely credited with laying the foundations for the establishment of Somaliland, a self-declared sovereign state. While not internationally recognised, Somaliland functions as a *de facto* state.⁴⁹

The SNM's organisational structure and wartime governance

The SNM was primarily financed through donations from members of the Isaaq clan living abroad. It maintained both political and military wings.⁵⁰ By 1991, it had around 10,000 fighters. The group's primary objective was to overthrow the Barre regime. While the SNM lacked a formal ideological programme, its political programme centred on the overthrow of Barre's authoritarian socialist regime and restoring democratic governance.⁵¹ The SNM positioned itself in direct opposition to the Barre regime and its systematic discrimination against the Isaaq clan. Notably, the SNM's cohesion was based more on clan solidarity and the shared experience of state violence than doctrinal ideology.⁵²

Drawing on Tilly's framework of war-making and state-making, the analysis suggests that the SNM's initial priority was to establish and centralise control over violence (the first stage of governance) within Somaliland, an objective it largely achieved prior to Somaliland's declaration of independence. This achievement, which made it the dominant actor in the regional security landscape, was the product of tactical competence and effective organisation, preventing the emergence of rival forces and compelling other actors to engage with it as a legitimate party in peace negotiations.⁵³ The SNM's military structure evolved into a decentralised, community-based guerrilla force, closely

tied to clan elders. As Andrew Duffield notes, this model reduced opportunities for wartime predation, such as plunder and extortion. The second and third stages of governance, according to Tilly's framework, involve bureaucratisation and civilianisation. The SNM achieved these by establishing systems of political accountability and by building a shared identity through negotiation between rulers and constituents. Key to this process was securing the support of elders and local financiers.⁵⁴

Consequently, the SNM increasingly functioned as a proto state. It was governed by six elected civilian leaders, avoiding domination by military elites, and adopted a democratic, clan-based power-sharing system. This approach later formed the basis of Somaliland's governance framework. Notably, the SNM also made efforts to protect minority groups who had supported the Barre regime and initiated reconciliation processes. The institutions and political culture of the emergent Somaliland state closely reflected those developed by the SNM during the conflict, highlighting how rebel movements can evolve into state-builders, a process consistent with Tilly's theoretical insights.⁵⁵

In terms of the three mechanisms identified in the theoretical framework, the SNM's wartime experience produced moderate governance capacity through clan-based administration and proto-state functions, although this capacity was decentralised rather than institutionally consolidated. Group coherence was sustained through clan solidarity and shared opposition against the Barre regime rather than through formal ideology or a rigid command hierarchy. Lastly, governance legitimacy was high as a result of the SNM's participatory, community-embedded governance model and its elected civilian leadership.

The SNM's post-conflict trajectory

The members of the SNM leadership transformed themselves into state-builders, forming Somaliland's first government in 1991, as they were the only organisation in Somaliland with sufficient authority to establish law and order.⁵⁶ The chairman and vice-chairman of the SNM transitioned into formal politics after 1991 and the institutions created during wartime were transplanted into Somaliland's government. However, in 1992 the progress was set back following an outbreak of violence, in part because combatants' livelihoods still depended on armed mobilisation, but also because the SNM had become factionalised without the threat of a common enemy and thus combatants pursued opportunities with other clan militias.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the practical and political costs of breaking away were low since militias had been organised autonomously during wartime and each clan militia had retained its own weapons in case other violent actors emerged. A number of confrontations flared up between the state and clan militias over strategic assets such as the port of Berbera, the country's main commercial gateway, and contested trade routes. These disputes, in which clans pressed competing claims of ownership, justified the state's investment in armed forces, especially consolidation-mobilising forces, and in the fight to control territory.

Despite these conflicts, the SNM was able to deter opponents to state-building by centralising coercion within the state, building an administration and (through negotiation and co-option) cultivating members whose interests were tied to state-building.⁵⁸ In 1993, following the Boroma Conference, the SNM transitioned from rebel movement to a new civilian administration completing its institutional transition from insurgent force

to government.⁵⁹ While largely unrecognised internationally, Somaliland has maintained a functioning political system, a relatively stable internal security situation, and a degree of economic self-sufficiency rarely seen in post-conflict settings. Governance has continued to operate through a hybrid model, combining traditional clan-based authorities with some formal political institutions such as an elected parliament, an executive president and a judiciary. This model has proved a flexible yet resilient framework for managing political disputes and accommodating diverse clan interests.

The success of peacebuilding and state-building in Somaliland can be largely attributed to the central role played by traditional actors and customary institutions embedded within the clan-based structure of Somali society.⁶⁰ Importantly, this state-building process has followed a bottom-up trajectory and unfolded without the establishment of a post-conflict central monopoly on violence. In practice, the government does not control all means of coercion; instead, security is managed in a decentralised manner, primarily maintained by local politicians and clan elders. This arrangement has produced an indigenous form of statehood that blends customary and statutory norms and practices, one which enjoys a high degree of legitimacy among the population.⁶¹ Evidence of this legitimacy is substantial. For instance, Somaliland has conducted successful peaceful transitions of power, including the closely contested 2003 presidential election. Though the election was decided by a small margin the result was accepted by the losing candidate, which demonstrates institutional trust.⁶² Mark Bradbury documents how Somaliland's hybrid governance model commands broad popular support because it is rooted in local norms and practices rather than external frameworks. This legitimacy has proven durable despite Somaliland not being internationally recognised.⁶³

Somaliland's experience demonstrates that strong local legitimacy, embedded in customary authority and community-driven governance, can compensate for the absence of rigid organisational hierarchy. The SNM's ability to embed itself within clan structures allowed it to mobilise resources, maintain discipline, and transition from insurgency to governance without provoking significant internal fragmentation. Unlike movements that rely heavily on top-down military command, Somaliland's bottom-up approach created a participatory political culture that has persisted into the post-conflict period. However, this model also limits the central state's reach, as authority remains decentralised and dependent on local consensus rather than institutional coercion.

RPF (Rwanda)

In both precolonial and colonial Rwanda, political dominance rested with one ethnic group within the country, the Tutsi who made up 17% of the population just before independence from Belgium.⁶⁴ The Tutsi were largely pastoralists with large herds of cattle. This ownership of cattle was the basis of their wealth, social status and political hierarchy. Colonial authorities in Rwanda (first the Germans then later the Belgians) favoured the Tutsi over the Hutu (who were traditionally farmers) relying on Tutsi elites to implement their administration. They granted them broad powers and integrated them into the educational and administrative systems, reinforcing their political dominance and marginalising the Hutu, which reinforced the divide between the Tutsi and Hutu.⁶⁵ In 1959, escalating tensions in southern Rwanda culminated in a challenge in the form of the Hutu Peasant Revolution, during which Hutu militias killed many within the Tutsi

communities in an effort to claim land and political power.⁶⁶ This violence triggered a mass exodus of Tutsi refugees to Burundi, Uganda, Zaire and Tanzania.⁶⁷ From 1961, some of these exiles launched cross-border raids from bases in Uganda and Burundi in an attempt to retake power. The Hutu-led government responded with intensified repression and violence against Tutsi civilians.⁶⁸

In neighbouring Uganda, political upheaval further shaped the fate of Rwandan exiles. Idi Amin's 1971 coup ousted Milton Obote, and by 1972 Amin began persecuting Tutsi refugees in retaliation for Kigali's support of Obote's rebels. Following Juvénal Habyarimana's 1973 coup in Rwanda, Amin briefly reversed course, recruiting Tutsi refugees into his army and security services, before again turning against them in the late 1970s.⁶⁹

After Amin's overthrow in 1979 by Yoweri Museveni's rebel forces, Tutsi refugees began to organise politically, forming the Rwanda Alliance for National Unity (RANU) with the aim of returning to Rwanda.⁷⁰ RANU's initial priority was to build a sense of national identity among the exile community as the foundation for a future political base.⁷¹ To this end, it adopted a dual strategy: openly establishing cultural and self-help associations to foster nationalism while covertly expanding its organisational networks across Rwanda's neighbouring states and in countries with significant Rwandan diaspora populations.⁷²

RANU maintained close links to Museveni through figures such as Fred Rwigyema, a Tutsi refugee who had joined Museveni's anti-Amin insurgency in 1979 and later became a key RANU member. In 1981, Rwigyema and fellow refugee Paul Kagame joined Museveni's renewed guerrilla campaign.⁷³ After Habyarimana formally banned the return of refugees to Rwanda in 1986 and Museveni's forces captured Kampala in 1987, the Tutsi exile leadership adopted a military strategy. In December 1987, RANU's congress reconstituted the movement as the RPF.⁷⁴

The RPF's organisational structure and wartime governance

Rwigyema, the RPF's founding chairman and later the Commander of the Rwandan Patriotic Army, was killed during the movement's first attack on Rwanda in 1990. He was succeeded by then-General Kagame, who transformed the RPF from a conventional military front into a coalition of guerrilla units.⁷⁵ This shift to guerrilla warfare, more suited to operations from Ugandan bases, proved decisive to the RPF's success. The movement's leadership was predominantly Tutsi, with some moderate Hutu members, and comprised roughly 15,000 combat troops supported by 5,000 administrative personnel.⁷⁶

While the RPF's primary aim was to overthrow the Hutu-led regime, it also advanced a broader political agenda to attract diverse support. This vision was set out in its 'Eight Point Programme',⁷⁷ designed to communicate a clear, accessible message that could mobilise even those with little or no formal education around a common national cause.⁷⁸ The Eight Point Programme centred on calls for national unity, democracy, the eradication of corruption and nepotism, the development of a self-reliant economy, enhanced social services, the establishment of a national military, a progressive foreign policy, and the dismantling of the structures that produce refugees.⁷⁹

By 1992, two years after the outbreak of war, the RPF had secured much of northern Rwanda. The 1993 Arusha Accords formalised its control over the region.⁸⁰ The RPF imposed martial law, which, by definition, excluded civilians from governance.

Engagement with the local population was minimal, with military command retaining full control of the RPF-held territory in northern Rwanda. Facing little resistance, the RPF saw no need to share power.⁸¹ Two key factors shaped this approach. First, most RPF leaders, raised outside Rwanda, supported the mass expulsion of Hutu residents, a policy that displaced nearly one million people. Those residents who remained, mainly disempowered Hutu and Tutsi, were subjected to strict military rule.⁸² Second, the RPF's military dominance, combined with its strategic goal of seizing Kigali and its lack of a revolutionary agenda (that is the elite led, politically restorative nature of its agenda which, unlike the transformative social programmes of mobilising insurgencies, did not require mass civilian engagement), left little incentive to involve locals. Political structures existed solely under military control, and the limited civilian governance that did take place depended entirely on local commanders.⁸³

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi population represented a decisive turning point for the RPF's organisational trajectory. The systematic killing of an estimated 800 000 people over approximately 100 days⁸⁴ also claimed the lives of much of the moderate Hutu political leadership that had been incorporated into the Arusha framework, destroying the power-sharing architecture the accords had established.⁸⁵ The genocide accelerated the RPF's military campaign and provided the push for its final offensive on Kigali. Organisationally the genocide consolidated the RPF's internal unity around a singular mission, hardening its command structures and deepening the ideological commitment of its cadres at a moment when the stakes of failure, for both the RPF and Tutsi population, had become existential.⁸⁶

In terms of the three mechanisms identified in the theoretical framework, the RPF's wartime experience produced high governance capacity through direct military administration of conquered territory, though this capacity was narrowly institutional rather than broadly participatory. Group coherence was strong as it was sustained through Kagame's centralised command, ideological commitment to the Eight Point Programme and the existential urgency imposed by the genocide. Governance legitimacy, however, remained limited in terms of popular consent: the RPF's reliance on martial law, exclusion of civilians from governance and mass displacement of Hutu populations meant that its wartime authority rested on coercion rather than on embedded engagement with the governed population.

The RPF's post-conflict trajectory

Although the RPF originated among civilian refugees in the late 1980s, it was decisively shaped by Kagame and his armed forces during the civil war.⁸⁷ Under Kagame's leadership, the RPF developed into a highly centralised, disciplined and effective military organisation. Following the 1994 genocide and during the peace negotiations in Arusha, it began transforming into a political party aiming to secure ministerial positions and legislative seats in the transitional government. However, Kagame's military high command continued to dominate the executive committee, with little internal democracy. Following its military victory, the RPF consolidated political control without significant demilitarisation, democratisation or genuine power-sharing.⁸⁸

Rwanda's post-war governance has been widely praised for its technocratic efficiency and ambitious modernisation agenda, particularly in economic development.⁸⁹ The RPF

has undertaken far-reaching political, economic and social reforms aimed at restructuring governance, transforming economic systems, and reshaping social identities and cultural norms.⁹⁰ Central to this vision is the construction of a unified national identity – *ubumwe* – that rejects ethnic categorisations such as Hutu and Tutsi, instead promoting a singular ‘Rwandan’ identity.⁹¹ The genocide served as the foundational pillar of this political project. The Kagame regime has instrumentalised the memory of the genocide as a central mobilising factor for its own cadres and as a legitimising narrative of its governance model.⁹² By positioning itself as the force that ended the genocide and prevented its re-occurrence, the RPF has secured a degree of moral authority (both domestically and internationally) that has shielded it from sustained criticism of its authoritarian practices.⁹³ This legitimacy rooted in the genocide operates alongside, and at times substitutes for, the governance legitimacy that the theoretical framework identifies as a key mechanism linking wartime organisation to post-conflict outcomes. Where the RPF’s coercive wartime governance generated limited popular consent, the moral claims derived from the genocide provided an alternative source of political authority that has proved durable in the post-conflict period.

While officially framed as a pathway to stability and reconciliation, this state-engineered unity legitimises tight political control. Laws against ‘ethnic divisionism’, ‘genocide ideology’ and ‘negationism’, vaguely defined and broadly applied, have curtailed public debate and silenced alternative historical narratives, particularly from Hutu perspectives.⁹⁴ Public memory of the genocide and civil war is thus selectively constructed, often suppressing underlying ethnic tensions.⁹⁵

Despite the government’s rejection of ethnic labels, research indicates that loyalties and resentments rooted in ethnicity persist beneath the surface.⁹⁶ Rwandans engage in ‘everyday resistance’ to the state’s reconciliation narrative while privately maintaining their identities and grievances as they perform the ‘Rwandan’ identity in public.⁹⁷ This dynamic is described as ‘chosen amnesia’, which has been identified as a collective approach of strategic forgetting that enables co-existence while neglecting unresolved underlying divisions.⁹⁸ This suppression of identity-based dialogue risks entrenching divisions, while masking the continued dominance of political and military power by Tutsi elites.⁹⁹ Although Rwanda’s post-conflict governance has produced stability and developmental gains, the unresolved question of ethnicity remains a latent faultline that could undermine these achievements if left unaddressed.

The RPF case illustrates how high organisational coherence, rooted in strong hierarchical command structures, shared ideology and disciplined wartime governance, can enable a rebel movement to establish strong post-war authority. The wartime emphasis on order and control translated into effective governance capacity after the conflict, though at the cost of significant political openness. The RPF’s trajectory demonstrates that while organisational discipline can underpin stability, it may also entrench authoritarian governance in the post-conflict period.

RENAMO (Mozambique)

RENAMO was created by Southern Rhodesia’s security forces, in response to FRELIMO’s support for the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), during Zimbabwe’s liberation

struggle.¹⁰⁰ FRELIMO had established a socialist one-party state in 1975, following Portuguese colonial rule. By 1977, Mozambican recruits had joined RENAMO; these included former FRELIMO commander André Matsangaissa, who became RENAMO's first president that year.¹⁰¹ Trained in Rhodesia, the group established bases in Mozambique, launching attacks on FRELIMO and ZANLA positions. These raids involved burning villages, destroying infrastructure, and damaging commerce. The civil war in Mozambique between RENAMO and FRELIMO started in 1977 and lasted 16 years. After Matsangaissa's death in 1979, Afonso Dhlakama assumed leadership of RENAMO, then comprising around 500 armed fighters still under tight Rhodesian control.¹⁰² When Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 under Robert Mugabe, a FRELIMO ally, South Africa's apartheid regime assumed sponsorship of RENAMO.

Throughout the 1980s, South Africa funded, trained and equipped RENAMO as part of a regional destabilisation strategy aimed at weakening socialist governments and curbing their support for anti-apartheid movements. Until 1989, RENAMO targeted economic infrastructure, state-run schools, health centres, local administrations, and their personnel. Captured documents and fighter testimony revealed the group considered civilians legitimate targets, with its early tactics marked by systematic brutality.¹⁰³

Organisational structure and wartime governance

According to extensive interviews with RENAMO officials and documentary sources, the group's structure was primarily military during the period of South African support between 1982 and 1985.¹⁰⁴ Following the 1984 Nkomati Accord, which formally curtailed the South African backing, RENAMO came under increasing pressure from external sponsors to articulate a formal political programme. Its political aims, outlined in the *Manifest and Programme* adopted in August 1991, called for a Government of National Unity, an army rooted in RENAMO, democratic elections and a mixed economy.¹⁰⁵

In 1982, RENAMO formed its National Council, led by President Dhlakama, a secretary-general, and several other Mozambican exiles. The group also maintained external offices in Lisbon, Washington, Paris and Bonn.¹⁰⁶ A revised programme in 1988 placed greater emphasis on economic and political freedom, as well as on liberating Mozambique from 'Soviet colonialism', reflecting US influence.¹⁰⁷ By 1985, RENAMO's secretary-general described the group's structure as a conventional, centralised military hierarchy: the Commander-in-Chief (Dhlakama) at the top, followed by generals, regional commanders, sector commanders, and zone commanders, with battalions and platoons at the base.¹⁰⁸ RENAMO was portrayed as both anti-communist and anti-FRELIMO. During the Cold War, its foreign backers promoted it as an anti-communist liberation movement, securing support from right-wing and religious groups in the West.¹⁰⁹ Beyond this image, RENAMO was also driven by grievances over FRELIMO's suppression of traditional chiefly authority, its repressive stance towards religion, and its economic and agrarian policies, which many viewed as ruinous.¹¹⁰

At its onset RENAMO's main strategy entailed terrorising rural populations as well as sabotaging governmental infrastructure. Later, the rebel group changed its strategy to begin exploiting the dissatisfaction of the locals over governmental policies. This strategy helped to build a base of popular support for RENAMO, particularly in the central provinces.¹¹¹ Notwithstanding this approach, RENAMO maintained a clear separation

between its military structures and the civilian population. Once established in an area, it secured food and labour through traditional authority structures – ie, *regulos* (traditional chiefs) overseen by *mujibas* (civilian collaborators tasked with enforcing compliance and reporting dissent), creating an effective surveillance network.¹¹² Corinna Jentzsch further highlights RENAMO's wartime governance, showing how the rebel group relied on auxiliary armed forces and civilian collaborators as innovations in security provision. Instead of building a coherent governance apparatus, RENAMO outsourced key security functions to local intermediaries. In doing so, it created a fragmented governance landscape in which control was maintained through surveillance networks and coercive compliance rather than through institutionalised administration.¹¹³ Civilian affairs were left to the *regulos*. RENAMO's governance was thus categorised as *aliocracy* – a form of indirect rule where rebels regulate only public order and taxation, while leaving other spheres to state, traditional or local authorities, provided certain obligations are met.¹¹⁴

In terms of the three mechanisms identified in the theoretical framework, RENAMO's wartime experience produced limited returns on all dimensions. Governance capacity remained low: by delegating civilian affairs to traditional chiefs and confining its own structures to military operations, RENAMO developed little in the way of administrative and institutional infrastructure that could be carried into peacetime governance. Group coherence was fragile, built on externally constructed ideology and sustained by foreign support rather than by internal organisational bonds or shared political vision. Governance legitimacy was severely undermined by RENAMO's early strategy of systematic violence against civilian populations and infrastructure. While its later shift toward exploiting local grievances generated a degree of regional support, particularly in the central provinces, this fell far short of the embedded popular authority achieved by the SNM or the institutional control exercised by the RPF.

RENAMO's post-conflict trajectory

By the late 1980s it had become apparent to both sides that the war was not going to be won by military means, and the FRELIMO government and the RENAMO rebels reluctantly sat down to negotiate a mediated end to the fighting.¹¹⁵ In 1992 the conflict ended, and a peace agreement was eventually signed between the two parties in Rome, Italy. Following the 1992 General Peace Agreement, RENAMO entered the formal political framework as the main opposition party, which allowed it to participate in elections and hold parliamentary seats. However, its weak institutional foundations and reliance on regional grievance politics limited its ability to act as a credible national political force. Furthermore, RENAMO has had difficulty developing the skills necessary for formal political opposition, continuing in many contexts to operate in ways that reflect its origins as a guerilla force.¹¹⁶

The party's engagement in politics has been punctuated by disputes, boycotts, and occasional returns to armed confrontation. For instance, the resurgence of insurgency in Mozambique was sparked by two key events: the re-establishment of wartime military bases in the Gorongosa mountains by then RENAMO leader Alfonso Dhlakama in 2012, and RENAMO's 2013 attack on a police station in Manica province, carried out in retaliation for a police raid on its local headquarters there. The underlying causes of the insurgency have been identified as: (1) the shortcomings of an incomplete disarmament,

demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) process; (2) RENAMO's only partial transformation into a political party; (3) FRELIMO's monopoly on political power and authoritarian governance; and (4) the rise of a younger, post-civil war generation within RENAMO who believe that force is the only means of compelling FRELIMO to relinquish power.¹¹⁷

While the FRELIMO government has continued to dominate the political landscape of Mozambique post 1992, significantly limiting political competition, RENAMO's weak organisational base and absence of robust wartime governance structures left it ill-prepared for post-conflict political competition. Although it secured a place in Mozambique's political order, its limited institutional capacity undermined its long-term effectiveness.

Comparative analysis

Organisational structure	SNM (Somaliland) Decentralised and clan-based	RPF (Rwanda) Hierarchical and highly centralised	RENAMO (Mozambique) Centralised military hierarchy, externally dependent
Ideological coherence	Weak formal ideology: clan identity and opposition to Barre's regime	Strong: 'Eight Point Programme'	Weak: externally constructed anti-communist/anti-FRELIMO movement
Wartime civilian relations	Embedded community engagement: generally inclusive of civilians; protection of minority groups	Coercive martial law: limited inclusion of civilians	Violence against civilians at the beginning; later indirect rule of civilians (aliocracy)
Governance capacity	Moderate: proto-state functions through clan-based administration	Strong: direct military administration of territory	Low: governance delegated to traditional authorities
Group coherence	Moderate: sustained through clan solidarity but prone to factionalisation	High: military discipline and ideological commitment	Low: dependent on external patronage and fragile after foreign withdrawal
Governance legitimacy	High: rooted in customary authority and participatory consensus	Low popular consent: legitimacy derived through coercion and state-engineered identity	Low: undermined by early violence and weak institutional presence
Post-conflict outcome	De facto state with hybrid governance: stable but not internationally recognised	Authoritarian state (dominant party): stable with developmental gains but restricted political openness	Main opposition party: weak institutional capacity, and periods of return to armed confrontation

Source: Author's own compilation.

The three cases of SNM, RPF and RENAMO illustrate how the structure and nature of wartime organisation decisively influence governance effectiveness outcomes following conflict.

In Somaliland, the SNM relied on decentralised clan governance with strong local legitimacy. Though lacking a rigid hierarchy, its bottom-up structures and wartime consensus politics enabled it to establish a stable post-war political order, even without international recognition (at the time of writing this article, only Israel had recognised Somaliland). Rwanda's RPF built a disciplined, hierarchical and centralised organisation with clear ideological goals. This allowed for effective wartime governance and an immediate post-war consolidation of authority, albeit in an authoritarian form. Mozambique's RENAMO had a weak and externally dependent structure, with little institutional learning or governance provision during wartime. This hindered its capacity to function effectively in peacetime politics, resulting in instability and periodic conflict.

The comparison shows that hierarchy and ideology can be powerful enablers of wartime governance that translate into post-war authority, but they are not the only

path to stability, as demonstrated by Somaliland's legitimacy-based, decentralised model. On the other hand, ideology alone does not guarantee post-war effectiveness; RENAMO's experience shows that without organisational depth and governance legitimacy, such identity bases offer limited political traction.

However, a few alternative explanations merit consideration. Firstly, the way in which conflict ended – conflict termination mode – could independently explain the observed variation: rebel victory may inherently produce stronger post-conflict authority, while negotiated settlements may inherently constrain it. However, termination mode alone cannot account for the full range of outcomes observed. The SNM achieved stable governance without either military victory over a state or a formal peace agreement, suggesting that organisational legitimacy and governance capacity operate independently of how the conflict ends. Secondly, external support could explain RENAMO's post-conflict weakness; that is, its dependence on Rhodesian and South African sponsors left it organisationally hollow, lacking the institutional foundations developed by independent insurgencies when that support was withdrawn. While external dependency is undoubtedly a contributing factor, it is analytically distinct from organisational structure. External resources could have been leveraged into durable governance capacity had RENAMO developed the internal institutional foundations to absorb them. The critical factor was not external support itself but the absence of endogenous organisational development. Thirdly, ethnic and social composition could be seen as an alternative driver: the RPF's ethnic minority status shaped its authoritarian governance, while the SNM's clan structure shaped its decentralised model. The article acknowledges the importance of these factors but argues that they are mediated primarily through the mechanisms identified here (particularly group coherence and governance legitimacy) rather than operating as independent causal pathways. Ethnicity and clan structure shaped how organisational coherence was achieved and how governance legitimacy was constructed, but it is the organisational and governance dimensions, not identity per se, that explain variation in post-conflict outcomes.

In summary, the depth of wartime organisational capacity, whether built through hierarchy and ideology, or through legitimacy and local institutions, determines the durability and effectiveness of post-war governance far more than ideological solidarity alone.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the internal organisational structure of rebel groups during conflict, operating through the mechanisms of governance capacity, group coherence and governance legitimacy, shapes their post-conflict governance effectiveness. The comparative analysis of the SNM, RPF and RENAMO demonstrates that this relationship holds across different conflict types, termination modes and organisational forms, though the specific governance outcomes are conditioned by these contextual factors.

The study has some limitations, however. It relies on secondary sources, which limits the depth of process tracing possible in each case. The focus on three African cases, while analytically productive, constrains generalisability to other regions and conflict contexts. And while the article has considered alternative explanations, the challenge of isolating organisational structure from closely related variables – such as conflict termination mode, external support, ethnic composition – remains. Future research could extend this

framework to non-African contexts, to cases involving rebel group fragmentation rather than consolidation, and to multi-party conflicts where several rebel organisations compete within the same theatre. This would test whether the mechanisms identified here operate under conditions of organisational competition as well as organisational coherence.

In conclusion, the comparative evidence underscores that the transition from rebel movement to political authority is not an automatic process but one deeply shaped by wartime governance choices. Effective post-conflict governance effectiveness is most likely when organisational structures are coherent, governance strategies are institutionally embedded, and legitimacy is cultivated both during and after the war. These insights have implications beyond the cases studied here, offering a lens through which to assess contemporary armed movements and their prospects for state-building and sustainable peace, particularly in Africa.

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Note on contributor

Buyisile Ntaka, PhD, is an assistant lecturer in the Department of International Relations at Corvinus University of Budapest in Hungary.

ORCID

Buyisile Ntaka  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9298-5382>