

Political Globalisation, Sovereignty Fragmentation and the Internationalisation of Conflicts in Africa

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Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/djiap eh.v2.i2.07

Abstract

This study examines how political globalisation contributes to the internationalisation of armed conflict in Africa. While existing scholarship has extensively associated conflict internationalisation with foreign intervention, economic interests and transnational networks, less attention has been given to how political globalisation transforms the distribution of sovereign authority within conflict-affected states. The study advances sovereignty fragmentation as a mechanism linking political globalisation to conflict internationalisation. It employs a comparative qualitative analysis of Libya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Somalia to examine how external political sponsorship, security provision, support for armed organisations and diplomatic legitimacy reshape the exercise of sovereign functions. The analysis demonstrates that political globalisation does not necessarily erode formal state sovereignty but can redistribute substantive political and security authority among domestic, regional, international and transnational actors. In Libya, competing external sponsorship reinforces rival political authorities; in the Democratic Republic of Congo, external security provision contributes to the distribution of coercive authority; in Sudan, transnational networks strengthen competing armed organisations; while in Somalia, international recognition, financing and security arrangements shape effective political authority. The study concludes that conflict internationalisation is not merely an external dimension added to domestic conflict but can become embedded within the organisation and reproduction of political authority. Sovereignty fragmentation therefore provides a useful analytical mechanism for explaining how domestic conflicts become increasingly connected to wider regional and global systems of power.

Keywords: *Armed conflicts, Globalisation, Internationalisation of armed conflicts, Political globalization, Africa*

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Background to the Study

In today's globalised world, contemporary armed conflicts increasingly resist simple classification as either domestic civil wars or conventional interstate wars (Hoffman, 2007; Bellamy, 2023). In most cases, contemporary conflicts are shaped by complex external factors such as foreign military assistance, diplomatic sponsorship, regional intervention, peacekeeping missions, private security actors, transnational political networks, foreign aid, and external sources of legitimacy (Jowell, 2019; Findley et al., 2023; Walther & Miles, 2017). At the same time, local armed organisations may develop cross-border relationships that allow them to obtain resources, weapons, training, political recognition, and strategic support from actors outside the territorial state. The result of this has been an increasingly blurred boundary between the domestic and international dimensions of organised violence and conflict in the 21st century (Babones & Aberg, 2019).

To critically understand the above, scholars have argued that globalisation has become an important structural context for understanding this transformation, particularly the internationalisation of armed conflicts (Mamba, et al., 2015). Political, economic and sociotechnological processes driven by the forces of globalisation have become instrumental in connecting domestic instability or conflict to transnational systems of power, capital, intervention and coercion (Singh, 2023). As such, globalisation is not merely considered background context but as an active mechanism through which local conflicts become internationally entangled. This situation exemplifies much of the conflicts in Africa, since the end of the Cold War era (Stapleton, 2025). Africa has experienced more conflict than most other continents in the world (Releigh et al., 2010). Yet these conflicts are not local conflicts alone, but local conflicts shaped and reshaped by external political and economic forces.

However, the majority of the existing studies have identified economic globalisation as a major cause of this transformation. This study attempts to argue that political globalisation especially to the extent it affects the sovereignty of African countries have contributed to the internationalised nature of conflicts in the continent. Hence, this study focuses on the political dimension and asks a more specific question: how does political globalisation transform state sovereignty in ways that facilitate the internationalisation of armed conflict? This study contends that the most visible impact of political globalisation in Africa, and in most conflict-affected states is sovereignty fragmentation. Although most African states appear to retain a sense of sovereignty, political globalisation ensure that this sovereignty is fragmented. Sovereignty fragmentation ensures that a state sovereignty becomes redistributed, contested and externalized in a way external forces can exercise influence over political decisions, territory, security and organised violence. In other words, while Africa states remain central, they however are not in full control of the conflicts, non-state actors and domestic political outcomes within their territories. The study advances a simple but important argument as its contribution to the existing literature that political globalisation creates more than opportunities for external intervention that fragment state's sovereignty.

Globalisation, Political Globalisation and Conflict Internationalisation

Globalisation is one of the world's most transformative political, economic and sociocultural processes, and it has driven remarkable change globally. Tukon (2024) identifies among its major effects the creation of a single political unity, in which global forces such as culture, politics and people interact, and previous distinctions become blurred (Keohane & Nye, 2020; Kraus, 2017). Globalisation nonetheless carries consequences for individual states. Maha and Emeka (2023) note that it produces both positive and negative outcomes. Economically, it has promoted free trade and technology transfer. Inokoba and Johnson (2017) argue that the same process has deepened inequality. Okorie (2018) further draws attention to its contribution to conflict. Globalisation is a multidimensional process. It involves intensified cross-border flows in trade, culture, economics, technology, sport, transportation and nearly every aspect of human activity. Several forms exist, including economic, political, cultural and technological globalisation (Singh, 2023). These dimensions affect states differently and contribute unevenly to peace, progress and instability. Scholars agree that the overall impact of globalisation is mixed, producing both positive and negative outcomes. Africa remains a continent where this impact is contested. Increased cross-border trade has coincided with deepened inequality and extractivism. The spread of technology has transformed African societies while also assisting transnational criminal groups (Gupta, 2022).

Musa et al. (2023) add that globalisation in Africa has not only generated conflict but has also made existing conflicts international. Umoh and Nwinkol (2024) argue that Africa is no stranger to international conflict, having served as a proxy centre for global economic and political rivalry since the Cold War. Schmidt (2016) further argues that Africa's exposure to the political economy of external forces leaves the continent vulnerable to foreign influence. Globalisation deepens this vulnerability by opening African borders, economies and political systems to external interference. This has produced a growing link between globalisation and the internationalisation of armed conflict in Africa.

Existing studies on African armed conflict, however, focus heavily on internal factors. Scholars have extensively explained conflict and violence through domestic drivers such as weak institutions, political exclusion, resource competition, ethnic and communal tension, poverty, authoritarianism, state failure and local security dilemmas. These explanations remain indispensable, since conflicts in Africa are dynamic and rooted in concrete domestic conditions. Yet this local framing overlooks growing evidence of globalisation's role in deepening conflict worldwide. In Africa, several factors besides globalisation have been linked to the internationalisation of conflict, including neo-colonialism, resource extraction, arms proliferation and political interference (Dwyer, 2023; Papaioannou & Michalopoulos, 2016; Bhattacharyya & Mamo, 2021). Contemporary conflicts nonetheless point to the role of globalisation in transforming most conflicts on the continent.

Foreign intervention in domestic or civil wars is commonly argued to internationalise conflict in Africa. In such settings, this pluralisation of authority can become militarised. External

actors may support one domestic faction against another, while domestic factions actively seek international sponsors. This dynamic captures the essential nature of the internationalisation of conflict. Conflict thereby moves from a purely domestic matter to an externalised one. Several studies support this argument. Regan (2002) shows that the involvement of external actors, often described as third parties, transforms civil conflicts. External involvement frequently lengthens conflicts, intensifies them and makes their outcomes more chaotic. Internationalisation can also arise from transnational linkages and existing international rivalries within the global system, since financial or political support for an actor often depends on its transnational relationships. Salehyan et al. (2011) similarly show that external support for insurgent groups demonstrates how transnational linkages and international rivalries influence the likelihood of conflict transformation. This article moves beyond this widely discussed position to interrogate what repeated external political involvement does to the organisation of political authority inside the conflict-affected state.

This point matters because internationalisation can persist after the original trigger for intervention has disappeared. It also helps explain the failure of peace processes in African states. Peace processes often treat conflict as a local problem between domestic actors, highlighting internal factors as the primary causes while overlooking the external relationships and sovereignty fragmentation produced by political globalisation. In Libya, the international intervention that helped defeat the Gaddafi regime did not end external involvement. The post-2011 political environment instead became a field of competition between domestic authorities and external powers. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, foreign intervention and regional involvement have been woven into a longer conflict history, in which neighbouring states, armed organisations and international peacebuilding institutions interact with domestic political structures. The discourse on the internationalisation of conflict in Africa therefore brings to the fore a manifestation of political globalisation that has previously been overlooked. It also reframes sovereignty erosion, from a general consequence of globalisation into a conflict mechanism that can be traced empirically through changes in political authority, security provision and external sponsorship of ongoing conflicts.

Few conflicts in Africa today are driven by internal factors alone. Conflicts on the continent have increasingly taken on international dimensions and implications (Twagiramungu et al., 2019). Several scholars argue that most African conflicts have been internationalised since the Cold War, and political globalisation has played a contributory role in this process (Cho, 2025; Lapenko & Muche, 2025; Dubale, 2024). Cho (2025) describes the realities of contemporary conflict in Africa as a 'new scramble for Africa'. These conflicts carry the footprints of one or more global powers, including the United States, Russia, China, Turkey, the Gulf states and other Western powers, all competing for strategic influence on the continent. This resembles the Cold War era but differs in the sheer number of interests now visible across Africa.

One effect of political globalisation is the dismantling of the traditional view of armed conflict as a purely domestic or internal phenomenon. In Africa, conflict has increasingly become

internationalised. Local conflicts and organised violence can now easily connect to broader regional and global power dynamics (De Waal et al., 2019; Twagiramungu et al., 2019). Scholars have examined political globalisation from several angles that all contribute to this internationalisation, including the growing authority of international norms, the transfer of sovereign powers to regional bodies, and the emergence of transnational networks that transcend national boundaries (Diaby & Klingelschmitt, 2023; Söderbaum & Tavares, 2009). Political globalisation manifests in the internationalisation of African conflicts in several ways. It draws external powers into local disputes, transforms domestic struggles into arenas of geopolitical competition, and enables political interference from external powers in local conflict situations. Foreign intervention is one clear channel through which political globalisation reshapes conflicts from local to international. Lapenko and Muche (2025) argue that the interests and interventions of global powers in Africa play a significant and contributory role in this transformation. Foreign intervention affects the duration, possibility of termination and outcomes of conflicts. Regan (2002) demonstrates that external intervention can prolong intrastate conflict, while other studies show that intervention produces different effects depending on the identity, timing and objectives of the intervening actor. Foreign intervention internationalizes conflict through several further mechanisms, including military support, diplomatic recognition and peacekeeping. Military assistance changes the balance of power among domestic actors. Diplomatic recognition can confer political legitimacy on one faction. Arms transfers increase the capacity of armed organisations to resist settlement. Economic and security assistance can reduce the costs of continued mobilisation. Peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions can also create new governance arrangements that sometimes alter domestic political incentives unintentionally.

Sovereignty Fragmentation as a Mechanism of Conflict Internationalisation

Much of the existing literature explores the economic dimension of globalisation as a cause of conflict transformation and increase in Africa. The political dimension receives less attention, particularly its role in producing sovereignty fragmentation. Political globalisation involves the expansion and intensification of political interconnections, along with their consequences for the state, sovereignty and governance. Political globalisation, as Steger (2020) argued intensifies and deepens political interrelations among countries such that pressure is placed on traditional forms of state sovereignty. Scholte (2004) similarly captures this dynamic, arguing that globalisation encourages and causes a shift from a predominantly statist mode of governance towards more polycentric forms, in which authority is distributed across multiple sites that goes beyond the state alone.

This challenges the assumption that sovereignty operates exclusively within the state in the era of globalisation although they remain central to the global system (Makovetska et al., 2024). The relationship between globalisation and sovereignty is more complex than a simple decline of state authority in a globalised era. Recent discourse on globalisation and sovereignty instead recognises its transformative impact on state authority (Nour, 2020). The state continues to serve as a major site of rulemaking, coercion and political legitimacy in today's globalised world, but it shares political space with international institutions, transnational

organisations, regional bodies and private actors (Grinin, 2012). Globalisation therefore fragments state sovereignty and turns it into a contested phenomenon (Reddy, 2012). Much of the literature on political globalisation's impact on African states has, however, failed to capture this fragmentation of sovereignty as a driver of the internationalisation of conflict on the continent.

One clear manifestation of fragmented sovereignty in Africa is the erosion of the Westphalian state status of many countries on the continent. This condition has relocated state legitimacy from national governments to sub-state, non-state or transnational networks. Central governments consequently lack sole control of violence, territory or authority, since control is distributed across various pockets of entities. International criminal syndicates further ease the internationalisation of conflict and violence (Adetula, 2015). Political globalisation therefore fundamentally disrupts state sovereignty, which makes it easier for foreign intervention to redirect the course of conflict.

Sovereignty fragmentation offers a relevant explanation for the relationship between political globalisation and the internationalisation of armed conflict in Africa. It emerges when a state loses the capacity to make and enforce political decisions, maintain internal and external security, control its territory and regulate organised violence, as a result of the erosion, contestation and externalised interference in its formal sovereignty. In Africa, this situation is visible in the activities of foreign governments, regional organisations, international organisations, private military and security companies, transnational armed groups, diaspora networks and external political patrons, all of which have become significant in shaping how these countries exercise authority.

Four dimensions of sovereignty fragmentation matter particularly in the African context. The first is political interference in the affairs of African states by foreign governments, international institutions and non-state actors. The second is security provision and foreign military assistance. Africa's dependence on external security aid, whether through foreign fighters, arms and weapons or intelligence support in responding to internal conflicts, opens the continent to the political influence that accompanies globalisation. The third is external support for armed groups, which has contributed to prolonged civil wars in Somalia, Sudan and elsewhere. The fourth is diplomatic legitimacy, since international recognition, sanctions, mediation and access to international forums can change the political standing of domestic actors.

Four Dimensions of Sovereignty Fragmentation: Comparative African Cases

Libya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Somalia demonstrate different pathways through which political globalisation can fragment sovereignty and internationalise armed conflict. Although they represent analytically distinct mechanisms through which political globalisation alters the substantive exercise of sovereign authority. Libya exemplifies the dynamics of political interference through competing external sponsorship on a state sovereignty, where rival domestic authorities are sustained by different foreign patrons. Also, external security provision can undermine a state as shown in Democratic Republic of Congo,

where international and regional actors assume or share functions associated with the state's coercive authority. Sudan reveals that external support for armed groups, through transnational finance, arms and political patronage sustain armed actors competing for control of the state. Somalia illustrates diplomatic legitimacy, where international recognition, external financing and international security arrangements shape the distribution of political authority between internationally recognised institutions and actors exercising effective authority at the local level. All of these forces point to the different forms of political globalisation and its impact on the sovereign capacity of a state.

Libya

Libya since 2011 illustrates how political globalisation can fragment sovereignty through competing external sponsorship of domestic political authorities. The fall of Muammar Gaddafi did not produce a unified successor authority capable of monopolising political legitimacy and coercive force. Instead, rival centres of authority emerged and increasingly became connected to different external patrons. Turkey supported the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord and its successors, while Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt supported the eastern forces associated with Khalifa Haftar (Wehrey, 2018; Lacher, 2020). The significance of these relationships extends beyond the provision of military assistance. External sponsorship and political interference have been argued to have had significant impact on the capacity of competing Libyan factions to maintain political and coercive authority in Libya (Pokalova, 2026). Arms, military assistance, mercenary deployment and diplomatic engagement altered the balance between domestic claimants and allowed rival authorities to sustain political projects that would otherwise have faced greater constraints (Bakir, 2020). Lacher (2020) demonstrates that Libya's fragmentation developed through the interaction between domestic political structures and external involvement rather than through domestic institutional weakness alone.

The Libyan case therefore illustrates the first mechanism of sovereignty fragmentation that reveals the impact of political interference and its disruptive effect on sovereignty. Libya retained formal international sovereignty as a recognised state, but substantive authority became divided among rival political and military centres whose survival was partly connected to external patrons. External actors consequently became participants in the production of political authority rather than merely observers of an existing domestic conflict. In addition to this, diplomatic processes also became part of this fragmented political environment (Lazib & Harchaoui, 2019). International conferences and negotiations, including the Berlin process, sought to produce a unified political settlement while simultaneously engaging rival domestic authorities as important interlocutors. The central analytical point is not that international diplomacy necessarily caused Libya's political division, but that diplomatic engagement operated within and sometimes reproduced a political landscape in which authority was already distributed among competing centres. Libya therefore demonstrates how political globalisation can internationalise conflict through the transformation of political authority itself. External involvement did not simply add an international dimension to an otherwise domestic conflict. It became incorporated

into the political organisation of the conflict by shaping the resources, legitimacy and coercive capacities available to rival claimants. Sovereignty remained formally intact at the international level while becoming fragmented in substantive political practice.

DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo illustrates a second mechanism through which political globalisation can fragment sovereignty through the externalisation of security provision. Since 1999, the United Nations has maintained a major peacekeeping presence in the country, initially through MONUC and subsequently through MONUSCO. Autesserre (2010) demonstrates that international peacekeeping became deeply embedded in the organisation of security and conflict management in eastern Congo. The significance of this involvement is not simply that foreign personnel were present on Congolese territory. International peacekeeping became involved in functions directly connected to the protection of civilians, disarmament and support for state security institutions. Security authority was therefore exercised through an arrangement in which the Congolese state remained formally responsible for national security while international actors assumed substantial operational responsibilities.

This situation became further complicated by the involvement of neighbouring states and regional organisations. Rwanda and Uganda have repeatedly intervened in Eastern Congo, both directly and through relationships with armed groups, while regional organisations have subsequently deployed forces in response to renewed conflict (Plett Usher, 2025). Stearns (2011) documents the historical significance of regional intervention in the Congo wars, while Paddon Rhoads (2016) demonstrates the broader difficulty faced by peacekeeping missions when international forces become embedded in conflicts involving multiple claimants to authority.

The Congolese case consequently illustrates sovereignty fragmentation through external security provision. The issue is not that the presence of external security actors automatically negates Congolese sovereignty. States can voluntarily cooperate with international or regional security organisations without losing sovereignty. The relevant condition is instead the extent to which external actors become necessary for the performance of core security functions and thereby acquire substantive influence over the organisation of coercion within the state.

In Eastern Congo, this dependence contributes to the internationalisation of conflict because the capacity to control violence increasingly involves actors whose authority, resources and strategic interests originate beyond the Congolese state. The conflict is consequently shaped not only by relations between the Congolese government and armed groups but also by the interaction of international peacekeepers, regional militaries, neighbouring states and transnational armed networks. The DRC case therefore demonstrates that sovereignty fragmentation can occur without rival governments being formally recognised as alternative sovereign authorities. It can instead emerge when the state's substantive capacity to provide security becomes distributed among external and domestic actors. Political globalisation thus internationalises conflict by transforming the organisation of security provision itself.

Sudan

Sudan illustrates a third mechanism through which sovereignty fragmentation can occur, namely the sustenance of organised violence through transnational networks rather than exclusively through domestic state institutions. The war that erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April 2023 emerged from a struggle over political and military power within the Sudanese state. However, the conflict has increasingly been shaped by external military, financial and logistical support. Recent findings by the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan indicate that transnational networks have supplied the RSF with weapons, logistics, training and foreign personnel, while there is also evidence of foreign military support to the Sudanese armed forces.

De Waal's (2015) concept of the political marketplace provides a useful analytical lens for understanding this dynamic. The concept emphasises the importance of negotiated political loyalties, financial transactions and networks of patronage in shaping political authority in Sudan and the wider Horn of Africa. Applied to the current conflict, this perspective helps explain how armed organisations can become embedded within networks of finance, arms and political patronage that extend beyond national borders. The RSF's capacity to sustain military operations has therefore been influenced not only by its domestic organisational and economic resources but also by transnational relationships that provide access to external resources.

This is important to the argument advanced in this article because external support can do more than weaken the state's existing authority. It can strengthen alternative centres of coercive power that compete with state institutions for control over territory, resources and political authority. In Sudan, external networks have contributed to the ability of the warring parties, particularly the RSF, to maintain military capabilities beyond what their domestic resources alone might otherwise have permitted. Recent UN findings identify foreign weapons, logistical networks, training and foreign personnel as important components of the transnational infrastructure sustaining the conflict.

The Sudanese case also demonstrates that sovereignty fragmentation does not require competing armed actors to obtain formal international recognition. The SAF occupies a distinctive position as the country's regular military institution and a central component of the state apparatus, whereas the RSF developed as a separate paramilitary organisation with its own command structures and economic networks. The 2023 war therefore represents a struggle in which competing coercive organisations operate within and around the state rather than a simple conflict between two equivalent governments. Their capacity to sustain military operations has nevertheless been reinforced by access to external resources and networks. The significance of these networks lies in their effect on the organisation of coercive authority. Where armed organisations can obtain weapons, finance, logistical support, military expertise and personnel through relationships extending beyond the state's territorial boundaries, the state's ability to maintain exclusive control over organised violence becomes

more difficult. External support consequently contributes to the development and maintenance of alternative centres of coercive power within the state.

The Sudanese case therefore represents a distinct pathway to sovereignty fragmentation. Rather than external actors directly assuming sovereign functions or formally recognising rival governments, transnational networks reinforce the coercive capacity of domestic armed organisations. These networks enable competing actors to sustain military power and embed the conflict within wider systems of finance, arms transfers, logistics and political patronage. Political globalisation thus contributes to the internationalisation of the Sudanese conflict by connecting domestic struggles over political and coercive authority to transnational networks that extend beyond Sudan's territorial boundaries.

Somalia

Somalia illustrates a fourth dimension of sovereignty fragmentation, in which the exercise of political authority is shaped by international recognition, external security provision and international support rather than solely through direct foreign military intervention. Since the collapse of the Siad Barre government in 1991, political authority in Somalia has remained dispersed among successive central administrations, regional authorities, clan-based structures and armed organisations. Menkhaus (2007) captures this condition through the concept of "governance without government", demonstrating how local and regional systems of governance emerged alongside the formal state rather than simply disappearing with the collapse of central government.

The international community has nevertheless continued to recognise Somalia as a sovereign state and has played a substantial role in supporting successive transitional and federal administrations. International recognition has enabled Somali governments to engage with international institutions and gain access to external political, financial and security assistance. This creates an important distinction between formal international sovereignty and effective domestic authority. Somalia has retained its formal status as a sovereign state, while the effective exercise of authority within its territory has remained distributed among multiple domestic and external actors. External security provision has been particularly significant. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), established in 2007, was replaced by the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in April 2022. ATMIS was subsequently replaced by the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) on 1 January 2025. AUSSOM was authorised to support the Federal Government of Somalia in degrading al-Shabaab and to contribute to stabilisation and security while Somalia progressively assumes greater responsibility for national security. The prolonged involvement of these international and regional security missions is significant because their presence does not, in itself, constitute a loss of Somali sovereignty. The missions operate through internationally authorised arrangements and in cooperation with the Somali government. The relevant issue is instead the extent to which the provision of core security functions becomes distributed between domestic institutions and external actors. The continuing role of AUSSOM in supporting Somali security forces demonstrates that the

organisation of security in Somalia remains partly dependent upon external military capabilities and international political support.

Diplomatic recognition represents another dimension of this process. International recognition of the Federal Government of Somalia influences which political authorities are treated as legitimate representatives of the Somali state and consequently affects their access to international institutions, financial assistance, diplomatic engagement and security cooperation. Recognition should not, however, be understood as automatically determining access to these resources. Donor priorities, bilateral interests, security concerns and international agreements also shape the distribution of external support. The Somali case therefore reveals a form of sovereignty fragmentation that extends beyond conventional accounts of armed intervention. The central issue is the coexistence of internationally recognised state sovereignty with dispersed effective authority. The Federal Government retains formal international sovereignty, while political and coercive authority has historically been exercised through a combination of federal and subnational institutions, clan-based structures, armed organisations and external security actors. Somalia consequently demonstrates how political globalisation can shape sovereignty through the international allocation of legitimacy, resources and security responsibilities. External actors do not necessarily replace the Somali state or formally assume its sovereignty. Instead, international recognition, external security provision and political support become embedded within the organisation of domestic authority. Political globalisation therefore contributes to the internationalisation of conflict by connecting Somalia's internal struggles over political and coercive authority to wider international systems of recognition, security provision and external support.

Comparative Analysis: From External Intervention to Sovereignty Fragmentation

Libya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Somalia differ substantially in their political histories, conflict dynamics and external relationships. Their analytical value lies precisely in this variation. Each demonstrates a different pathway through which political globalisation can redistribute sovereign functions and thereby internationalise armed conflict.

Table 1.

Case	Principal Mechanism	Sovereign Function Affected
Libya	Competing external sponsorship	Political authority and legitimacy
Democratic Republic of Congo	External security provision	Security and coercive authority
Sudan	External support for armed groups	Control of organised violence
Somalia	Diplomatic legitimacy	International recognition and political authority

Source: Authors Compilation

The comparison demonstrates that sovereignty fragmentation is not synonymous with the collapse of the state. In all four cases, the state retains formal international recognition. What changes is the substantive distribution of sovereign functions. In Libya, competing external patrons strengthen rival political authorities. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, international and regional actors share important security functions with the state. In Sudan, external networks sustain armed organisations that compete directly for coercive authority. In Somalia, international recognition, financing and security arrangements influence which actors can exercise and claim national political authority.

Existing approaches to internationalised conflict often identify external intervention as an independent factor affecting conflict duration, intensity or outcome. The evidence examined here suggests a broader process. Repeated external involvement can alter the internal architecture of political authority by redistributing the resources and functions through which sovereignty is exercised. Internationalisation is therefore not simply something that happens to a domestic conflict when foreign actors intervene. It can become embedded within the organisation of political authority that sustains the conflict. The four mechanisms also demonstrate that sovereignty fragmentation is multidimensional. Political authority can be fragmented through external sponsorship, coercive authority through external security provision or armed-group support, and legitimacy through international recognition. These dimensions may occur independently, but they can also reinforce one another. Libya, for example, combines competing political sponsorship with military and diplomatic intervention, while the Democratic Republic of Congo combines international peacekeeping with regional military involvement and transnational armed networks.

This helps explain why internationalised conflicts can become resistant to conventional peace processes. Peace negotiations frequently assume that recognised domestic authorities possess sufficient control over the actors and resources necessary to implement a settlement. Where sovereign functions are fragmented, however, domestic actors may lack the autonomy required to make or enforce a settlement. External patrons may possess influence over military resources, financial support, diplomatic legitimacy or armed organisations that domestic negotiators cannot independently control. The problem is consequently not simply disagreement between domestic parties but the fragmented structure of authority within which those parties operate.

The argument should not be interpreted as suggesting that political globalisation inevitably produces sovereignty fragmentation or that external intervention always intensifies conflict. External actors can also facilitate mediation, peacekeeping and conflict termination. The argument is conditional: where political globalisation produces sustained external involvement in the exercise of core sovereign functions, it can fragment substantive sovereignty and thereby create conditions through which domestic conflicts become increasingly internationalised. The four cases consequently support the fact that political globalisation does more than provide opportunities for external intervention in African conflicts. It can redistribute political authority, security provision, coercive capacity and

diplomatic legitimacy among domestic, regional, international and transnational actors. The resulting fragmentation leaves the state formally sovereign but substantively unable to exercise exclusive authority over the political and security processes through which conflict is organised. Sovereignty fragmentation therefore provides a mechanism linking political globalisation to the internationalisation of armed conflict in Africa.

Conclusion

Globalisation is shifting and transforming the nature of conflict in Africa and globally. This study argues that conflicts in Africa are taking new forms, particularly the fact that local conflicts could easily become internationalised through various mechanisms of globalisation. However, this study focuses on political globalisation as a key driver of the increased internationalisation of armed conflict in Africa by demonstrating how external intervention, military support, and diplomatic recognition are vehicles that have contributed to the fragmentation of the sovereign authority of African states, thereby fuelling this internationalisation. It advances the argument that sovereignty fragmentation links political globalisation to the transformation of domestic conflicts into internationalised ones. This argument consequently extends beyond the existing approaches that examine internationalisation through the presence, timing or effects of foreign intervention by showing that sustained external involvement can alter the distribution of political authority, security provision, coercive capacity and legitimacy within conflict-affected states. The significance of this contribution lies in shifting analytical attention from whether external actors intervene to how their involvement becomes embedded in the organisation and reproduction of conflict.

Drawing comparative insights and evidence from Libya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Somalia, the study demonstrates in four ways how sovereignty fragmentation takes different forms. Competing external sponsorship has reinforced rival political authorities in Libya, while international and regional security actors have also played a role. Across these cases, domestic, regional, international, and transnational actors have been dispersed among domestic, regional, international, and substantive sovereign functions, while formal state sovereignty has persisted. In the DRC, security provision is embedded within transnational networks that have strengthened competing centres of coercive power in Sudan, and international recognition, financing, and security arrangements have also shaped the distribution of effective authority in Somalia. Across these cases, formal state sovereignty has persisted while substantive sovereign functions have been dispersed among domestic, regional, international, and transnational actors. Across these cases, domestic, regional, international, and transnational actors have dispersed substantive sovereign functions while formal state sovereignty has persisted. Substantive sovereign functions have been dispersed among domestic, regional, international and transnational actors. Internationalisation is therefore not merely an external dimension added to domestic conflict but a process that can become constitutive of the political and coercive structures through which conflict is sustained.

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