

South Sudan Five Vice Presidents and the Political Economy: Assessing the Fiscal and Institutional Costs of Transitional Power-Sharing in the World's Youngest Nation

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Abstract

The transitional government of South Sudan formed an exceptionally expanded executive power-sharing framework that includes a president, one first vice president, and four other vice presidents as per the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). The arrangement was primarily created to accommodate competing political opponents, reduce the risk of renewed conflict, and facilitate the execution of the peace agreement. This article analyzes the financial and organizational consequences of that arrangement without presuming that the mere presence of vice presidents led to South Sudan's economic issues. The research employs a qualitative case-study approach that integrates structured documentary analysis with a descriptive evaluation of publicly accessible fiscal information from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the approved budget documents of South Sudan. The documents were chosen for their clear relevance to the transitional executive, public spending, oil reliance, fiscal oversight, and governance after conflict. The examination is directed by three interrelated concepts: power-sharing and post-conflict stability, political-economy perspectives on elite motivations and rent-seeking behavior, and opportunity-cost assessment of limited public resources. The data indicates that the financial problem extends beyond the wages of five officials. In the approved budget for FY2023/24, the Ministry of Presidential Affairs received around SSP 32.18 billion, whereas the IMF indicated total projected expenditure of SSP 1,971.3 billion for that fiscal year. Consequently, the presidential ministry accounted for approximately 1.6% of the expenditure envelope reported by the IMF, though this number should not be viewed as the expense for the five vice-presidential offices, as the ministry encompasses functions beyond just those offices. According to the study's findings, a shift away from elite-centered power-sharing toward leaner institutions, better public financial management, accountability, economic diversification, and investment in productive sectors is necessary for South Sudan's long-term economic recovery.

Keywords: South Sudan, Power-Sharing, Transitional Government, Political Economy, Public Expenditure, Fiscal Governance, Oil Dependence, State-Building

INTRODUCTION

South Sudan achieved independence on 9 July 2011 following years of conflict and political turmoil. Independence created hopes for harmony, establishment of institutions, economic progress, and enhanced public well-being. Those anticipations were interrupted by civil conflict, political division, displacement, sub-national violence, and ongoing humanitarian challenges. The resulting institutional framework has complicated state-building efforts and heightened the significance of how limited public resources are distributed (World Bank, 2026).

The transitional executive created by the R-ARCSS stands out as one of the unique aspects of South Sudan's political landscape after the conflict. The pact included a president, a first vice president, and four vice presidents, with the vice-presidential roles linked to governance clusters. The setup was not merely an administrative framework; it was a negotiated system for political participation. This differentiation is important as the research on post-conflict power-sharing shows that inclusion can assist former opponents in addressing security and commitment challenges, while also raising challenging issues regarding institutional complexity, accountability, and incentives (Cammett & Malesky, 2012; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003; Nomikos, 2021). South Sudan's fiscal environment makes these questions significant. The nation continues to rely heavily on oil revenues, as interruptions to oil production and export paths have consistently caused fiscal and macroeconomic turmoil. The IMF reported that oil exports made up about 95% of total exports and nearly 90% of government revenues during the 2024 oil-pipeline disruption (International Monetary Fund, 2024a). The World Bank's recent Public Finance Review similarly identifies extreme oil dependence, limited fiscal capacity, underinvestment, interruptions in export infrastructure, and governance issues are significant obstacles to economic recovery (World Bank, 2026).

This article therefore asks a more specific question than whether five vice presidents are simply too many. It analyzes the interaction between an expanded transitional executive and South Sudan's political economy, budgetary limitations, public financial oversight, and developmental objectives. The analysis does not assert that the vice-presidential framework led to South Sudan's economic crisis. Instead, it analyzes the institutional and opportunity expenses tied to sustaining a sizable politically negotiated executive in a resource constrained post-conflict nation.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

South Sudan's transitional power-sharing arrangement presents a governance dilemma. On one hand, the inclusion of multiple political groups can reduce exclusion and provide former adversaries with institutional incentives in maintaining peace. However, power-sharing may increase the number of administrative offices, support staff, political offices, and claims on public resources. Previous research demonstrates that the effects of power-sharing are conditional rather than consistently favorable or unfavorable. Executive power-sharing can promote peace and institutional restraint, but it can also encourage rent-seeking and patronage, especially in areas with weak institutions and significant natural resource rents (Haass & Ottmann, 2017; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003).

The limited empirical integration of South Sudan's transitional executive structure with its fiscal and political-economic setting is the specific research problem this article attempts to address. While economic discussions frequently address oil reliance and public financial management without methodically linking these challenges to the institutional architecture of transitional administration, many discussions of the

five-vice presidential setup concentrate on political representation. Therefore, the gap is both analytical and empirical: there is insufficient systematic presentation of the available fiscal evidence and, it is not explained how documentary and budget data can be utilized to evaluate the potential costs of an expanded executive.

As a result, the study tackles three related issues: first, the lack of a well-defined analytical method for analyzing the financial effects of transitional power-sharing; second, the lack of comparative research on post-conflict power-sharing, fiscal governance, and political economy; and third, the inadequate use of actual budget and macro-fiscal data to differentiate documented expenditure from more general claims about institutional cost.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the institutional rationale and structure of South Sudan's transitional power-sharing arrangement.
2. To assess the fiscal environment in which the five-vice-presidential arrangement operates, using publicly available IMF, World Bank, and national budget data.
3. To analyze the institutional and opportunity costs associated with an enlarged transitional executive.
4. To compare South Sudan's arrangement with selected post-conflict or power-sharing executive arrangements in order to identify similarities and differences in institutional design.
5. To develop evidence-based recommendations concerning public financial management, executive accountability, and post-transitional institutional consolidation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What political and institutional purposes does the five-vice-presidential arrangement serve under the R-ARCSS?
2. What do available budget and macro-fiscal data indicate about the fiscal environment surrounding the transitional executive?
3. Through what mechanisms can an enlarged transitional executive generate direct and opportunity costs?
4. How does South Sudan's arrangement compare institutionally with selected power-sharing arrangements in other post-conflict states?
5. What institutional reforms could reconcile political inclusion with fiscal discipline and accountable governance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Power-Sharing and Transitional Governance

In nations that have emerged from civil war, power-sharing has emerged as a crucial institutional instrument for controlling political rivalry. Power-sharing agreements disperse political decision-making among previously contending groups instead of enabling one group to monopolize governmental control after a war. Power-sharing is conceptualized generally by Hartzell and Hoddie (2003) in terms of political, military, territorial, and economic aspects. According to their comparative analysis of negotiated civil-war settlements, institutionalized power-sharing can promote long-lasting peace by lowering former combatants' security worries and giving them incentives to participate in common political institutions. This literature's main conclusion is that post-conflict institutions should not be evaluated only based on their administrative effectiveness. They must also be viewed in light of the security and political circumstances that necessitated their development.

Because executive institutions can guarantee political inclusion to erstwhile foes, the political aspect of power-sharing is especially pertinent to transitional governments. Political power-sharing, according to Hartzell and Hoddie (2003), can divide access to central state authority among factions who had previously engaged in violent control struggles. The danger that one group may utilize state institutions to punish or exclude another can be lessened by this arrangement. Therefore, even though it adds to institutional complexity, inclusiveness may play a crucial role in fostering peace in a fragile post-conflict environment. Because the larger executive resulted from a negotiated peace deal rather than an ordinary constitutional choice to raise the number of senior executive offices, South Sudan's five-vice presidential structure can be placed within this theoretical tradition.

By analyzing how specific institutional designs impact peace and governance, Cammett and Malesky (2012) offer a different view of power-sharing. According to their investigation, different types of power-sharing provide different results. Some political systems may lead to longer-lasting peace because they enhance public service delivery and governance. This finding is important for the present study because it prohibits the analysis from using the number of vice presidents as an independent indicator of institutional success or failure. Rather, focus needs to be placed on how executive offices operate, how duties are assigned, and whether or not political participation promotes efficient governance.

Hartzell and Hoddie (2019) further explained the connection between institutional limitations and power-sharing. They argue that by establishing institutional restraints and boosting the security of political and judicial actors, power-sharing agreements can assist in the growth of the rule of law. Power-sharing may have effects that go beyond short-term conflict resolution, according to their examination of post-civil war governments. Former adversaries may be more motivated to work within political institutions if they think such institutions offer significant protection against exclusion. Therefore, when power-sharing is coupled with legitimate regulations and limitations, it may be able to support longer-term institutional development.

Nevertheless, significant limitations are also noted in the research. According to Jung (2012), power-sharing may effectively resolve current security issues while also posing challenges for democratization in the long run. Political rivalry may continue to be structured around group-based bargaining rather than programmatic or institutional accountability when political institutions perpetuate wartime divisions. This makes it crucial to distinguish between power-sharing as a long-term governance paradigm and power-sharing as a short-term peace instrument. This distinction is important for South Sudan since the five-vice presidential system was put in place during a period of transition. Therefore, the question is not only whether the arrangement can assist the establishment of accountable institutions after the transitional phase, but also whether it can accommodate conflicting political opponents throughout the change.

Nomikos (2021) provides another explanation for the emergence of power-sharing arrangements. According to his cross-national research of 186 power-sharing agreements between 1945 and 2011, political elites are more inclined to institutionalize power-sharing when they are up against fierce external competition. In such situations, formalized power-sharing might offer political leaders assurances of sustained influence following the conflict. The argument is important because it shifts attention from power-sharing as simply an externally imposed peace mechanism to power-sharing as an institutional choice shaped by the political interests of former combatants.

Because the R-ARCSS did not merely establish more executive roles for administrative convenience, this viewpoint is pertinent to South Sudan. The expanded presidency represented a negotiated distribution of political authority among parties to the peace process. According to the literature, the five vice-presidential

positions should be seen as a component of the transition's political bargaining framework. The agreement's peace-making goals are inextricably linked to their institutional purpose. However, research suggests that when political involvement is combined with well-defined institutional roles, accountability systems, and limitations on executive discretion, it becomes more sustainable.

The literature on power-sharing consequently provides the theoretical foundation for the first research question: What political and institutional purposes does the five-vice-presidential arrangement serve under the R-ARCSS? According to existing research, the arrangement can be interpreted in terms of security assurances, political inclusion, conflict management, and the institutionalization of negotiations between former political rivals. The literature does, however, also show that good governance cannot be ensured by inclusiveness alone. Therefore, the current study examines South Sudan's arrangement as an administrative structure whose costs and functions need to be empirically evaluated as well as a peace-building institution.

2. Fiscal Governance, Oil Dependence, and Transitional Public Finance

Fiscal governance is central to state-building because governments must reconcile public responsibilities with available revenues. Post-conflict governments face difficult fiscal choices because they are expected to finance security, administration, reconstruction, public services, and institution-building simultaneously. Managing these demands can be challenging when domestic revenue systems are inadequate. Therefore, fiscal governance encompasses more than just the amount of money spent by the government; it also addresses the sustainability, quality, composition, and openness of public expenditures. Therefore, fiscal governance encompasses more than just the amount of money spent by the government; it also addresses the sustainability, quality, composition, and openness of public expenditures.

The South Sudanese context makes this issue important because the country's public finances are strongly dependent on petroleum revenues. In addition to highlighting the significance of domestic revenue mobilization, public financial management, cash management, and expenditure controls, the IMF has documented South Sudan's fiscal vulnerability to disruptions in oil production and export infrastructure (International Monetary Fund, 2024a, 2024b). Because of the nation's reliance on an unstable resource, ongoing government obligations must be weighed against revenues that are subject to large fluctuations due to production outages, global circumstances, or infrastructure issues.

The literature on resource reliance offers another viewpoint on this issue. Governments can obtain significant fiscal resources from natural resource earnings, but reliance on resource rents can also reduce incentives for the development of widespread domestic taxation and raise the political significance of resource management. Because political elites may see access to state institutions as a means of obtaining financial resources, these dynamics may become especially important in a post-conflict setting. Haass and Ottmann (2017) link this broader political-economic issue to power-sharing, contending that in situations where natural-resource rents are substantial, executive power-sharing may lead to rent-seeking incentives.

Therefore, fiscal governance must make a distinction between spending that is clearly institutionally justified and spending that is essential for administrative purposes. Personnel, offices, transportation, communications, security, coordination, and other operational resources are all necessary for an executive institution. Such expenses do not prove inefficiency on their own. Whether those expenditures are transparent, operationally justified, subject to oversight, and sustainable within the government's fiscal capability is the most relevant analytical question.

When analyzing South Sudan's Ministry of Presidential Affairs, this distinction is very important. Because the ministry carries out more extensive presidential and administrative duties, a budgetary allotment to the

ministry cannot be immediately understood as the expense of the five vice presidents. Therefore, treating the allocation as an administrative proxy while avoiding the unjustified attribution of the full sum to the vice-presidential offices is the proper methodological approach. By separating documented expenditure from expenditure that cannot yet be disaggregated, this distinction enhances the study's empirical credibility.

Additionally, the World Bank's study of South Sudan's governmental finances offers a crucial framework for comprehending opportunity costs. According to its assessment, there are significant budgetary constraints, a reliance on oil, difficulties with public spending, and underinvestment in significant social areas (World Bank, 2026). These requirements do not prove that executive expenditures led to insufficient funding for social protection, health care, or education. Instead, they show that South Sudan's administration must constantly choose between conflicting institutional and developmental priorities due to the country's limited financial resources.

The fiscal-governance literature therefore contributes directly to the second research question: What do available budget and macro-fiscal data indicate about the fiscal environment surrounding the transitional executive? According to the literature, the solution needs to take into account factors including oil reliance, revenue volatility, expenditure composition, administrative obligations, public financial management, and budget allocation transparency. This method enables the study to investigate the five-vice-presidential configuration inside the larger fiscal system instead of considering the offices as a separate budgetary event,

3. Political Economy, Executive Expansion, and Opportunity Costs

Political-economy scholarship provides a framework for understanding how political institutions influence the distribution and use of public resources. In post-conflict governments, political office can have economic relevance because access to government may grant control over public spending, employment, procurement, licenses, natural resource earnings, and other state resources. Therefore, political institutions have the power to influence both who has access to economic possibilities and who wields authority.

Haass and Ottmann (2017) investigation on power-sharing and corruption in post-conflict nations directly examines this link. According to their findings, executive power-sharing may be linked to rent-seeking motives, especially in situations where natural resource rents are significant. Their claim does not imply that all members of a government that shares power are corrupt. Instead, it identifies an institutional environment in which access to executive office can increase the value of political positions because office provides access to public resources. Since the current study looks at structural incentives rather than levelling accusations against specific vice presidents, this distinction is crucial when applying the literature to South Sudan.

Haass (2021) expands on this political-economy argument by looking at democratization and transitional power-sharing regimes. He argues that because political elites are concerned about their future access to government, the transient structure of power-sharing institutions might exacerbate rent-seeking motivations. Therefore, political actors may be encouraged to value short-term access to resources by transitional institutions. According to his empirical study, the relationship between foreign aid and power-sharing governments can be linked to lower institutional limitations and particularistic expenditure.

Because the transitional administration operates in a political setting marked by rivalry for state authority and a significant reliance on oil resources, this argument is especially pertinent to South Sudan. The five vice presidents of South Sudan do not, however, directly participate in rent-seeking just because such incentives exist. The appropriate implication is narrower: an expanded executive creates additional

institutional sites through which political bargaining and access to state resources may occur. Therefore, it is necessary to use budgetary and documentation information to determine whether those places result in considerable fiscal costs.

This specific research about South Sudan reinforces the relevance of this political-economy perspective. Craze (2024) looks at the country's post-oil political economy and the relationship between resource flows, political appointments, and access to economic opportunities. Similarly, Chol (2022) highlights institutional failure, resource appropriation, and elite competitiveness in South Sudan. According to these research, executive institutions ought to be evaluated in the context of the larger political bargaining and resource allocation system.

The concept of opportunity cost provides an important bridge between political economy and public finance. In economic terms, resources devoted to one purpose cannot simultaneously be devoted to another. Applied to the government, expenditure on administrative structures may represent resources that could otherwise have been allocated to infrastructure, education, health, agriculture, social protection, or other priorities. However, opportunity-cost analysis does not imply that administrative expenditure is automatically wasteful. The government requires administrative institutions to implement public policy. The relevant question is whether the marginal costs associated with an institutional arrangement are justified by the political and governance functions that arrangement performs.

This distinction is important for the present study. It would be methodologically inappropriate to calculate the entire Ministry of Presidential Affairs budget as the opportunity cost of the five vice presidents. Similarly, it would be inappropriate to claim that eliminating the vice-presidential offices would automatically transfer equivalent funds to schools, hospitals, roads, or other development programs. The evidence can support a more limited argument: maintaining an expanded executive entails institutional commitments, and those commitments should be assessed against their functions, fiscal sustainability, and opportunity costs.

The political-economy literature therefore informs the third research question: Through what mechanisms can an enlarged transitional executive generate direct and opportunity costs? The literature identifies several potential mechanisms, including additional administrative structures, political bargaining over public resources, rent-seeking incentives, coordination costs, and the allocation of scarce public resources to recurrent institutional commitments. The empirical contribution of this study is to determine which of these mechanisms can be documented in South Sudan rather than assuming that all theoretically possible costs necessarily occur.

4. Comparative Post-Conflict Power-Sharing Arrangements

Power-sharing arrangements differ significantly in institutional design, according to comparative study. While some settlements rely on legislative representation, territorial autonomy, coalition cabinets, military integration, or mixtures of these methods, others distribute power through executive offices. Power-sharing is multifaceted and shouldn't be limited to the number of senior executive jobs, according to Hartzell and Hoddie (2003). South Sudan's five-vice presidential system is one particular example of executive-centered inclusion, therefore this comparative viewpoint is crucial for assessing the nation.

Because the post-Arusha settlement integrated power-sharing into the larger constitutional framework of governance, Burundi offers a significant comparative case. In his analysis of Burundi's experience with power-sharing, Vandeginste (2009) shows how institutional arrangements evolved as a result of successive attempts to handle political conflict and change. Thus, Burundi serves as an example of how constitutional provisions pertaining to political balance and representation can incorporate executive participation. The

comparison demonstrates that power-sharing agreements can combine political inclusiveness with constitutional measures meant to control executive authority, but it does not prove that South Sudan should follow the Burundian model.

Kenya offers another example. The National Accord created a coalition administration comprising the presidency, a prime ministerial office, and a coalition cabinet in the wake of the 2007–2008 post-election unrest. The political and constitutional ramifications of this arrangement are examined by Amadi (2009). The Kenyan example shows that the establishment of multiple vice-presidential posts is not always necessary for political accommodation. Different combinations of executive and cabinet offices can be used in coalition arrangements to transfer political authority.

Another example of formalized post-conflict power-sharing is Bosnia and Herzegovina. Collective representation in the presidency and other state institutions is included into its political architecture. While Jung (2012) emphasizes the conflicts that can occur when institutions intended to manage conflict become integrated into longer-term political rivalry, Hartzell and Hoddie (2003) situate such arrangements within the larger comparative research on post-conflict settlements. Thus, Bosnia serves as an example of how collective executive arrangements might differ significantly from South Sudan's approach.

Zimbabwe provides a further constitutional contrast. A state may institutionalize executive inclusiveness while retaining fewer vice-presidential positions, as evidenced by the fact that its constitutional structure only allows for two vice presidents (Constitute Project, 2013). Again, the comparison is not meant to prove that a smaller executive is inherently more productive. Rather, the case demonstrates differences in the quantity and constitutional foundation of top executive roles.

As a result, the comparative research suggests that the number of offices is not the only important analytical variable. These include the arrangement's goal, the parties it represents, the duties given to officeholders, its constitutional or legal foundation, its lifespan, and the accountability systems that surround it. These factors offer a more meaningful foundation for comprehending the five-vice presidential system in South Sudan. Comparative analysis therefore informs the fourth research question: How does South Sudan's arrangement compare institutionally with selected power-sharing arrangements in other post-conflict states? According to the literature, various combinations of executive offices, coalition arrangements, constitutional representation, and other power-sharing systems can lead to post-conflict political inclusion. Therefore, rather than being a universal model of post-conflict government, South Sudan's arrangement is best understood as a unique type of executive-centered transitional power-sharing.

5. Institutional Reform, Accountability, and Post-Conflict State-Building

The comparative literature supports a central claim of our analysis: the institutional and budgetary effects of power-sharing depend on the structure of the settlement, the functions allocated to offices, the accountability structures surrounding them, and the general financial condition. Therefore, South Sudan's arrangement should be examined as a particular institutional configuration rather than as a general representation of power-sharing.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is another institution where the president incorporates collective representation. Hartzell and Hoddie (2003) and Jung (2012) position such arrangements within the broader comparative study on post-conflict power-sharing. Additionally, Zimbabwe's constitution restricts the number of vice presidents to two, which is another constitutional inconsistency (Constitute Project, 2013). These examples are not provided as models to follow or as standards for institutional quality. Their objective is to establish variation in the number, location, and constitutional basis of executive power-sharing arrangements.

Kenya's 2008 National Accord offers a unique perspective. Rather than creating several vice-presidential

positions, the coalition model incorporated a prime-ministerial role and a coalition cabinet. Amadi (2009) discusses the institutional and constitutional consequences of that coalition government. The Kenyan example demonstrates that a combination of executive roles and coalition arrangements at the cabinet level can be used to achieve political accommodation instead of employing many vice presidents.

Burundi provides one relevant analogy since post-Arusha institutions used executive inclusion and group-balance measures within a larger constitutional settlement. Power-sharing in Burundi is part of a long-term institutional transformation and conflict resolution process, according to Vandeginste (2009). The comparison aids in figuring out how executive inclusion might be incorporated with constitutional requirements rather than relying solely on the number of offices as a measure of power-sharing.

Comparative research demonstrates the many institutional structures of post-conflict power-sharing. Hartzell and Hoddie (2003) show how settlements could distribute state authority through processes that extend beyond the presidency by distinguishing the political, military, geographical, and economic dimensions of power-sharing. This is important because South Sudan's five-vice presidential system is only one possible institutional way to address the problem of political engagement.

This is important because South Sudan's five-vice presidential system is only one possible institutional way to address the problem of political engagement. This result implies that institutional reform should take into account both the formal structure of government and the incentives it creates. Reforms that eliminate institutional guarantees without establishing reliable substitute safeguards may face political opposition if political players believe that access to executive office is crucial to their survival.

Furthermore, transitional power-sharing administrations can create financial incentives surrounding political office, according to Haass (2021). His findings suggest that, these organization's transient nature may exacerbate short-term political and economic calculations. According to this research, openness and accountability are crucial during political transitions because, in the absence of such institutions, political players may use them as a means of gaining resources and power before the transition is over.

Therefore, political inclusiveness and administrative accountability must be addressed in South Sudan's institutional transformation. It is not necessary to assume that a specific number of vice presidents is necessary for political inclusion. Instead, reform should look at whether each executive office has demonstrable institutional outcomes, financial transparency, reporting lines, legislative supervision, and defined responsibilities. Political inclusion would be able to function within an accountable governance framework.

In this regard, public financial management is important. Transitional institutions can operate within established fiscal standards with the support of transparent budgets, expenditure reporting, procurement controls, auditing, commitment controls, and parliamentary supervision. The lack of disaggregated data itself becomes a challenge for institutional accountability when spending cannot be clearly linked to specific offices. Therefore, enhancing expense disclosure would benefit future research as well as fiscal management.

A legitimate relationship between transitional arrangements and permanent constitutional government is also necessary for institutional reform. Transitional institutions must have distinct legislative mandates and a clear route to electoral and constitutional normalization. Even after the political circumstances that supported them have changed, transitory mechanisms may become embedded in the state in the absence of such a pathway. As a result, the literature encourages examining both the executive's current structure and the institutional processes that are anticipated to lead to the evolution of transitional arrangements.

This literature informs the fifth research question: What institutional reforms could reconcile political

inclusion with fiscal discipline and accountable governance? Existing study suggests that reforms should focus on mandate clarity, institutional constraints, public financial management, expenditure transparency, legislative oversight, rule-of-law safeguards, and a credible transition from exceptional arrangements to permanent constitutional institutions. The research supports reform-oriented recommendations without presuming political inclusiveness and fiscal discipline are incompatible.

RESEARCH GAP

Three gaps emerge from the literature. First, much power-sharing scholarship evaluates peace duration, political inclusion, democratization, or institutional stability, while fewer studies connect transitional executive design to detailed national budget evidence. Second, South Sudan political-economy scholarship has extensively examined oil rents, elite bargaining, and state formation but has less frequently connected these dynamics to the fiscal architecture of the transitional executive. Third, public discussions of South Sudan's five vice presidents often rely on the number of offices as a proxy for cost without distinguishing the cost of individual offices from the wider administrative structures that support them. This study addresses these gaps by combining institutional analysis with descriptive fiscal evidence.

METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative case-study design supplemented by descriptive fiscal analysis. This research employs a qualitative case-study approach complemented by descriptive financial analysis. South Sudan is regarded as a unified, data-rich example of transitional executive power-sharing. The design is suitable as the research questions focus on institutional objectives, political motivations, public spending, and the relationship between peace agreements and financial governance. The research does not assess a causal influence of the number of vice presidents on GDP, growth, poverty, or outcomes in public services. Rather, it recognizes recorded institutional frameworks, outlines pertinent fiscal trends, and analyzes their possible opportunity costs through well-known political-economy concepts.

2. Document Selection

The documentary corpus was constructed from four categories of sources. First, primary institutional documents were used to establish the legal and political design of the transitional executive, especially the R-ARCSS. Second, official fiscal documents were used to obtain budget allocations and expenditure information, including South Sudan's FY2023/24 Approved Budget Book. Third, international financial institution reports from the IMF and World Bank were used to assess macroeconomic conditions, oil dependence, fiscal pressures, public expenditure patterns, and public financial management. Fourth, peer-reviewed academic literature was selected to provide theoretical and comparative foundations on power-sharing, post-conflict governance, political economy, and resource dependence.

Documents were included when they met at least one of the following criteria: (a) direct relevance to South Sudan's transitional governance structure; (b) provision of official fiscal or macroeconomic data; (c) peer-reviewed analysis of post-conflict power-sharing or political economy; or (d) direct comparative relevance to executive power-sharing. Opinion pieces and unsupported commentary were excluded from the evidentiary base.

3. Data Extraction and Analysis

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, institutional provisions were extracted from the R-ARCSS and coded under the categories of executive composition, political inclusion, functional allocation, and transitional status. Second, fiscal indicators were extracted from IMF and World Bank documents,

including oil-revenue dependence, total expenditure, current expenditure, salary expenditure, public investment, and social-spending concerns. Third, the national budget was examined to identify allocations to the Ministry of Presidential Affairs. Fourth, findings were interpreted through three analytical concepts: (1) the peace and security rationale of power-sharing; (2) political-economy incentives associated with access to state resources; and (3) opportunity cost and fiscal allocation.

Where exact costs for individual vice-presidential offices were not publicly available in the documents reviewed, the study does not estimate them. Instead, it uses the Ministry of Presidential Affairs as an administrative expenditure proxy and explicitly distinguishes that proxy from the cost of the five vice-presidential offices. This distinction prevents the ministry's entire allocation from being incorrectly attributed to the vice presidents.

4. Use of IMF and World Bank Data

IMF data were used primarily for macro-fiscal indicators and government-wide expenditure patterns. The 2024 Article IV report provides budget and projected fiscal data for FY2022/23 and FY2023/24, including total revenue, oil revenue, total expenditure, current expenditure, salaries, operating expenses, and capital expenditure.

World Bank material was used to contextualize the fiscal structure, including the finding that public spending averages about 35% of GDP but is skewed toward administration, security, and rule of law while health, education, and social protection remain severely underfunded (World Bank, 2026). The two institutions were treated as complementary rather than interchangeable sources.

5. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework links institutional design to fiscal consequences through three pathways. The initial approach is the peace pathway: inclusive governing bodies can lessen exclusion and aid in maintaining negotiated agreements. The second is the administrative pathway: higher-level offices can create needs for staffing, coordination, protocols, security, transportation, and communication. The third pathway is political-economy: when gaining public office provides significant political and economic resources, expanded executive structures may boost incentives for patronage or rent-seeking behavior. The framework thus eliminates the presumption that administrative expenses solely dictate institutional worth.

6. Reliability, Limitations, and Ethics

Reliability was strengthened through source triangulation. Institutional claims were checked against the peace agreement and comparative constitutional sources; fiscal claims were checked against official budget, IMF, and World Bank materials; and theoretical claims were grounded in peer-reviewed scholarship. The principal limitation is data availability. Publicly accessible documents do not provide a complete, consistently disaggregated time series for the expenditure of each vice-presidential office. The article therefore avoids false precision. A second limitation is that a descriptive fiscal association cannot establish that the five-vice-presidential arrangement caused observed fiscal outcomes. A third limitation is that comparative cases differ in constitutional design, conflict history, economic structure, and institutional capacity. The study uses them for institutional comparison rather than causal benchmarking.

Ethical approval was not required because the study uses publicly available documentary and administrative data and does not involve human participants or personally identifiable research data. No interviews were conducted. Any future research involving interviews with public officials, civil society representatives, or citizens would require appropriate ethical review and informed consent.

RESULTS

1. Institutional Design of the Five-Vice-Presidential Arrangement

The R-ARCSS established an executive framework aimed at incorporating key political factions into the transitional government. The accord established a president, a first vice president, and four vice presidents, delegating governance clusters to top executive figures (Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, 2018). The setup thus merged representation with operational duties.

The agreement similarly described the expanded transitional framework as extraordinary. Its dedication to a lean government is important as it suggests that the enlarged executive was not necessarily meant to serve as the lasting constitutional framework. This establishes a significant difference between transitional institutional design and enduring administrative design. The economic issue is thus not merely the current cost of the transitional executive, but whether the transitional institutional frameworks continue to be temporary, accountable, and linked to a credible route toward constitutional consolidation.

2. Fiscal Context

The financial evidence shows that the vice-presidential issue arises in a severely limited revenue landscape. IMF data for FY2023/24 indicated projected total revenue and grants of SSP 1,838.0 billion and projected total expenditure of SSP 1,971.3 billion, with oil revenue estimated at SSP 1,536.5 billion. The IMF staff forecast estimated oil revenue at SSP 2,097.2 billion and overall expenditure at SSP 2,263.1 billion for that year (IMF, 2024a). These numbers demonstrate the extent of the national budget and the importance of oil revenue.

Indicator	FY2022/23 budget (SSP billion)	FY2023/24 budget (SSP billion)
Total revenue and grants	832.8	1,838.0
Oil revenue	715.8	1,536.5
Total expenditure	1,170.7	1,971.3
Current expenditure	770.6	1,383.1
Salaries	64.1	457.1
Road project / non-financial assets	238.2	435.7

Note. Figures are budget values reported by the IMF and are presented for descriptive comparison. They are not expenditure figures attributable to the vice-presidential offices.

Presidential Affairs Expenditure

The Approved Budget Book for South Sudan's FY2023/24 offers a clearer figure for institutional expenditures. Within Public Administration, the Ministry of Presidential Affairs received SSP 32,175,454,221. The identical budget table assigned SSP 11,824,375,949 to the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs and SSP 51,688,474,379 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (Ministry of Finance and Planning, Republic of South Sudan, 2023).

The allocation of the Ministry of Presidential Affairs, when compared to the IMF-reported budgeted total expenditure of SSP 1,971.3 billion for FY2023/24, represents roughly 1.63% of the national expenditure envelope. This calculation is helpful for context, but it should be understood cautiously: the allocation from the Ministry of Presidential Affairs is not a designated budget line labeled five vice presidents and so cannot substantiate the claim that 1.63% of public expenditure was dedicated to the five vice presidents. Instead, it offers a visible administrative substitute through which presidential and associated tasks are financed.

FY2023/24 budget item	Allocation (SSP)	Interpretation
Ministry of Presidential Affairs	32,175,454,221	Administrative proxy; not equal to five vice-presidential offices
Ministry of Cabinet Affairs	11,824,375,949	Separate executive coordination function
Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation	51,688,474,379	Separate public administration function
Public Administration subtotal	237,478,551,772	Broader administrative category

Note. Source: Ministry of Finance and Planning, Republic of South Sudan (2023), FY2023/24 Approved Budget Book.

Oil Dependence and Fiscal Vulnerability

The IMF indicates that oil exports represented about 95% of total exports and close to 90% of government revenues during the pipeline disruption in 2024. The disruption lowered oil exports to about one-third of past levels, leading to exchange-rate strain, inflation, financing shortages, and unpaid wages (IMF, 2024a). This situation renders the composition of spending particularly significant. When revenue fluctuates significantly, ongoing administrative obligations can become challenging to fund, even if they were politically essential when they were established.

The 2026 Public Finance Review by the World Bank reaches a comparable conclusion from a wider fiscal viewpoint. It states that public expenditure averages around 35% of GDP, but is biased towards administration, security, and legal enforcement, while health, education, and social protection are critically

underfunded (World Bank, 2026). The discovery does not prove that vice-presidential offices led to underfunding in social sectors. It does, however, create the opportunity-cost framework within which executive spending needs to be assessed.

Comparative Institutional Evidence

Comparative evidence shows that power-sharing after conflicts can assume significantly varied institutional structures. The arrangement of five vice presidents in South Sudan should not be assessed based on the oversimplified belief that all power-sharing systems feature identical executive frameworks.

Case	Power-sharing Mechanism	Executive Design	Relevance
South Sudan	R-ARCSS transitional executive	President + First Vice President + four Vice Presidents	Executive-centered transitional inclusion
Burundi	Post-Arusha consociational settlement	President + two Vice Presidents from different parties/ethnic groups	Executive inclusion combined with group-balance rules
Kenya (2008–2013)	National Accord and coalition government	President + Prime Minister with coalition cabinet	Power-sharing through coalition offices rather than multiple vice-presidencies
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Post-war constitutional power-sharing	Three-member Presidency plus other consociational institutions	Multi-member executive without a five-vice-president model
Zimbabwe	Constitutional executive	President + no more than two Vice Presidents	Smaller vice-presidential structure

Note. Comparative cases are used to identify institutional variation, not to rank governments.

Burundi's constitution stipulates that there should be two vice presidents representing different political parties and ethnic groups (Constitute Project, 2005). In 2008, Kenya's coalition established a prime-ministerial position as part of a larger coalition government (Amadi, 2009). The power-sharing framework of Bosnia and Herzegovina is examined in comparative literature (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003;

Jung, 2012). The constitution of Zimbabwe allows for a maximum of two vice presidents (Constitute Project, 2013).

DISCUSSION

1. Political Inclusion and the Cost of Peace

The results endorse a measured understanding of the five-vice-presidential system in South Sudan. The arrangement must initially be viewed as a component of a peace agreement. Power-sharing can alleviate the anxiety of exclusion among past opponents and offer motivations to uphold established agreements (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003). Considering the cost of executive inclusion as a regular administrative expense would ignore a significant advantage: the avoidance of renewed conflict can have considerable economic worth. Concurrently, peace-building and sustainable institutional development are not equivalent goals. Jung (2012) argues that power-sharing can address urgent security issues but also leads to enduring obstacles for democratization when conflict-based divisions are entrenched in political structures. The message for South Sudan is not to dismiss power-sharing but to tie transitional inclusion to institutional regulations that can foster accountability after the transitional phase.

2. Institutional Cost is wider than Salaries

The evidence indicates that the direct salary expense for five officeholders is merely one aspect of the possible financial impact. Executive offices typically need administrative staff, security services, transportation, communication systems, protocol management, office resources, and coordination structures. These expenses could be allocated among various ministries and government agencies instead of being consolidated under one vice-presidential budget item. As a result, an evaluation based solely on salaries would underestimate the institutional expense, whereas assigning all Ministry of Presidential Affairs costs to vice presidents would exaggerate it.

This differentiation is key to the article's contribution. The existing evidence allows for a recorded assessment of the larger presidential-affairs administrative scope, but it does not enable a justifiable computation of the overall expense for each vice-presidential office. Upcoming government budget reports that break down spending at the office level could significantly enhance the accuracy of this analysis.

3. Political Economy and Rent-Seeking Risks

The political-economy literature offers a framework by which transitional institutions can create resource stresses. Haass and Ottmann (2017) discover that sharing executive power may be linked to rent-seeking motivations in post-conflict contexts, particularly when natural-resource rents hold significance. This mechanism is significant for South Sudan since oil revenues are a primary source of government funding. Nevertheless, the article does not imply that the vice presidents of South Sudan are directly involved in corruption. The evidence backs a structural claim regarding incentives and institutional exposure to resource distribution. Craze's (2024) examination of South Sudan's political economy underscores how appointments, licenses, and resource access can serve as tools for sustaining political relationships. In this context, the institutional challenge lies in guaranteeing that political inclusion is not reliant on unclear or poorly accountable allocation of public resources. Robust budget regulations, procurement processes, legislative oversight, and autonomous auditing are thus essential supplements to any power-sharing agreement.

4. Fiscal Governance and Institutional Allocation

Even though the five-vice-presidential setup is a method of sharing executive power instead of a federal financial arrangement, studies on fiscal governance are still pertinent since South Sudan confronts the challenge of matching public duties with available income. A government with low domestic revenue

generation and significant reliance on an unstable resource must strategically match ongoing obligations with stable income. The IMF highlights the importance of domestic revenue generation, cash management, public investment oversight, and social expenditures, which underscores this observation (IMF, 2024a). The financial problem is thus not merely the extent of the executive. It pertains to the structure and standard of governmental spending. An expanded executive can be financially viable if it is clearly budgeted, under supervision, and linked to specific functions. On the other hand, a lesser executive can still produce unfavorable results if budgeting, procurement, oil-revenue management, and expenditure controls are lacking.

5. Opportunity Cost and Development

The opportunity-cost argument is strongest when linked to observable expenditure pressures. The IMF reports significant spending on salaries, operating costs, capital investments, and financing deficits, whereas the World Bank highlights insufficient investment in health, education, and social welfare. These data illustrate conflicting pressures on public resources. They do not prove that cutting vice-presidential roles would necessarily fund these areas. Rather, they suggest that policymakers should assess each ongoing institutional commitment based on quantifiable public functions and financial ability.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create a transparent transition pathway

Exceptional transitional institutions should be connected to clearly define constitutional and electoral milestones. This would reduce the risk that temporary power-sharing arrangements become permanent administrative structures without renewed constitutional justification.

2. Link transitional offices to explicit functions

Each senior executive office should have publicly defined responsibilities, reporting lines, and measurable institutional outputs. Clear mandates can reduce duplication and improve accountability without requiring the elimination of political inclusion.

3. Strengthen public financial management

Budget preparation, cash management, procurement, auditing, commitment controls, and oil-revenue reporting should be strengthened. The IMF has emphasized these areas as necessary for restoring fiscal credibility and reducing financing pressures (IMF, 2024a).

4. Protect productive and social expenditure

Fiscal adjustment should distinguish between essential governance expenditure and high-priority development spending. Health, education, agriculture, roads, water, electricity, and social protection should be assessed through transparent budgetary prioritization.

5. Create a transparent transition pathway

Exceptional transitional institutions should be connected to clearly define constitutional and electoral milestones. This would reduce the risk that temporary power-sharing arrangements become permanent administrative structures without renewed constitutional justification.

6. Strengthen legislative and public oversight

Parliamentary scrutiny of executive budgets, publication of budget execution reports, independent audit, and accessible fiscal information can increase accountability across all executive institutions.

7. Diversify the revenue base

Reducing dependence on oil requires stronger non-oil revenue collection and investment in agriculture, livestock, manufacturing, services, and small and medium-sized enterprises.

8. Conduct a public expenditure review of transitional institutions

A formal expenditure review should assess staffing, security, transport, protocol, and operating costs attached to transitional offices. This would provide better evidence for future constitutional decisions than political debate about the number of offices alone.

9. Publish disaggregated executive expenditure

Future national budgets should identify expenditure for the Presidency, first vice presidency, each vice presidency, and associated administrative support where legally and administratively feasible. This would allow researchers and citizens to distinguish office-specific costs from wider presidential administration. This would enable researchers and the public to differentiate between office-specific expenses and broader presidential administration costs.

CONCLUSION

This study examined South Sudan's five-vice-presidential arrangement as a political-economic institution rather than as a simple question of the number of political officeholders. The evidence confirms that the arrangement emerged from a negotiated peace framework designed to accommodate political constituencies and reduce exclusion. The comparative literature indicates that power-sharing can contribute to post-conflict stability, but its institutional consequences depend on design, accountability, and the broader political environment.

The financial data indicates that South Sudan functions under considerable limitations. Oil revenue is the primary source of public finance, fiscal situations are susceptible to external shocks, and international financial institutions have noted deficiencies in public financial management and underfunding in social sectors. The budget for FY2023/24 allocates SSP 32.18 billion to the Ministry of Presidential Affairs, and IMF statistics estimate total budgeted expenditures at SSP 1,971.3 billion. The former accounts for about 1.63% of the latter, yet it should not be regarded as the expense for the five vice-presidential offices since the ministry includes wider presidential duties.

The principal conclusion is therefore institutional rather than numerical. The relevant economic issue is the relationship between political inclusion, administrative complexity, fiscal capacity, and public accountability. South Sudan's transitional executive should be evaluated through transparent expenditure data, clear institutional mandates, and measurable governance functions. The long-term challenge is to ensure that peace-building institutions provide a bridge toward accountable constitutional government rather than becoming permanently embedded mechanisms for allocating scarce public resources.

Future research needs to build on this study by acquiring detailed expenditure data for each executive office, performing longitudinal analyses over multiple budgets, and, when ethically permissible, including interviews with officials, civil society groups, and citizens. This research would allow for more accurate estimation of administrative expenses and a more thorough evaluation of how institutional design influences public service provision and financial governance.

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