Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 10022
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.10022

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Open Access Journal

Colonial and Post-Colonial War Legitimization and Peace Process Efficacy: The Cases of Angola and Mozambique

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Submitted: 31 January 2025 **Accepted:** 26 May 2025 **Published:** 30 July 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "The Moral and Political Legitimations of War and the Complex Dynamics of Peace Negotiation Processes" edited by Alexander Yendell (Research Institute Social Cohesion, Section Leipzig) and Oliver Hidalgo (University of Passau), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i391

Abstract

The paradox of war's legitimacy has long fueled debate over what constitutes a just cause. This article examines the evolving interpretation of just war through the lens of Africa's 20th-century decolonization. It examines how struggles for national sovereignty raised questions about the legitimacy of newly formed governments and their ideologies, as well as the efficacy of peace processes facilitated by international bodies amid ongoing interference from former colonial powers in a state-centric, ideologically divided world order. This article draws on the case studies of Mozambique and Angola to explore the complexities of legitimization. These countries were selected for two reasons: First, both countries share a recent history shaped by their (de)colonization struggle against the Portuguese. Second, parallels emerge in their post-colonial power struggles and the peace processes that followed. Ultimately, this comparison intends to explain how the protagonists legitimized their struggles and assess the effectiveness of the United Nations' approach to these conflicts. The differing outcomes in these cases highlight the importance of context-specific approaches and the critical role of adaptable international support. This exploratory study relies on qualitative methods, drawing data from archival sources, particularly official documents from the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, and parties involved in the conflicts. The study also employs discourse analysis to examine the narratives developed by various protagonists in their quest to legitimize warfare and articulate grievances during negotiations.

Keywords

Angola; legitimization of war; Mozambique; peace processes; post-colonialism; United Nations

1. Introduction

Despite decades of peacebuilding efforts, conflicts previously considered "resolved" often resurface, exposing the fragile nature of post-conflict legitimacy. In post-colonial states like Angola and Mozambique, legitimacy remains a contested process, shaped by colonial legacies, liberation struggles, and Cold War geopolitics. This study examines how different actors, namely colonial powers, insurgents, and post-independence governments, have contested and redefined legitimacy in Angola and Mozambique, influencing their peace processes and governance outcomes.

Classical war theories, particularly those influenced by von Clausewitz (1993), traditionally frame conflict within a state-centered trinity: (a) the interdependence of the army and the people, (b) war as a function of strength and will, and (c) the primacy of policy in determining military strategy (Kitzen, 2012). However, modern insurgencies and post-colonial conflicts challenge this framework, demonstrating that legitimacy struggles often dictate outcomes more than battlefield victories.

Twentieth-century wars of decolonization were not just military struggles but also battles over legitimacy. As Cold War rivalries turned colonial uprisings into proxy conflicts, Western powers institutionalized peace processes as counterinsurgency tools (Kiras, 2016). Thinkers like Thompson, Galula, and Kitson understood that force alone could not secure victory. General Templer's "winning hearts and minds" doctrine demonstrated that allegiance, not firepower, dictated outcomes (Egnell, 2010, p. 283). Peace processes thus became not only settlements, but instruments of political engineering.

Globalization has only deepened the fractures in war-to-peace transitions. It has amplified grievances, fueled power struggles, and entrenched divisions. Yet, the underlying problem persists: The "conflict trap" cycle of weak institutions, elite dominance, and mistrust ensures that war mutates rather than ends (Egnell, 2010). In such environments, legitimacy is not merely desirable—it is existential.

Portugal's refusal to cede autonomy ensured that decolonization in Angola and Mozambique would unfold through war, not negotiation. Without a phased transition, legitimacy was not inherited but rather constructed from the wreckage of conflict, rendering post-independence crises inevitable. Thus, the decolonization processes in Angola and Mozambique offer valuable case studies for examining the interplay between colonial legacies, legitimacy struggles, and peacebuilding in post-conflict governance.

Additionally, both Angola and Mozambique became battlegrounds for Cold War geopolitics, reinforcing their internal divisions. Angola saw Cuban and Soviet support for the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola; MPLA), while the US, South Africa, and China backed the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola; UNITA), entrenching the political and military fragmentation. Similarly, in Mozambique, the socialist governance of the Liberation Front of Mozambique (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique; FRELIMO) faced direct opposition from the Mozambican National Resistance (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana; RENAMO), which received support first from Rhodesia and later from apartheid South Africa. These geopolitical rivalries not only shaped the legitimacy claims of governing parties but also dictated the design and effectiveness of peace processes.

The comparison between Angola and Mozambique is particularly valuable for understanding how external interventions, historical grievances, and competing legitimacy narratives shape post-conflict state-building. Unlike other post-colonial contexts where negotiated transitions facilitated continuity, these two cases demonstrate the consequences of abrupt ruptures, militarized state-building, and externally influenced peace settlements. This makes them critical for broader discussions on the efficacy of peace processes in post-colonial states, illustrating how legitimacy struggles persist long after war formally ends. This study explores these issues by systematically analyzing how legitimacy has been framed, contested, and institutionalized during colonial rule, the independence struggles, and post-independence peace processes in Angola and Mozambique.

1.1. Research Focus and Contribution

While existing research on post-colonial African conflicts has largely focused on structural weaknesses of African states or external interventions shaping their post-independence trajectories, legitimacy as a dynamic and contested process remains underexplored. Much of the current scholarship treats legitimacy as a fixed, legalistic concept, overlooking its fluidity and strategic use by different actors. Moreover, peace processes are often studied through the lens of diplomatic negotiations or institutional reforms, rather than through the deeper, ongoing struggles over legitimacy that shape long-term governance. This study fills this gap by examining how legitimacy functioned as a political tool in both war and peace processes in Angola and Mozambique. The research also interrogates the effectiveness of peace processes beyond the cessation of hostilities, assessing whether they addressed the root causes of conflict, facilitated sustainable governance, and reshaped legitimacy narratives.

This study engages legitimacy theory by drawing on Weber's typology (traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational legitimacy), liberal peace theory, and post-colonial state-building debates. Given the abrupt transitions from colonial rule to independence in Angola and Mozambique, these theoretical perspectives help analyze how legitimacy was constructed amid war, political upheaval, and external interventions. These cases allow for a critical examination of whether Western-centric models of state legitimacy apply in post-colonial governance or require adaptation to local political contexts. By situating Angola and Mozambique within these broader debates, this study contributes to an evolving understanding of legitimacy beyond legal-institutional frameworks.

This article defines legitimacy as the constructed, contested, and negotiated belief that an actor or institution has the right to govern (Hurd, n.d.; Weber, 1968). Rather than treating it as a fixed legal category, legitimacy is understood here as a dynamic resource mobilized by both state and non-state actors through claims to authority, service provision, historical narratives, and external recognition. The term peace process is used not only to describe formal and informal negotiations or ceasefires, but also the broader set of political, institutional, and discursive mechanisms aimed at transitioning from conflict to post-war governance (Richmond & Franks, 2009). Finally, elite survival refers to both domestic and international strategies employed by ruling actors to maintain political control, often prioritizing regime continuity, access to resources, and international legitimacy over democratic inclusion (Bayart, 2000).

Thus, the study is guided by the following central research question: How have colonial powers, liberation movements, and post-independence governments in Angola and Mozambique contested and redefined

legitimacy, and how have these contestations shaped governance outcomes and the success of peace processes? The study is guided by the sub questions below:

1. How did liberation movements construct and sustain legitimacy from resistance to governance?
2. How did post-independence governments assert legitimacy amid Cold War rivalries and internal opposition?
3. Did peace processes redefine legitimacy, or reinforce elite control?

By engaging with these questions, this study moves beyond descriptive historical accounts and evaluates not only the formal peace agreements but also the broader socio-political transformations they attempted to bring about.

1.2. Methodological Approach

This study employs a comparative case study design, analyzing Angola and Mozambique as two post-colonial states with shared colonial legacies but divergent post-independence trajectories. This approach enables an examination of both structural factors (colonial policies, international interventions) and agency-driven factors (legitimacy strategies of political actors) shaping peacebuilding outcomes.

Given the complexity of post-colonial transitions, qualitative methods are used:

- Historical analysis: Traces the evolution of legitimacy from colonial rule to post-independence governance, drawing from archival records, official documents, and secondary sources.
- Critical discourse analysis: Examines how political actors framed legitimacy in speeches, peace agreements, and diplomatic discourse, identifying patterns in justification strategies, delegitimization of opposition, and appeals to international recognition.
- Process tracing: Maps key events, turning points, and external interventions that shaped legitimacy struggles in Angola and Mozambique, focusing on shifts in governance strategies and peace process outcomes.

1.2.1. Data Sources and Analytical Framework

The study relies on both primary and secondary sources to ensure comprehensive, evidence-based analysis. Primary sources were selected based on their direct relevance to legitimacy framing (e.g., political speeches, peace agreements, and United Nations [UN] reports), while secondary sources were chosen for their scholarly engagement with state-building and peace processes in Africa. Data collection focused on documents explicitly discussing legitimacy, governance strategies, and peace negotiations to ensure alignment with the study's research questions.

1.2.2. Analytical Dimensions

The study engages in temporal analysis, assessing how legitimization strategies and peace process efficacy evolved over time, and emphasizes that legitimacy can stem from both state and non-state actors. It also assesses peace outcomes and the impact of global dynamics like the Cold War, questioning whether missions

fostered lasting peace or elite dominance. The combined historical, discursive, and process-based analysis frames legitimacy as a dynamic process in post-conflict governance.

2. The Theoretical Challenge of Legitimacy

Hurd (n.d.) defines legitimacy as "the belief that a rule, institution, or leader has the right to govern." However, who determines legitimacy, on what basis, and through which mechanisms? These questions become even more complex in post-colonial states, where multiple legitimacy claims, rooted in historical grievances, ideological struggles, and foreign interventions, often compete. This article approaches legitimacy as a political resource that is constructed, contested, and instrumentalized by different actors, drawing on Max Weber's typology of authority, Pierre Englebert's concept of historical legitimacy, and Jean-François Bayart's theory of extraversion and elite preservation.

Weber (1968) identifies three ideal types of legitimacy: rational-legal authority, based on formal institutions and legal frameworks; traditional authority, rooted in historical customs and inherited power structures; and charismatic authority, which relies on the personal influence of a leader. Western governance models typically emphasize rational-legal legitimacy as the normative foundation of state authority, assuming that well-functioning institutions will naturally generate political stability. But post-colonial states often exhibit hybrid structures, where multiple sources of legitimacy like charisma, tradition, historical grievances, nationalist movements, and military strength compete for dominance. While Weber's typology remains foundational, its application to post-colonial governance reveals important limitations.

Englebert (2000) deepens this analysis by arguing that most post-colonial African states suffer from a fundamental legitimacy deficit, which he terms a lack of "historical legitimacy." Their institutions are often artificial inheritances from colonial administration, unmoored from native political traditions and practices. As a result, many of these states struggle to convert legal authority into actual political legitimacy, especially in peripheral regions, leading to recurring governance crises and insurgent challenges. Lemke (2003) echoes this diagnosis by showing how post-colonial states inherit weak statehood: They possess formal sovereignty but lack the institutional depth or territorial control to exercise legitimate authority beyond major cities.

Therefore, the legitimacy of the state is fragile, and alternative actors such as insurgent movements, warlords, or communal authorities step in to fill the vacuum. These actors may not derive their claims to rule from constitutions or elections, but rather from their capacity to mobilize historical memory, provide essential services, position themselves as defenders of the people, or through coercion, patronage, and territorial control. In this sense, insurgent legitimacy does not operate within the boundaries of legal rationality but instead draws on symbolic and functional dimensions, resistance narratives, localized governance, and external alliances. However, insurgencies are not monolithic, nor are they always aligned with the populations they claim to represent. This complexity challenges Western counterinsurgency doctrines, which tend to treat insurgencies as either illegitimate spoilers or revolutionary actors.

Bayart (2000) pushes this critique further by showing how many post-colonial insurgent and state-based regimes are not primarily oriented toward democratic legitimacy or institutional accountability. Rather, they operate through what he calls "extraversion," a strategy in which elites maintain power by mobilizing external resources, forging international alliances, and embedding themselves in patron–client networks.

In such systems, legitimacy is often detached from popular participation and instead hinges on elite preservation, foreign support, and control over state rents. This has direct implications for peacebuilding: Even when peace agreements are reached, they often do not restructure power or reform governance but simply entrench existing elite arrangements. Lewis (2020) notes that attempts to integrate former insurgents into formal state structures frequently fail, precisely because dominant elites resist reforms that could undermine their control. The peace process, in this view, becomes an extension of the wartime political order rather than a transformative moment.

Smith and Jones (2015) argue that "the paradox is that all war is unique, yet all doctrine is, in theory, fixed" (p. 36). Peace agreements assume a linear progression from conflict to institutional stability, but in practice, they often reinforce the very dynamics that produced war in the first place. Richmond and Franks (2009) document how, in Angola and Mozambique, peacebuilding efforts reinforced the dominance of ruling parties rather than opening space for inclusive governance or structural reform. These cases demonstrate how fragile post-conflict legitimacy can be when it is shaped more by elite continuity and external validation than by genuine societal consensus.

These theoretical frameworks challenge state-centric models of legitimacy. While Weber provides a typology to classify the types of authority invoked, Englebert explains post-colonial institutional fragility, and Bayart reveals elite survival strategies. Applied to Angola and Mozambique, these frameworks show how the different actors have reshaped legitimacy across different phases of conflict and peacebuilding, redefining the concept from merely a normative ideal, to a terrain of struggle, a product of history, and a strategy for survival.

2.1. The Political Challenge

The central academic critique of Western interventions is that their conceptions of war and governance fundamentally undermine peace processes, as insurgencies are ultimately rooted in contested authority. Legitimacy, in turn, is a subjective construct shaped by context-specific values. Rooted in liberal peace theory, the Western normative approach does not acknowledge traditional forms of legitimacy and thus finds resistance (Egnell, 2010). Using the example of Somalia, Ucko (2013) shows that despite being a "failed state," anarchy has not succeeded as communities are self-organized. This perspective is significant in that it acknowledges the agency of local populations, countering the Western tendency to portray them primarily as passive victims. Legitimizing peace processes encounters challenges at both operational and moral levels, as interventions may be perceived as neo-imperialism, self-serving stabilization efforts, or outright foreign influence, rather than genuine conflict resolution (Kilcullen, 2012).

Moreover, the challenge of maintaining prestige is not solely internal; external actors overseeing peace processes often operate within democratic political systems. These systems are shaped by re-election cycles, rendering peace operations subject to shifting political will. As a result, there is often a preference for quick solutions—an approach that undermines coherence in warfare (Marston, 2008).

2.2. The Operational Challenge

Peace processes must balance mediation with security enforcement (Kilcullen, 2012). Military actions must deter insurgents without alienating civilians—a delicate balance made more difficult when peace requires

including violent actors in negotiations (Vick et al., 2006, pp. 27–52). Eikenberry (2013, p. 61) poses critical questions: "Protect the population from whom and against what?....What about criminal narco-traffickers, venal local police chiefs, or predatory government officials?" Insurgents often reject peace talks when they perceive a threat to their power (Kilcullen, 2012).

Furthermore, peace operations often fail due to a poor understanding of insurgencies' socio-cultural environments (Berdal, 2016). Targeting poverty alone does not end violence, especially when the root causes involve governance failures or ethnic and religious tensions. Regular interaction with civilians fosters trust and helps troops understand local dynamics (Ucko, 2013). Local partnerships enhance legitimacy and support information gathering, and since insurgencies rely on popular backing, the strategy must be bottom-up (Kitzen, 2012). Funding must also address local needs without fostering dependency, especially given budget rigidity and unpredictable events (Ucko, 2013).

2.3. Peace Processes

Today, peacebuilding emphasizes *positive peace*—a concept that goes beyond merely ending violence (negative peace) to include social justice, equality, and structures that promote well-being and cooperation (Galtung, 1969). The UN leads these efforts primarily through multidimensional peacekeeping operations (PKOs), which support political transitions, protect civilians, disarm combatants, promote human rights, and restore the rule of law (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2008).

However, these missions face significant legitimacy and operational challenges. Political rivalries, especially among the UN Security Council's Permanent Five, and the absence of a standing UN force, despite being envisioned in Article 43 of the Charter, limit their effectiveness (Roberts, 2008). Member states often prioritize national credit and blur distinctions between UN and non-UN missions, further complicating deployments (Bellamy & Williams, 2009; Koops, 2009).

Structural issues, such as the UN Security Council's veto power and limited collaboration with regional organizations, exacerbate perceptions of neo-colonialism and overload the UN, weakening local and regional responses (Gray, 2008). Ad hoc deployment by voluntary contributors also undermines mission effectiveness, with some operations lasting decades despite the Capstone Doctrine's assertion of their temporary nature (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2008).

Failures in rapid deployment and conflict prevention, as seen in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Somalia, have damaged the UN's credibility (Bellamy & Williams, 2009). Since *An Agenda for Peace* (Boutros-Ghali, 1992), PKOs have expanded their scope to include human security, responsibility to protect (R2P), and civilian protection (Baldwin, 1997), but this has overstretched their capabilities (Bove et al., 2022).

The absence of clear mandates and the burden of overly broad expectations has undermined military personnel's role, causing confusion, reduced legitimacy, and hampered intelligence gathering (Ponsaer, 2001). Moreover, legal requirements like Status-of-Forces Agreements can delay deployment and reduce perceived neutrality, turning PKO personnel into "law officers" rather than peace enforcers (Bove et al., 2022).

Contemporary conflicts, often driven by non-state actors, further challenge the state-based model of PKOs and raise issues around local ownership, economic dependencies, and environmental impacts (Gledhill et al., 2021).

There is growing consensus that peacekeeping must prioritize local contexts. PKOs should be understood not merely as violence management but as processes fostering long-term structural change. Emphasizing grassroots perspectives and local agency is crucial for building legitimate and sustainable peace.

3. Case Studies

Peace processes entail different dynamics that have mutated over time. Mozambique and Angola illustrate this evolution while also highlighting the importance of tailored, context-specific approaches to peacebuilding.

3.1. Angola and Mozambique: The Same Struggle?

For almost five centuries, Mozambique (1492–1975) and Angola (1482–1975) were Portuguese colonies. The colonial administration was characterized by policies of forced labour, cultural suppression, and economic exploitation, which, combined with the momentum of the international liberation movement, spurred national movements seeking to free their countries from Portuguese rule (Meijer & Birmingham, 2004). Nevertheless, the national liberation movements were not solely focused on ending colonial rule. An internal struggle for a unique national representation arose in which different actors, although sharing the same goal, would compete to be the only legitimate representatives of their nations (Meijer & Birmingham, 2004).

Angola and Mozambique achieved independence from Portugal in 1975 after protracted wars of national liberation and the Carnation Revolution (Revolução dos Cravos) on the colonial mainland. In Mozambique, FRELIMO positioned itself as the legitimate representative of the Mozambican people, advocating for national liberation and social justice (Phiri & Macheve, 2014). Similarly, in Angola, the MPLA aimed to gain domestic and international legitimacy by leading the fight against Portuguese colonization (Muto & Saraiva, 2020). In both cases, the liberation movements were rooted in anti-colonialist and initially communist ideologies, but their transitions to peace and governance produced different outcomes.

Mozambique's war for independence began in 1964, led by FRELIMO. After a decade of conflict, the Lusaka Accords were signed on September 7, 1974, between FRELIMO and the Portuguese government, granting Mozambique the right to self-determination. Independence was officially declared on June 25, 1975—FRELIMO's 13th anniversary (Vines, 1996). FRELIMO established itself as the ruling party but encountered resistance from RENAMO, an insurgent group initially supported by apartheid South Africa and Rhodesia. RENAMO's dissent emerged in response to FRELIMO's authoritarianism and neglect of rural areas, seeking legitimization through the representation of the marginalized and subjugated voices. On the other hand, FRELIMO saw itself as the protector of national sovereignty and the socialist revolution (Vines, 1996).

The civil war lasted from 1977–1992, leading to the Rome General Peace Accords. The mutual exhaustion—both economic and human—created an unsustainable stalemate, which in turn fostered a willingness to engage in dialogue. The Catholic Church, principally the Community of Sant'Egidio, played a crucial role in

the mediation of peace talks as it legitimized the negotiations. Nevertheless, it was the inclusiveness of the dialogue—particularly the involvement of civil society organizations—that led to successful peace negotiations (Weinstein, 2007). The success of the Accords lies not only in their ability to end the civil war, but also in their establishment of a framework for political pluralism through the incorporation of RENAMO into the political process (Hume, 1994). This reflects the broader definition of peace process used in this article, not just as a settlement mechanism, but as a space for negotiated legitimacy and power reconfiguration.

Angola's transition history was the opposite, enduring a civil war until 2002 (Malaquias, 1996). The war for independence started in 1961, with the MPLA, UNITA, and the FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola; National Front for the Liberation of Angola) as the main nationalist movements. Due to the mass exile of its members, the FNLA lost its relevance during the conflict. Negotiations with Portugal concluded with the Alvor Agreement (January 15, 1975), setting the terms for Angola's transition to independence. However, the agreement failed to establish a stable power-sharing arrangement, leading to immediate conflict (Nalley, 2008).

The civil war, which officially began on November 11, 1975, persisted for decades, largely shaped by external support and control over resources. While the death of Jonas Savimbi, founder and leader of UNITA, in 2002 is often seen as the turning point that ended the conflict, this view oversimplifies the war's conclusion. As Ganesan and Vines (2004) highlight, UN-backed sanctions had already weakened UNITA by restricting its access to arms and illicit diamond revenues. Additionally, the MPLA had gained military dominance, and the loss of Cold War-era foreign backers further constrained UNITA's ability to continue fighting. The war's end was thus not solely a result of Savimbi's death but also of broader structural factors that made sustained conflict untenable. This underscores how legitimacy in post-conflict transitions is shaped not just by leadership changes but also by economic and geopolitical dynamics.

While the civil war was ostensibly ideological, it was in reality a proxy conflict shaped by Cold War dynamics (Paul et al., 2013). The incentive for the external powers centered on the country's wealth—primarily its diamonds, controlled by UNITA, and its oil, controlled by the MPLA (Malaquias, 1996). During the 1980s, the first international peace negotiation took place—the New York Accords. Signed by Angola, South Africa, and Cuba on December 22, 1988, the Accords removed Cuba's troops from the battlefield, which had been since 1975, permitting the decrease of tensions between the superpowers in Angola and keeping negotiations open (Paul et al., 2013). Nevertheless, except for Cuba, the Accords failed to forbid foreign interventions and foster the creation of a coalition government and transitional rules, which would have avoided the "winner takes it all" result (Messiant, 2004).

The military stalemate and external pressures, exacerbated by the end of the Cold War, led to the Bicesse Accords in 1991, which aimed to settle the civil war. The agreement outlined a transition to multiparty democracy and provisions for demobilization, mediated by a Troika: Portugal, the US, and the USSR (Marcum, 1995). However, its implementation was flawed. In the 1992 elections, José Eduardo dos Santos won 49.56% of the vote, narrowly missing an outright victory, which triggered a planned presidential run-off. However, the run-off never took place as the country descended back into war, with UNITA rejecting the results and renewed violence breaking out. Meanwhile, both the MPLA and UNITA continued exploiting Angola's natural resources to fund their military efforts, further escalating the conflict. The end of the

Cold War also saw the retreat of superpower involvement, shifting the war's dynamics as external backers reduced their direct influence (Paul et al., 2013).

The critical error of the Bicesse Accords was not postponing the elections, as was done in Mozambique. The political and military conditions had not been met, and the MPLA victory heightened tensions. Contrary to the perception of a stalemate, UNITA held the upper hand militarily until well into 1994, controlling significant territories and resources (Messiant, 2004). However, international dynamics began shifting against UNITA. The election of Bill Clinton in November 1992 brought a change in US policy, reducing previous tacit support for Savimbi. At the same time, the humanitarian crisis worsened, prompting intensified lobbying efforts by the UN. The MPLA leveraged this momentum to secure international recognition, leading to a series of UN sanctions against UNITA between 1993 and 1997. These included a ban on military equipment and petroleum products (Resolution 864), travel restrictions on UNITA officials (Resolution 1127), the freezing of UNITA bank accounts, and a prohibition on the trade of illegal diamonds (Resolution 1173; Paulo, 2004).

UNITA's stalemate ended when it rejected the US-backed Abidjan Protocol, prompting the US to recognize the MPLA as the legitimate government and support UN sanctions. This decision was also driven by the discovery of offshore oil reserves under the MPLA's control (Messiant, 2004). The new conditions led to the Lusaka Protocol in 1994. To overcome the shortcomings of the Bicesse Accords, the Protocol established a new ceasefire agreement, along with a revised demobilization framework, a second round of presidential elections, and the integration of UNITA into the new Government of Unity and National Reconciliation (Messiant, 2004). However, this Government, officially formed in 1997, was run exclusively by the MPLA. The Protocol failed, once again, due to the parties' unwillingness to disarm and the lack of adequate international enforcement mechanisms (Kopiński, 2018). Furthermore, it did not include the "triple zero clause"—present in Bicesse—which prohibited the re-armament of both parties. The "peace for diamonds" proposal, which envisioned the sharing of said commodities, also collapsed due to UNITA's refusal to cede control of the diamond mines for legal revenues due to its mistrust of the MPLA (Paul et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, the main catalyst for the continuation of the civil war was labelling UNITA's rebellion as illegitimate and, thus, the only faction expected to disarm and demilitarize. This shift in the legitimacy narrative, favoring the MPLA, illustrates how legitimacy operates not as a neutral legal status but as a politically constructed tool shaped by international alignment and elite strategy. This ended the symmetry between the parties and created disparities in the obligations and rights of the belligerents, increasing discontent (Messiant, 2004). The failure of the Protocol was internationally recognized, but the blame was put solely on UNITA for not disarming. The international community's alienation of UNITA ultimately bolstered the MPLA's ambitions, culminating in the launch of the "war for peace" at the end of 1998, spurred by UN Security Council's Resolution 1173 sanctioning UNITA's diamond trade (Messiant, 2004).

The eventual peace agreement, the Luena Memorandum of Understanding, was signed on April 4, 2002, after the official military defeat of UNITA and the assassination of its leader, Jonas Savimbi, by the Counterinsurgency (COIN) forces of the US, Brazil, and Israel. The peace process was significantly shaped by the imposition of international sanctions and the MPLA's eventual military supremacy (Kopiński, 2018). The Luena Memorandum of Understanding reaffirmed the principles of the Lusaka Protocol but, most importantly, was led by the Angolans through the Angolan Armed Forces (Forças Armadas Angolanas) and UNITA (Meijer & Birmingham, 2004).

Overall, the Angolan and Mozambican trajectories reveal that peace processes are deeply embedded in struggles over legitimacy, not just between factions but across competing local, national, and international narratives. As these cases demonstrate, legitimacy was not merely derived from formal peace agreements or institutional reforms but was actively produced through claims to historical justice, elite bargaining, and geopolitical alignment. This affirms the study's core argument that legitimacy must be understood as a dynamic and contested resource, shaped by the legacy of colonial rule (Englebert), strategically instrumentalized by post-independence elites (Bayart), and filtered through external frameworks like liberal peacebuilding. The contrast between Mozambique's negotiated pluralism and Angola's militarized consolidation illustrates how different configurations of legitimacy claims, whether inclusive or exclusionary, deeply influence the effectiveness, sustainability, and local resonance of peace processes.

3.2. New Country, New Identity: The War for Legitimization

Legitimization depends on both local and international recognition. A government acknowledged internationally but lacking domestic support, or vice versa, faces legitimacy challenges. The legacy of colonial borders drawn at the 1885 Berlin Conference, which ignored Africa's ethnic and tribal realities, has complicated national identity formation on the continent. Post-independence and the struggle for dominance among ethnic groups often led to civil war, as factions sought to define the national identity in their own image (Heath, 2010).

In Mozambique, figures like Archbishop Jaime Pedro Gonçalves served as crucial catalysts for peace by facilitating dialogue between rival groups. His neutrality and moral authority legitimized his role, fostering communication beyond entrenched divisions (Bartoli et al., 2010). This "Italian formula" of peacebuilding, facilitated by Sant'Egidio, introduced a conflict resolution model that relied on grassroots movements alongside external assurances (Bussotti, 2021). While it succeeded in ending violence, it resulted in a state of "negative peace" characterized by exclusion rather than reconciliation (Bussotti, 2021). The failure to adequately address decentralization, a key demand by RENAMO, exemplifies the incomplete nature of the legitimization process (Muto & Saraiva, 2020). RENAMO's demands were rooted in a sense of marginalization from the FRELIMO-led government (Muto & Saraiva, 2020), but RENAMO's political strategy was shaped by its historical evolution.

Initially, RENAMO was tightly controlled by Rhodesia and later by apartheid South Africa until 1984, when it began operating with greater autonomy. Unlike conventional insurgencies seeking outright power, RENAMO primarily aimed to maintain a strategic stalemate, inflict damage on the government, and extract concessions through elite bargaining rather than directly threatening FRELIMO's dominance. This dynamic shaped the post-war political order, where FRELIMO maintained its control by institutionalizing a "managed democracy." This system superficially upheld democratic principles, such as elections, to create a façade of legitimacy while functioning as a de facto authoritarian regime (Phiri & Macheve, 2014). This aligns with the definition of elite survival employed in this study, where legitimacy is instrumentalized to sustain power rather than foster inclusive governance. Although this system allowed for a degree of political competition, it failed to address exclusion and inequality, raising concerns about long-term legitimacy. Many RENAMO fighters were former FRELIMO members, showing how internal fractures fueled ongoing violence and identity struggles (Bartoli et al., 2010).

Angola followed a parallel path. The 1975 Alvor Accord lacked a viable transition framework, resulting in military zones controlled by the MPLA and UNITA. These zones became platforms for elite-driven identity construction, polarizing the population into "UNITA people" and "MPLA people" (Pearce, 2015). Each group employed symbolic state-building strategies to demonstrate capacity and earn legitimacy at home and abroad (Paul et al., 2013; Pearce, 2015). Both sought to monopolize national identity and presented themselves as the sole liberators of Angola. This exclusionary narrative, combined with deep animosity, repeatedly undermined peace negotiations (Meijer & Birmingham, 2004).

3.3. The Role of the UN and the International Community

International actors were central to both countries' peace processes. The UN played a key role in mediation and peacebuilding and was largely perceived as a neutral actor facilitating the implementation of settlements (Malaquias, 1996). Nevertheless, the use of international legitimacy to consolidate power often encounters resistance, as it may be perceived as externally imposed rather than organically developed—as was the case of the MPLA (Dodge, 2012). This suggests that in resource-rich post-conflict states, external actors often reinforce elite dominance rather than fostering inclusive governance structures. International involvement also becomes an instrument for securing external legitimacy and a source of authority for claiming national legitimacy.

In Mozambique, the UN's ONUMOZ (Operação das Nações Unidas em Moçambique; United Nations Operations in Mozambique) mission (1992–1994) was instrumental in implementing the 1992 General Peace Agreement, overseeing ceasefires, elections, and reconstruction (Manning & Malbrough, 2010). The UN continued to support peacebuilding through programs such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, and the World Food Programme (Nhamaze & Moyo, 2022). Bilateral donors, however, played a decisive role by directly supporting democratic development. They funded political party participation, including RENAMO's transformation into a legitimate electoral contender. Trust funds were established to support all parties equally, helping legitimize the peace process (Manning & Malbrough, 2010).

In Angola, UN involvement was more fragmented and less effective. Multiple missions—from UNAVEM I (United Nations Angola Verification Mission I) to the United Nations Mission in Angola (UNMA) were deployed, but faced weak mandates, low compliance, and dwindling international interest (Kopiński, 2018). These limitations, combined with the entrenched interests of the warring parties, hindered the UN's impact.

These dynamics reinforce the study's central argument that legitimacy in post-conflict settings is not a normative end-state to be achieved, but a historically situated and politically contested process. As both Angola and Mozambique demonstrate, identity formation, international recognition, and elite strategies intersect to produce hybrid forms of legitimacy that do not always reflect inclusive or participatory governance. Whether through RENAMO's strategic bargaining, the MPLA's monopolization of national identity, or the UN's uneven engagement, legitimacy emerged not from broad-based consensus but from the successful consolidation of authority, often aligned with international expectations or geopolitical interests. This supports the theoretical claim that post-colonial legitimacy must be understood as a terrain of negotiation, deeply shaped by colonial legacies (Englebert), elite preservation strategies (Bayart), and the limitations of liberal peace frameworks that prioritize formal institutions over grassroots legitimacy.

3.4. Discursive Construction of Legitimacy: A Critical Discourse Analysis

To further unpack how legitimacy was constructed and contested in Angola and Mozambique, this section employs critical discourse analysis to examine the rhetoric of key domestic leaders and international actors. Discourse is understood here not merely as reflection but as a performative mechanism through which power, authority, and legitimacy are claimed, challenged, and institutionalized (Fairclough, 1995). By analyzing political speeches and evolving UN language, this section highlights how discourse functioned as a strategic resource within post-conflict state-building.

Samora Machel's 1975 independence speech exemplifies the use of revolutionary rhetoric to consolidate legitimacy. By framing Mozambique as "a State born of our people's struggle for freedom and independence," Machel anchored FRELIMO's authority in a narrative of historical resistance (Machel, 1975). His denouncement of colonialism as a "leech" and "python" positioned FRELIMO as the moral antithesis to Portuguese oppression, while his appeal to unity—"We do not know tribes…we know only Mozambicans" (Machel, 1975)—constructed a national identity that delegitimized division and opposition. This aligns with critical discourse analysis's emphasis on how discourse constructs social reality and legitimates political orders (van Dijk, 2006).

Agostinho Neto's 1976 UN address similarly framed the MPLA as the authentic voice of the Angolans by aligning Angola's anti-colonial struggle with broader anti-imperialist and pan-African movements. His reference to FRELIMO and the MPLA as "authentic African national liberation movements" served to delegitimize rival factions like UNITA, casting them as counter-revolutionary (Neto, 1976). Neto's invocation of solidarity and Marxist internationalism reinforced the MPLA's authority through global moral alignment.

In both countries, the UN's discourse also evolved. Initially framed as neutral and technical, the UN's rhetoric toward UNITA shifted significantly after its rejection of the 1992 election results. Secretary-General's Special Representative to Angola Margaret Anstee's description of UNITA as seeking power "at any cost" marked a transition from neutral observation to active delegitimization (Anstee, 1996). Sanctions, framed not just as legal measures but as moral judgments, were accompanied by discourse that increasingly labeled UNITA as a spoiler, not a legitimate actor. This evolution reflects how international discourse functions not only as policy but as a legitimacy-producing mechanism (Richmond, 2011).

These examples demonstrate that discourse was not ancillary but central to the construction, erosion, and reordering of legitimacy. Through symbolic framing, historical appeals, and moral binaries, both domestic leaders and international actors employed language to claim authority, delegitimize opponents, and shape post-conflict political orders.

3.5. Disparities in the Cases

Mozambique followed a "foreign aid-driven model," whilst Angola adopted a "petrostate model" (Pérez Niño & Le Billion, 2013). Aside from the donors, there are several differences between these approaches. Regarding autonomy, Angola enjoys greater maneuverability due to its control over the oil rent. Concerning effectiveness, foreign aid undermines the quality of political institutions as they lack autonomy, although both models tend to have low institutional quality (Pérez Niño & Le Billion, 2013).

In comparing the two countries, international involvement in Mozambique's peace process was more robust and coordinated, particularly from bilateral donors and the UN. In fact, Mozambique's reliance on foreign aid-driven peacebuilding resembles post-conflict Sierra Leone and Liberia, where external donors played a central role in funding institutions and reconstruction. However, long-term stability remains uncertain, as donor-driven governance often leads to dependency rather than self-sufficiency (Paris, 2004). Aid inevitably influences the balance of power within the recipient country, creating an environment where donors are reluctant to acknowledge the negative impacts on peace and legitimacy (Manning & Malbrough, 2010). In Mozambique, due to the lack of central coordination, donors assumed the role of the state (Manning & Malbrough, 2010). This dynamic creates a sense of donor ownership.

The interplay between the bilateral donors and the UN was crucial for legitimizing the peace process. A combination of regular meetings, support from UNDP electoral experts with experience in Angola, and extensive briefings allowed for advanced coordination and a comprehensive analysis of the situation (Manning & Malbrough, 2010). For instance, the Group for Democracy Aid (GAD)—a group of bilateral donors focused on democratic initiatives—acted as the facilitator for bilateral donors, enabling the exchange of information among them. This communication network reassured RENAMO's leadership and reduced tensions between RENAMO and the government (Manning & Malbrough, 2010). Over time, these consistent meetings forged a sense of institutional identity, solidifying the GAD's position as the leading donor group in electoral assistance (Manning & Malbrough, 2010). The GAD gained legitimacy through this approach, effectively influencing ONUMOZ, FRELIMO, and RENAMO. Nevertheless, other factors such as the absence of strategic natural resources and the lessons learned from Angola cannot be undervalued in the success of Mozambique's democratic process (Manning & Malbrough, 2010).

Conversely, Angola's international intervention did not achieve the same level of compromise as in Mozambique. A key example lies in the differences in UN involvement between the Bicesse Accords in Angola and the General Peace Agreement in Mozambique. UNAVEM I, established before the end of the Cold War, comprised 70 military observers and 20 civilian officials, successfully overseeing the withdrawal of Cuban troops as stipulated in the Tripartite Agreement. UNAVEM II was later deployed with 350 unarmed military observers, 90 police observers (later increased to 126), and 100 electoral observers (later increased to 400), tasked with supervising the implementation of the Bicesse Accords.

Although UNAVEM II lacked strong enforcement mechanisms, the UN played a more active role in the electoral process than is generally acknowledged. In December 1991, the Angolan government formally requested UN technical assistance for election preparation, voter registration, and monitoring. An agreement was signed in January 1992, leading to the deployment of UN electoral observers throughout the process until its completion in the fall of 1992. However, despite this involvement, failure to ensure compliance with key provisions of the Bicesse Accords, particularly regarding disarmament and political integration, ultimately undermined the peace process (Meijer & Birmingham, 2004).

Angola's experience mirrors South Sudan, where oil wealth allowed ruling elites to consolidate power rather than fostering inclusive governance (de Waal, 2014). This highlights a broader trend in resource-rich post-conflict states, where economic structures shape the success or failure of peace transitions (Manning & Malbrough, 2010). Angola's peace processes were initially less successful due to insufficient international enforcement (Meijer & Birmingham, 2004). Peace was eventually achieved more through military victory than comprehensive peacebuilding efforts (Kopiński, 2018).

Moreover, Angola faced a more competitive environment for attracting international assistance. Some scholars, such as Malaquias (1996), suggest that the post-Cold War international order positioned the UN as the quasi-sole peacekeeper and peacebuilder. The scarcity of international resources and interest thus created a "competition" between countries torn by internal conflict, making Angola less of a priority (Malaquias, 1996). This could explain why, in contrast to other contemporary UN missions such as the UN Transition Assistance Group in Namibia, UNAMEV did not organize the elections (Meijer & Birmingham, 2004).

Conversely, the 1992 General Peace Agreement in Mozambique saw more effective UN involvement through ONUMOZ. Lessons from Angola's challenges in disarmament and political integration were applied in Mozambique. The experiences in Angola highlighted the need for sustained international engagement, enforcement mechanisms, and comprehensive support for political and social reconstruction (Manning & Malbrough, 2010). The relative success of ONUMOZ provided a model for later peacekeeping missions, demonstrating the value of context-specific strategies, sustained international engagement, and local ownership in peace processes in addressing both immediate security concerns and long-term development needs (Bartoli et al., 2010).

3.6. The New Global Order and the Evolution of UN Missions

UN PKOs have evolved alongside global political shifts, particularly after the Cold War. This evolution is evident in the missions deployed in Angola and Mozambique. During the Cold War, UN missions were limited to ceasefire monitoring and border control, avoiding internal political engagement. The Bicesse Accords in Angola exemplify this minimal scope, where they aimed for a political transition but lacked mechanisms for disarmament and integration, ultimately reigniting conflict (Meijer & Birmingham, 2004). National elections were largely considered sovereign matters, with limited exceptions such as Namibia (Malaquias, 1996).

Post-Cold War, the *Agenda for Peace* (Boutros-Ghali, 1992) redefined UN engagement to include diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction (Muto & Saraiva, 2020). The limitations of UNAVEM in Angola showed that peace efforts were undermined by a lack of local legitimacy and an overreliance on elite-driven governance structures (Grare & Maley, 2011). Thus, UN mandates were bound to match the realities of the civilians by being adaptive and context-specific (Bartoli et al., 2010). This shift is evident in ONUMOZ, which incorporated a broad range of activities from disarmament to supporting democratic elections, in contrast to UNAVEM II, which had a mandate of verification and monitoring (Manning & Malbrough, 2010).

Despite this new vision, UNAVEM III (1995) failed to embody the shift, offering limited capacity to address root causes like elite power struggles (Paulo, 2004). MONUA (United Nations Observer Mission in Angola), which followed, suffered from reduced resources and legitimacy. Later missions—UNOA (United Nations Office in Angola) and UNMA—repeated these shortcomings, with insufficient personnel and weak mandates. Ultimately, the UN could only endorse the Luena Memorandum of Understanding, having lost the trust of the parties involved (Paulo, 2004).

Moreover, the contrasts between Mozambique's donor-driven governance model and Angola's petrostate logic illustrate how economic structures and international engagement patterns fundamentally reshape the

legitimacy landscape in post-conflict states. These cases affirm that legitimacy is not simply a product of institutional design or international endorsement but emerges through negotiated relations of power, authority, and historical continuity. The countries' divergent outcomes demonstrate how peace processes serve as arenas where legitimacy is not only claimed but instrumentalized, supporting Bayart's theory of elite extraversion and Englebert's critique of institutional disjuncture. Furthermore, the evolution of UN peacekeeping mandates from minimal ceasefire monitoring to multidimensional state-building reflects a growing, though inconsistent, recognition that legitimacy cannot be imposed externally but must be cultivated through locally resonant, historically informed, and politically inclusive frameworks.

3.7. Post-Conflict: All That Glitters Is not Gold

Long-term peace and legitimacy are best measured by a country's post-conflict trajectory. In this regard, Angola and Mozambique diverged significantly. Angola, with a 2023 GDP of $84.82 billion, dwarfs Mozambique's $20.95 billion (World Bank, 2023). Angola remains dependent on oil, producing 1.55 million barrels daily in 2021. Yet, it imports 80% of its refined oil, exposing its economy to volatility and persistent poverty (U.S. Department of Commerce, n.d.).

Mozambique, by contrast, is capitalizing on liquefied natural gas investments, since its agriculture sector, key for employment, has not recovered from the Covid-19 shock (World Bank, 2024a). In both countries, informality dominates, with 80% of the workforce in informal employment (World Bank, 2024b). In terms of human development, Angola's Human Development Index (HDI) stood at 0.591 in 2022, with a life expectancy of 61.9 years, 12.2 expected years of schooling, and 5.8 years of actual schooling. Mozambique's HDI was lower at 0.461, with a life expectancy of 59.6 years and only 3.9 years of schooling (UNDP, 2022).

Both countries struggle with governance, human rights, and deep-rooted grievances. Angola's group grievance score rose from 7.8 (2020) to 8.6 (2024), while Mozambique's jumped from 5.3 to 7.5 over the same period (Fund for Peace, n.d.). On human rights and the rule of law, Angola has held steady score of 6.4 since 2020, whereas Mozambique worsened from 5.3 to 6.9 (Fund for Peace, n.d.).

3.8. Mozambique: A Myth of Successful Peacebuilding?

While Mozambique's peace process is often cited as a success, its long-term stability faces challenges, illustrating how power-sharing peace agreements can entrench elite dominance and limit political competition (Chivvis, 2019). Additionally, Mozambique's insurgency in Cabo Delgado mirrors the situation in Colombia, where FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, in English Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) dissidents resumed armed activities due to economic grievances and governance vacuums (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2020). These cases highlight the risks of peace processes that fail to address underlying socio-economic inequalities. Internally, the centralization of power in the hands of the president has created structural challenges (Bussotti, 2021) as it erodes institutional checks and balances (Phiri & Macheve, 2014).

The October 2024 general elections further underscored these issues. Official results declared FRELIMO's candidate, Daniel Chapo, as president-elect with 65.17% of the vote. However, opposition parties, notably

PODEMOS (Partido Otimista pelo Desenvolvimento de Moçambique, in English Optimist Party for the Development of Mozambique) led by Venâncio Mondlane, disputed these results, alleging electoral fraud and presenting parallel counts suggesting Mondlane had secured 53% of the vote. These allegations led to widespread protests, during which security forces reportedly killed at least 11 people and injured dozens using live ammunition and tear gas ("Mozambique: Security force crackdown kills," 2024). Despite these disputes, Mozambique's Constitutional Council confirmed FRELIMO's victory in December 2024, further intensifying public unrest (Lawal, 2024).

Moreover, although external donors were vital in reviving civil society, contributing over 70% of funding, their influence often shaped domestic policies and undermined local ownership (Phiri & Macheve, 2014). Mozambique's initial democratic success, reflected in an 87% voter turnout in 1994, has since faded; participation dropped to 40% by 2004, reflecting growing public disillusionment with a system perceived as corrupt. This disenchantment was met with state violence, notably during the 2000 and 2005 protests, exposing a governance model focused more on control than inclusion.

The rise of non-Western actors like China, along with major resource discoveries, shifted international priorities from promoting democracy to securing economic interests (Sambo, 2023). This realignment, combined with the leadership shift from Joaquim Chissano to a more authoritarian Armando Guebuza, further eroded democratic norms. Afrobarometer's (2025) 2021 survey reflects this decline, with fewer than half of Mozambicans expressing support for democracy (Sambo, 2023). Compounding these issues is the ongoing insurgency in Cabo Delgado, which exposes not only severe security concerns but also the limits of militarized responses to legitimacy crises (Phiri & Macheve, 2014). While international support has bolstered counterinsurgency operations, socio-economic inequalities and historic grievances remain unaddressed (Sambo, 2023). This suggests that although grassroots-driven peace efforts initially proved effective, they lacked the structural resilience to endure.

Ultimately, Mozambique's peace process remains a work in progress. Achieving lasting legitimacy will require not only enhanced security but a renewed commitment to democratic principles, inclusive governance, and meaningful public engagement.

3.9. Angola: The Volatility of Oil Revenues

Angola continues to struggle with corruption and deep economic inequality. As one of the least diversified economies (UNDP, 2023), it depends heavily on oil, which constitutes 97% of exports and 75% of government revenue (Kopiński, 2018). This overreliance creates revenue volatility that undermines long-term planning, further complicated by substantial debts to China, Angola's main oil client.

Angola's oil dependency originated during the civil war, when the MPLA used oil-backed loans to finance its fight against UNITA. By 2002, debt had reached $10 billion, constraining further borrowing. However, oil revenues enabled the regime's survival and consolidation of power (Pérez Niño & Le Billion, 2013). This aligns with Acemoglu's 2005 concept of a weak state, where elites invest in public goods only when it benefits their private interests.

Corruption, paired with the destruction of vital infrastructure during the war, such as one-third of bridges, 70% of railways, and three major ports, has stalled recovery. Post-war reconstruction has followed the "Angolan model": oil-for-infrastructure deals marked by inefficiency and corruption (Pérez Niño & Le Billion, 2013).

Humanitarian aid was redirected toward development by 2006, but investments disproportionately benefited the capital Luanda, leaving rural regions neglected and exacerbating regional inequality (Kopiński, 2018).

Angola thus remains locked in a state of "negative peace." To ensure lasting stability, it must reduce oil dependence, combat corruption, and promote inclusive development through equitable investment and infrastructure renewal. Without these reforms, the risks of deepening inequality and renewed instability persist.

4. Conclusion

The establishment and sustainability of legitimacy in post-conflict governance depend on a complex interplay between political settlements, economic structures, and external interventions. The cases of Angola and Mozambique demonstrate that while local and international actors play a crucial role in the peacebuilding process, legitimacy is not guaranteed by the mere cessation of conflict. Instead, it requires long-term, inclusive governance mechanisms that address structural inequalities and economic dependencies. This underscores that peace must be understood not as a definitive outcome but as a continuing process of legitimization that is negotiated over time and across multiple levels of society.

In Angola, military victory and resource wealth enabled the MPLA to consolidate power, reinforcing a centralized and exclusionary governance model. Although international actors, particularly the UN, facilitated elections, these mechanisms did not foster an inclusive peace process but instead became a tool for political survival, contributing to the resumption of conflict. The MPLA's success in diplomatic and military consolidation, particularly in co-opting former UNITA allies, ensured both domestic dominance and external legitimacy. However, Angola's continued reliance on resource-driven governance has entrenched elite control, limiting broader political participation. This case highlights the risks of equating state authority with legitimacy, particularly when political settlements are driven by military asymmetry rather than societal consensus.

In contrast, Mozambique pursued a more inclusive peace process, learning from the Angolan experience. The negotiated settlement integrated former combatants into political institutions, ensuring a degree of stability. However, despite its initial inclusivity, Mozambique remained reliant on external donors, leading to governance challenges tied to economic dependence rather than domestic consolidation. While the country avoided Angola's direct militarization of governance, it did not escape the constraints of negative peace, a fragile stability that has not prevented later insurgencies, particularly in Cabo Delgado. This illustrates how formal inclusivity, if not supported by structural transformation and economic empowerment, may still produce legitimacy deficits that re-emerge in new forms of unrest.

The study also challenges conventional Weberian interpretations of legitimacy, which often equate stability with institutionalization. Instead, these cases align with constructivist and post-colonial approaches, which emphasize that legitimacy is continuously negotiated between state actors, local populations, and

international stakeholders. Furthermore, the findings challenge liberal peace theory, particularly its assumption that externally imposed governance models can be universally applied without adequate adaptation to local sociopolitical contexts, historical grievances, and economic asymmetries (Richmond, 2011). This calls for a paradigmatic shift in peacebuilding, away from technocratic institution-building and toward more participatory, historically informed, and locally grounded legitimacy-building processes.

In addressing the research question, the study demonstrates that legitimacy in post-conflict governance is contingent upon three interrelated factors: (a) the nature of the political settlement—whether legitimacy is achieved through military dominance (Angola) or negotiated inclusion (Mozambique); (b) the role of economic resources—how natural wealth strengthens elite power (Angola) or fuels external dependency (Mozambique); and (3) the extent of international intervention—whether external actors promote inclusive governance or reinforce existing power structures. These findings offer a framework for assessing post-conflict legitimacy more generally: Legitimacy is strongest when political authority is derived from inclusive settlements, economic power is balanced with accountability, and international involvement enables rather than substitutes domestic agency.

The implications of these findings extend beyond Angola and Mozambique, offering critical insights for ongoing peacebuilding efforts in states such as South Sudan, Libya, and Colombia. These cases highlight the risks of elite-driven settlements, economic inequalities, and externally imposed governance models. As international actors continue to engage in post-conflict state-building, these findings underscore the need to prioritize local agency, economic diversification, and governance adaptability to prevent the recurrence of conflict. They also caution against treating legitimacy as a fixed endpoint; instead, legitimacy must be seen as a fluid and pluralistic process, shaped by continuous negotiation among competing actors and influenced by broader geopolitical, economic, and societal pressures.

Ultimately, this study reaffirms that durable peace is not merely the product of institutional design, but of legitimacy—earned through political inclusion, economic justice, and responsive governance structures. Future peacebuilding efforts must move beyond top-down institutional engineering and prioritize bottom-up legitimacy-building mechanisms that ensure meaningful political participation, economic opportunity, and long-term stability in post-conflict states. Only through this broader understanding of legitimacy as evolving, negotiated, and locally grounded, can post-conflict societies build the foundation for sustainable peace and resilient governance.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the efforts of Ms. Zineb El Yafi, Ms. Oumaima Said, and Ms. Yasmine Charai for the assistance given in the development of the article.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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