

The domestic aspect of sovereignty in Southern Sudan: local control and legitimacy in an emerging state

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Separation from the North is universally supported in Southern Sudan, but the government structures of the nascent state lack legitimacy and a monopoly on the use of violence. The degree of state penetration in areas outside the major urban nodes is uncommonly low. This is a result of a historical legacy of weak governance, but also a product of the recent civil war (1983-2005) and the politics of the post-conflict recovery phase. Life in rural Southern Sudan is characterized by self-reliance, a light administration mainly through the local system of chiefs' courts and a high degree of insecurity and vigilantism. This paper traces Southern Sudan's path to independence through the Sudan's recent history and focus on local governance and domestic challenges to Southern Sudan's sovereignty. It explores the dilemma facing the new government in Juba: one the one hand it needs to build a nation state and to gain effective control over its territory, but, on the other, it lacks the means to do this and, moreover, the state's future legitimacy is dependent on a large degree of decentralisation and devolution of power. This challenge is particularly acute in the periphery along the border to Northern Sudan. This paper is primarily based on research in these areas during the spring of 2011 and in 2009.

