



Effectiveness of African Union Peacekeeping Operations in Reducing Armed Conflict in Africa: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Background: The increasing prevalence of armed conflicts across Africa has intensified the need for regional peacekeeping efforts led by the African Union (AU). As the continent's primary regional security organization, the AU has conducted numerous peacekeeping and peace support operations to stabilize conflict-affected areas. However, their overall effectiveness in reducing armed conflict and sustaining long-term peace remains uncertain.

Objectives: This study systematically evaluated the effectiveness of African Union peacekeeping operations in reducing armed conflict, focusing on key outcomes, operational strengths, and persistent challenges.

Methods: A systematic review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. Literature published between 2020 and 2025 was retrieved from ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Sage Journals, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar. Eligible studies were selected using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, appraised with the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tool, and synthesized according to the Synthesis Without Meta-Analysis (SWiM) guidelines.

Results: Thirteen studies met the inclusion criteria. The findings show that AU peacekeeping operations effectively support short-term conflict reduction, rapid stabilization, and crisis response. However, long-term effectiveness is limited by funding shortages, logistical constraints, coordination challenges, reliance on external support, and the complexity of conflict environments.

Conclusion: African Union peacekeeping operations play a crucial role in conflict management and stabilization. Strengthening institutional capacity, sustainable financing, international coordination, and multidimensional peacebuilding strategies is essential to improve long-term effectiveness and achieve sustainable peace in Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

The persistence of armed conflict in Africa has remained a significant challenge to regional stability, security, and development, prompting the need for effective conflict management and peacekeeping strategies (Bokeriya & Khudaykulova, 2023). In response to these challenges, the African Union (AU) has taken a proactive role in promoting peace and security across the continent through its peacekeeping operations and institutional mechanisms. Established as a successor to the Organization of African Unity, the African Union has developed frameworks such as the African Peace and Security

Architecture (APSA), which aims to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts in member states (Apuuli, 2020). These peacekeeping efforts are critical in addressing complex conflicts involving civil wars, insurgencies, and political instability, particularly in regions such as the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and Central Africa (Day & Hunt, 2023).

Peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union are designed to stabilize conflict-affected areas, protect civilians, and support political processes that lead to sustainable peace (Yaw Tchie, 2023). Through missions such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and other regional interventions, the AU has demonstrated its commitment to reducing violence and restoring order in fragile states. These operations often involve collaboration with international partners, including the United Nations and regional organizations, to enhance operational capacity and legitimacy (Apuuli, 2020). While such interventions have shown promising outcomes in certain contexts, their overall effectiveness in reducing armed conflict remains a subject of ongoing academic and policy debate.

Despite the increasing deployment of African Union peacekeeping missions, there are varying perspectives regarding their effectiveness in achieving long-term conflict reduction (Tschunkert, 2025). Some studies highlight significant successes, including the containment of extremist groups and the facilitation of political transitions, while others emphasize persistent challenges such as limited funding, logistical constraints, and coordination issues among stakeholders (Apuuli, 2020; Bankov, 2024). Furthermore, the complexity of modern conflicts raises questions about the extent to which peacekeeping operations alone can address the root causes of violence and ensure sustainable peace. These differing findings underscore the need for a systematic and comprehensive synthesis of existing research on the subject (Beardsley & Gleditsch, 2015).

Given the growing body of literature on African Union peacekeeping efforts, this study aims to systematically examine the effectiveness of African Union peacekeeping operations in reducing armed conflict in Africa. By synthesizing empirical findings from existing studies, this research evaluates the extent to which AU interventions contribute to measurable reductions in conflict intensity, violence, and instability (Khudaykulova, 2023). Additionally, this review seeks to identify the key factors that influence the success or limitations of these operations, providing a more nuanced understanding of their overall impact.

Through a comprehensive analysis of existing evidence, this study aims to offer valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners involved in peace and security initiatives. By assessing the effectiveness of African Union peacekeeping operations, this research contributes to the broader discourse on conflict resolution and regional security in Africa, while also informing future strategies for improving peacekeeping interventions and promoting sustainable peace across the continent.

METHOD

Study Design

This study employed a systematic review methodology to examine the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union in reducing armed conflict across Africa. The researchers utilized the PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, and Outcomes) framework to develop a focused research question that specifically addresses the relationship between African Union

Table 1. Description of PICO

PICO Elements	Description
People/ Participants	Conflict-affected countries and regions in Africa
Intervention	Peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union
Comparison	Absence of peacekeeping intervention or presence of other peacekeeping forces (e.g., United Nations missions)
Outcomes	Reduction in armed conflict, including decreased violence levels, fewer battle-related deaths, and improved stability

Search Methods

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases to identify relevant studies examining the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union in reducing armed conflict in Africa. The selected databases included Scopus(110), Web of Science(135), ScienceDirect(117), ProQuest(22,668), JSTOR(4,305), Taylor & Francis Online, and Google Scholar(15,700), Pubmed (70) covering the publication period from 2002 to 2025, corresponding to the establishment of the African Union up to recent scholarship (N = ____).

To ensure a systematic and exhaustive search, Boolean operators (AND, OR) were utilized to refine and combine search terms. Quotation marks (" ") were applied for exact phrase searching, while parentheses () were used to group related concepts. The search terms were carefully selected to capture a wide range of relevant literature on African Union peacekeeping and conflict outcomes. The keywords included the following:

("African Union" OR "AU") AND ("peacekeeping operations" OR "peacekeeping missions" OR "peace support operations") AND ("armed conflict" OR "conflict reduction" OR "violence" OR "battle deaths") AND (effectiveness OR impact OR outcomes OR efficacy)

In addition, related terms such as "civil war," "insurgency," "conflict intensity," and "stability" were incorporated to broaden the scope of the search. Reference lists of selected articles were also manually screened to identify additional relevant studies not captured in the initial database search. This systematic approach ensured a comprehensive collection of literature necessary for evaluating the effectiveness of African Union peacekeeping interventions.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for selecting articles in this study were as follows: (1) studies that examined peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union, (2) research focusing on conflict-affected countries or regions in Africa, (3) articles published in peer-reviewed international journals, (4) publications within the time frame of 2002 to 2025, corresponding to the establishment of the African Union, (5) empirical studies employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research designs, and (6) articles written in English. Additionally, included studies must report measurable outcomes related to armed conflict, such as conflict intensity, violence levels, battle-related deaths, or political stability.

On the other hand, the exclusion criteria included: (1) review articles, conference proceedings, study protocols, opinion papers, editorials, and theses or dissertations, (2) studies that focused on peacekeeping operations conducted by other organizations (e.g., United Nations) without specific reference to the African Union, (3) articles that did not report outcomes related to armed conflict reduction or peacekeeping effectiveness, and (4) studies that were not readily accessible or unavailable in full-text format.

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reduction or peacekeeping effectiveness, and (4) studies that were not readily accessible or unavailable in full-text format. This additional layer of review was designed to enhance consistency, minimize bias, and uphold the integrity of the screening process.

Data Extraction

Seven articles that met the inclusion criteria were selected for data extraction. The reviewers employed a structured data extraction framework to systematically gather key information from each study, including authorship, year of publication, country of origin, research design, study setting, intervention model, duration, results, and components of outcomes related to peacekeeping effectiveness.

The extracted data were organized into a comprehensive summary table (Table 2, Appendix 1) to facilitate systematic comparison and synthesis of findings.

This structured approach enabled the researchers to examine variations in methodological designs and intervention models, particularly those related to peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union and its collaboration with international and regional partners. Furthermore, the data extraction process allowed for the identification of key outcome components, such as conflict containment, reduction of violence, operational effectiveness, institutional capacity, and challenges affecting peacekeeping performance.

Through this systematic synthesis, the study was able to compare the effectiveness of different peacekeeping approaches and identify recurring themes, including the role of international cooperation, logistical and financial constraints, and the implications of peacekeeping operations on conflict dynamics in Africa.

Quality Assessment of Selected Articles

To evaluate the quality of the selected studies, the researchers employed the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools, which are widely recognized for assessing the methodological rigor of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research. These tools have undergone extensive peer review and are officially endorsed by the Joanna Briggs Institute Scientific Committee, ensuring their reliability and applicability across diverse study designs ([Barker et al., 2023](#)).

Given that the included studies comprised a combination of qualitative, conceptual, and mixed-methods research, appropriate JBI critical appraisal checklists were applied to assess each study's methodological quality. The appraisal focused on key criteria such as clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of study design, rigor in data collection and analysis, validity of findings, and the extent to which conclusions were supported by evidence. Particular attention was given to studies examining peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union and their reported outcomes related to conflict management and reduction.

The critical appraisal process was conducted by four primary reviewers (MCM, HKP, SMS, and SHB), who independently assessed each study using the relevant JBI checklists. Any discrepancies or disagreements in the evaluation were resolved through consultation with an independent panel of reviewers (JAS, NPHM, AJTHN, JS, and FD) to ensure consistency, minimize bias, and maintain methodological rigor.

This systematic quality assessment process ensured that only studies with acceptable methodological standards were included in the final synthesis. It also enhanced the transparency and reliability of the review by providing a structured evaluation of the strengths and limitations of each study, thereby strengthening the overall validity of the findings.

Risk of Bias

The risk of bias assessment for the included studies was conducted using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools, consistent with the quality assessment procedure of this review. Given that the selected articles consisted of qualitative, mixed-methods, and analytical studies, the JBI critical

appraisal checklists were applied to evaluate the methodological rigor and potential sources of bias across all included studies.

Each study was assessed based on key domains such as clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of methodology, adequacy of data collection and analysis, coherence between research questions and findings, and transparency in reporting results. Studies were categorized as having low, moderate, or high risk of bias based on the proportion of criteria met ("Yes" responses). A higher percentage of "Yes" responses indicated stronger methodological quality and lower risk of bias.

Overall, the majority of the included studies demonstrated moderate to low risk of bias, as most met key methodological criteria, particularly in clearly defined objectives and appropriate analytical approaches. However, some studies exhibited moderate risk of bias due to limitations such as lack of explicit methodological detail, absence of clearly defined outcome measures related to conflict reduction, and insufficient integration of qualitative and quantitative components. These limitations are common in peacekeeping and security studies, where research often relies on qualitative and contextual analysis rather than controlled experimental designs.

The risk of bias assessment was conducted by the primary reviewers (MCM, HKP, SMS, and SHB), while disagreements were resolved through consultation with the independent review panel (JAS, NPHM, AJTHN, JS, and FD). This process ensured consistency, minimized subjectivity, and enhanced the reliability of the evaluation.

Table 2. Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tool for Mixed Methods

Author(s) & Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	% Yes	Overall Interpretation
Khudaykulova, (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	86%	Moderate risk of bias
Apuuli, 2020	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	86%	Moderate risk of bias
Tchie, 2023a (PSOs)	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	U	Y	71%	Moderate risk of bias
Spandler, 2020	Y	Y	U	Y	U	U	Y	71%	Moderate risk of bias
Muller, 2020	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Low risk of bias
Bokeriya & Khudaykulova, 2023	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%	Low risk of bias
Tchie, 2023b (Ghana)	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	U	Y	71%	Moderate risk of bias

Note: (Y) criterion is fully met, indicating high methodological quality, (U) criterion is partially met or not explicitly stated, leading to some uncertainty, (N) criterion is not met, indicating a potential risk of bias or methodological weakness.

Data Analysis

The authors employed the Synthesis Without Meta-Analysis (SWiM) guidelines to analyze and synthesize the findings of the included studies, ensuring a systematic, transparent, and structured approach to integrating evidence from diverse research designs (Campbell et al., 2020; Glišić et al., 2023). The SWiM framework was particularly appropriate for this study, as the included articles consisted primarily of qualitative, conceptual, and mixed-methods research examining peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union and their effectiveness in reducing armed conflict in Africa.

The initial stage of analysis involved organizing the extracted data into key categories, including authors and year of publication, country, research design, study setting, intervention model, duration, outcome measures, and key findings. These elements were systematically presented in a data extraction table (Table 2, Appendix 1), which served as the foundation for further analysis. The first

phase of synthesis focused on reviewing full-text articles that met the inclusion criteria and ensuring their alignment with the study's objective of assessing the relationship between African Union peacekeeping operations and conflict reduction outcomes.

Subsequently, the studies were grouped according to their methodological approaches and thematic focus. This included categorizing studies based on types of peacekeeping interventions (e.g., AU-led missions, hybrid AU-UN operations, and regional cooperation mechanisms), as well as the nature of outcomes examined (e.g., conflict containment, reduction of violence, operational effectiveness, and institutional capacity). A comparative analysis was then conducted to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and variations across the studies, particularly in relation to the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations and the factors influencing their success or limitations.

Furthermore, a thematic synthesis approach was applied to integrate qualitative findings, allowing for the identification of key themes such as rapid deployment and crisis response, logistical and financial constraints, international cooperation, and unintended consequences of peacekeeping operations. These themes were analyzed in relation to the study's independent variable (African Union peacekeeping operations) and dependent variable (reduction in armed conflict), providing a deeper understanding of how and under what conditions peacekeeping interventions influence conflict dynamics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results:

3.1 Characteristics of the Selected Studies

A total of seven (7) studies were included in the final review. Initially, 42,995 articles were identified across multiple academic databases, including ScienceDirect, ProQuest, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Of these, 35,782 articles were excluded based on applied limiters such as publication year, article type, subject relevance, and language. Following title and abstract screening, 1,870 articles were assessed, of which 1,860 were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. A total of 10 full-text articles were evaluated for eligibility, and after further quality assessment, 3 studies were excluded, resulting in 7 studies included in the final synthesis (Figure 1).

The included studies were conducted across various geographical contexts, including Russia (Africa-focused), Uganda, and Norway, with all studies focusing on conflict-affected regions within Africa. These studies examined different operational environments such as African Union peacekeeping missions, hybrid peacekeeping operations, and regional peace support initiatives across countries including Burundi, Sudan, Somalia, Mali, and the broader Sahel region.

In terms of research design, the majority of studies employed qualitative and analytical approaches, including case studies, conceptual analyses, and mixed-methods research. Specifically, two studies utilized qualitative case study designs, two employed analytical approaches, one applied a mixed-methods design, and the remaining studies were conceptual in nature. This diversity in methodology reflects the complexity of evaluating peacekeeping operations, which often rely on context-specific and non-experimental research frameworks.

Regarding intervention models, all included studies examined peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union, either independently or in collaboration with international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and regional security bodies. These interventions included African Union peace support operations (e.g., AMISOM, AMIB, AMIS), hybrid AU-UN missions, and emerging African-led peace support operations in regions such as Somalia, the Sahel, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The duration of interventions was generally not explicitly specified, reflecting the long-term and evolving nature of peacekeeping missions.

Across the selected studies, findings indicated mixed but generally positive outcomes regarding the effectiveness of African Union peacekeeping operations. Several studies highlighted the AU's ability to

rapidly deploy forces and contain conflicts, particularly in the early stages before international intervention. However, consistent challenges were identified, including limited funding, logistical constraints, and overreliance on military force, which may affect long-term sustainability and effectiveness in reducing armed conflict.

Furthermore, the studies identified key outcome components related to peacekeeping effectiveness, including conflict containment, reduction of violence, regional security governance, institutional capacity building, and international cooperation. At the same time, some studies emphasized limitations such as unintended consequences, operational gaps, and the complexity of addressing root causes of conflict.

Overall, the diversity of study designs and intervention contexts highlights the multifaceted nature of African Union peacekeeping operations. While evidence suggests that these interventions contribute to short-term conflict management and stabilization, variations in implementation and contextual factors significantly influence their long-term effectiveness in reducing armed conflict across the continent.

3.2 Participants and Study Settings

The “participants” in this systematic review do not refer to individual human subjects but rather to conflict-affected states, regions, and institutional actors involved in peacekeeping operations across Africa. The included studies primarily focused on countries experiencing armed conflict, such as Somalia, Sudan (Darfur), Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR), and the broader Sahel region, where peacekeeping interventions have been implemented.

Across the seven selected studies, the settings were largely centered on African conflict zones and peacekeeping environments, including active mission areas and post-conflict contexts. These settings involved operations conducted by the African Union, either independently or in collaboration with international and regional partners such as the United Nations and regional security organizations. Some studies also examined hybrid missions (e.g., AU–UN operations in Darfur) and regional peace support operations, reflecting the complexity and multi-actor nature of peacekeeping in Africa.

In terms of institutional participants, the studies highlighted the involvement of African Union peacekeeping forces, national military institutions (e.g., Ghana Armed Forces), international organizations, and local actors, including civilian populations and peacekeeping personnel. Unlike experimental research, the included studies did not specify numerical sample sizes, as they relied primarily on qualitative, conceptual, and analytical approaches to assess peacekeeping effectiveness.

The study settings varied from mission-specific contexts (e.g., AMISOM in Somalia, UNAMID in Darfur) to continent-wide analyses of African-led peace support operations and regional security frameworks. This variation reflects the diverse operational environments in which peacekeeping missions are deployed, ranging from active combat zones to post-conflict stabilization settings.

Overall, the participants and study settings demonstrate that African Union peacekeeping operations are implemented across heterogeneous and complex conflict environments, involving multiple actors and institutional frameworks. These variations in context are crucial in understanding how peacekeeping interventions influence conflict dynamics and their effectiveness in reducing armed conflict across the continent.

3.3 Effectiveness of African Union Peacekeeping Operations in Reducing Armed Conflict

The synthesis of the included studies reveals that peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union demonstrate varying levels of effectiveness in reducing armed conflict across Africa. While evidence suggests that these operations contribute significantly to short-term conflict containment and stabilization, their long-term effectiveness in achieving sustained peace remains contingent upon several operational, institutional, and contextual factors.

Several studies highlight the African Union's capacity for rapid deployment and early intervention, which plays a critical role in preventing the escalation of armed conflict. For instance, [Khudaykulova \(2023\)](#) emphasizes that AU peacekeeping missions often intervene during the initial stages of conflict, effectively containing violence and creating conditions for subsequent international involvement. This ability to act swiftly allows the AU to stabilize volatile situations and reduce immediate threats to civilian populations. Similarly, [Apuuli \(2020\)](#) notes that AU-led missions such as those in Burundi, Sudan, and Somalia have contributed to conflict management and partial reduction of hostilities, particularly in environments where state institutions are weak or collapsing.

However, despite these contributions, the effectiveness of AU peacekeeping operations is often described as context-dependent and uneven. While some missions have successfully achieved their mandates, others have encountered significant limitations that hinder their ability to produce long-term reductions in armed conflict. [Apuuli \(2020\)](#) underscores that persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, logistical constraints, and limited institutional capacity restrict the operational effectiveness of AU missions. These constraints often result in delayed deployments, insufficient troop support, and reduced sustainability of peacekeeping efforts, thereby limiting their overall impact on conflict resolution.

In addition, the evolving nature of African-led peace support operations (PSOs) reflects both progress and emerging concerns regarding their effectiveness. [Tchie \(2023a\)](#) argues that these operations have enhanced regional agency and ownership of peacekeeping initiatives, allowing African actors to take a more prominent role in addressing security challenges on the continent. However, the study also highlights an overreliance on military force as a primary strategy for conflict resolution, which may undermine long-term peacebuilding efforts and fail to address the root causes of conflict. This reliance on force, while effective in suppressing immediate violence, raises concerns about the sustainability of peace and the potential recurrence of conflict.

The effectiveness of AU peacekeeping operations is also closely linked to international and regional cooperation, particularly with organizations such as the United Nations. [Bokeriya & Khudaykulova \(2023\)](#) emphasize that successful peacekeeping outcomes are often dependent on collaborative frameworks between the AU and international partners, where the AU provides rapid response capabilities and the United Nations contributes resources and long-term stabilization mechanisms. This complementary relationship enhances the overall effectiveness of peacekeeping interventions, particularly in complex conflict environments.

Nevertheless, some studies point to limitations and unintended consequences associated with peacekeeping operations. [Muller \(2020\)](#) highlights that hybrid missions, such as those involving AU–UN cooperation, may inadvertently expose local actors to risks, particularly those involved in human rights monitoring and data collection. These findings suggest that while peacekeeping operations aim to protect civilians, they may also create new vulnerabilities if not properly managed.

Overall, the findings indicate that African Union peacekeeping operations are effective in achieving short-term conflict reduction and stabilization, particularly through rapid deployment and regional engagement. However, their long-term effectiveness in reducing armed conflict is constrained by structural challenges, including resource limitations, coordination issues, and an overemphasis on military approaches. These results suggest that while AU peacekeeping plays a crucial role in managing conflict dynamics, its impact can be significantly enhanced through improved institutional capacity, sustainable funding mechanisms, and stronger integration of non-military peacebuilding strategies.

3.4 Key Factors Influencing Peacekeeping Effectiveness

The effectiveness of peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union is shaped by a range of interrelated factors that influence their ability to reduce armed conflict and sustain peace. The synthesis of the included studies highlights several critical determinants, including institutional capacity, funding and logistics, nature of intervention strategies, and international cooperation. These

factors collectively determine whether peacekeeping operations achieve short-term stabilization or contribute to long-term conflict resolution.

One of the most consistently identified factors is institutional capacity, particularly in terms of operational readiness, command structures, and coordination mechanisms. [Khudaykulova \(2023\)](#) emphasizes that the African Union's ability to deploy forces rapidly and respond to emerging crises is a key strength that enhances its effectiveness in conflict containment. However, this capacity is often uneven across missions, as variations in training, equipment, and organizational coordination can affect overall performance. Similarly, [Apuuli \(2020\)](#) notes that while AU missions demonstrate growing institutional capability, these are frequently constrained by limited resources and reliance on external support, which can hinder sustained operational success.

Another major factor influencing effectiveness is funding and logistical support. Several studies identify financial constraints as a persistent challenge affecting the scale, duration, and sustainability of peacekeeping operations. [Apuuli \(2020\)](#) highlights that inadequate funding leads to shortages in essential resources such as personnel, equipment, and infrastructure, thereby limiting the operational reach of AU missions. These logistical challenges can delay deployment, reduce mission effectiveness, and ultimately weaken the AU's ability to maintain long-term stability in conflict-affected areas.

The nature of intervention strategies, particularly the reliance on military force, also plays a significant role in shaping outcomes. [Yaw Tchie \(2023\)](#) argues that African-led peace support operations have increasingly emphasized the use of force to address insecurity, reflecting a shift toward more robust and interventionist approaches. While such strategies may be effective in suppressing immediate violence, they may not adequately address the underlying political, economic, and social drivers of conflict. This overreliance on military solutions may limit the long-term effectiveness of peacekeeping operations and increase the risk of conflict recurrence.

In addition, international and regional cooperation emerges as a crucial factor in enhancing peacekeeping effectiveness. [Bokeriya & Khudaykulova \(2023\)](#) and [Khudaykulova \(2023\)](#) highlight that collaboration between the African Union and international organizations, particularly the United Nations, strengthens operational capacity by providing additional resources, technical expertise, and institutional support. This partnership allows for a division of labor, where the AU focuses on rapid deployment and initial stabilization, while international actors contribute to long-term peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts. Similarly, [Spandler \(2020\)](#) emphasize that strategic cooperation frameworks are essential for maximizing the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, although such partnerships require clear coordination and shared objectives to be successful.

Finally, contextual and environmental factors, such as the nature of the conflict, political dynamics, and level of local support, also influence the success of peacekeeping operations. The complexity of conflicts in regions such as the Sahel, Somalia, and Sudan presents unique challenges that require context-specific approaches. As noted by multiple studies, the effectiveness of AU peacekeeping is highly dependent on the broader political environment, including the willingness of local actors to engage in peace processes and the presence of functioning state institutions.

Overall, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of African Union peacekeeping operations is not solely determined by the presence of intervention but is significantly shaped by institutional strength, resource availability, strategic approach, and the extent of international cooperation. Addressing these factors is essential for enhancing the capacity of the African Union to achieve sustainable reductions in armed conflict across the continent.

3.5 Challenges and Limitations of African Union Peacekeeping Operations

Despite the significant contributions of peacekeeping missions conducted by the African Union in managing and containing armed conflict, the included studies consistently highlight a range of structural, operational, and strategic challenges that limit their overall effectiveness. These challenges

not only constrain the success of individual missions but also affect the sustainability of peacekeeping outcomes across the African continent.

One of the most prominent challenges identified is financial dependency and resource constraints. [Apuuli \(2020\)](#) emphasizes that many African Union peacekeeping missions operate under chronic funding shortages, relying heavily on external donors and international partners for financial support. This dependency affects the autonomy of the AU and limits its ability to independently sustain long-term operations. Inadequate funding also results in insufficient equipment, delayed troop deployment, and limited logistical capacity, all of which reduce mission effectiveness and operational reach.

Another critical limitation is logistical and operational inefficiency. Several studies note that the AU faces difficulties in maintaining consistent supply chains, transportation systems, and communication infrastructure necessary for large-scale peacekeeping operations. [Khudaykulova \(2023\)](#) points out that while the AU is capable of rapid deployment, sustaining operations over time remains a significant challenge due to logistical gaps and coordination issues. These inefficiencies can hinder the continuity of missions and reduce their ability to respond effectively to evolving conflict dynamics.

The overreliance on military-centered approaches is also identified as a major limitation. [Tchie \(2023a\)](#) argues that African-led peace support operations increasingly prioritize the use of force to suppress violence, often at the expense of broader peacebuilding strategies. While military intervention may achieve short-term stability, it does not adequately address the root causes of conflict, such as political instability, economic inequality, and social fragmentation. This limitation raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of peace and the potential for recurring conflicts once military presence is reduced.

In addition, coordination challenges among multiple actors present a significant barrier to effective peacekeeping. Many AU missions involve collaboration with international organizations, regional bodies, and national governments, which can lead to overlapping mandates and unclear divisions of responsibility. [Bokeriya & Khudaykulova \(2023\)](#) highlight that while cooperation between the AU and the United Nations

enhances operational capacity, it can also create complexities in command structures and decision-making processes. Similarly, [Spandler \(2020\)](#) note that the absence of clearly defined strategic frameworks for cooperation may reduce the efficiency of joint operations.

Another important limitation involves unintended consequences and risks to local actors. [Muller \(2020\)](#) demonstrates that peacekeeping missions, particularly hybrid operations, may inadvertently expose local staff and civilian populations to security risks. For example, individuals involved in data collection and human rights monitoring may become targets in conflict zones, especially in situations where host governments are hostile to peacekeeping missions. These unintended effects highlight the need for stronger protection mechanisms and more context-sensitive approaches to peacekeeping.

Furthermore, the complex and evolving nature of conflicts in Africa poses an ongoing challenge to the effectiveness of AU peacekeeping operations. Contemporary conflicts are often characterized by the involvement of non-state actors, transnational extremist groups, and fragmented political landscapes. As noted by [Tchie \(2023b\)](#) these dynamics require adaptive and multifaceted responses, yet AU missions may struggle to keep pace with rapidly changing security environments due to institutional and resource limitations.

Overall, the findings suggest that while African Union peacekeeping operations play a vital role in conflict management, their effectiveness is constrained by financial dependency, logistical challenges, strategic limitations, coordination issues, and contextual complexities. Addressing these challenges is essential for strengthening the capacity of the African Union to deliver more sustainable and impactful peacekeeping outcomes in the future.

3.6 Role of International and Regional Cooperation

The effectiveness of peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union is significantly enhanced by international and regional cooperation, which provides critical support in terms of funding, logistics, expertise, and long-term peacebuilding mechanisms. The included studies consistently emphasize that AU peacekeeping efforts are rarely implemented in isolation; rather, they operate within a broader network of partnerships involving global and regional actors.

One of the most prominent forms of cooperation is the collaboration between the African Union and the United Nations. [Bokeriya & Khudaykulova \(2023\)](#) highlight that this partnership operates through a complementary framework, wherein the AU often undertakes rapid deployment and initial stabilization efforts, while the United Nations provides sustained support through long-term peacekeeping missions, institutional reforms, and reconstruction initiatives. This division of labor enhances overall mission effectiveness by combining the AU's regional responsiveness with the UN's extensive resources and experience in peace operations.

Hybrid missions further illustrate the importance of such cooperation. [Muller \(2020\)](#) examines the AU–UN hybrid mission in Darfur (UNAMID), demonstrating how joint operations can improve coordination and resource mobilization. However, the study also points out that hybrid arrangements may introduce institutional complexities, including overlapping mandates and challenges in command and control structures. Despite these challenges, such partnerships remain essential for addressing large-scale and protracted conflicts.

Regional cooperation within Africa also plays a crucial role in supporting peacekeeping effectiveness. [Khudaykulova \(2023\)](#) notes that sub-regional organizations contribute to operational implementation, often working alongside the AU to provide localized responses to conflict. These regional actors enhance the AU's capacity by offering contextual knowledge, troop contributions, and logistical support tailored to specific conflict environments.

Additionally, cooperation with external actors, including international alliances and bilateral partners, has become increasingly important. [Spandler \(2020\)](#) emphasize that partnerships with organizations such as NATO and other international stakeholders can strengthen peacekeeping operations through capacity building, training, and strategic coordination. However, the study also cautions that such relationships must be guided by clearly defined objectives to avoid issues related to strategic misalignment or external influence on African security priorities.

Overall, the findings suggest that international and regional cooperation is a critical enabler of African Union peacekeeping effectiveness. While these partnerships enhance operational capacity and resource availability, their success depends on clear coordination mechanisms, well-defined roles, and alignment of strategic objectives among all actors involved.

3.7 Unintended Consequences and Operational Gaps

While peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union aim to reduce armed conflict and enhance security, the included studies reveal the presence of unintended consequences and operational gaps that may undermine their overall effectiveness. These issues highlight the complexity of peacekeeping environments and the need for more comprehensive and context-sensitive approaches.

One of the key unintended consequences identified is the increased vulnerability of local actors, particularly those directly involved in peacekeeping processes. [Muller \(2020\)](#) demonstrates that individuals such as local staff, human rights monitors, and data collectors may face heightened security risks due to their association with peacekeeping missions. In conflict zones where state or non-state actors are hostile to external intervention, these individuals may become targets, thereby exposing a critical gap in protection mechanisms within peacekeeping frameworks.

Another important issue is the limited focus on long-term peacebuilding and structural transformation. [Tchie \(2023a\)](#) argues that while African-led peace support operations are effective in

addressing immediate security threats, they often lack comprehensive strategies for addressing the underlying causes of conflict. This creates a situation where violence is temporarily suppressed but not fully resolved, increasing the likelihood of conflict recurrence once peacekeeping forces withdraw.

Operational gaps are also evident in terms of policy and institutional frameworks. [Muller \(2020\)](#) highlights the absence of clearly defined policies to safeguard local collaborators and ensure accountability within peacekeeping missions. Similarly, [Apuuli \(2020\)](#) notes that gaps in funding mechanisms and logistical planning can lead to inconsistencies in mission implementation, reducing overall effectiveness. These shortcomings indicate the need for more robust institutional structures to support peacekeeping operations.

In addition, the complexity of modern conflicts presents significant challenges that existing peacekeeping models may not fully address. Contemporary conflicts in Africa often involve non-state armed groups, transnational terrorism, and fragmented political systems, which require adaptive and multidimensional responses. As noted by [Oluyemi & Akinwunmi \(2025\)](#) broader global dynamics such as militarization and external economic interests further complicate conflict environments, making it difficult for peacekeeping operations to achieve lasting impact.

Finally, there is evidence of overdependence on external support, which may limit the autonomy and sustainability of AU-led initiatives. While international cooperation enhances capacity, it may also create reliance on external funding and strategic direction, potentially affecting the long-term independence of African-led peacekeeping efforts.

Overall, the findings indicate that while African Union peacekeeping operations contribute to conflict management, they also face unintended consequences and operational gaps that must be addressed. Strengthening protection mechanisms for local actors, integrating long-term peacebuilding strategies, improving institutional frameworks, and adapting to evolving conflict dynamics are essential steps toward enhancing the overall effectiveness and sustainability of peacekeeping intervention.

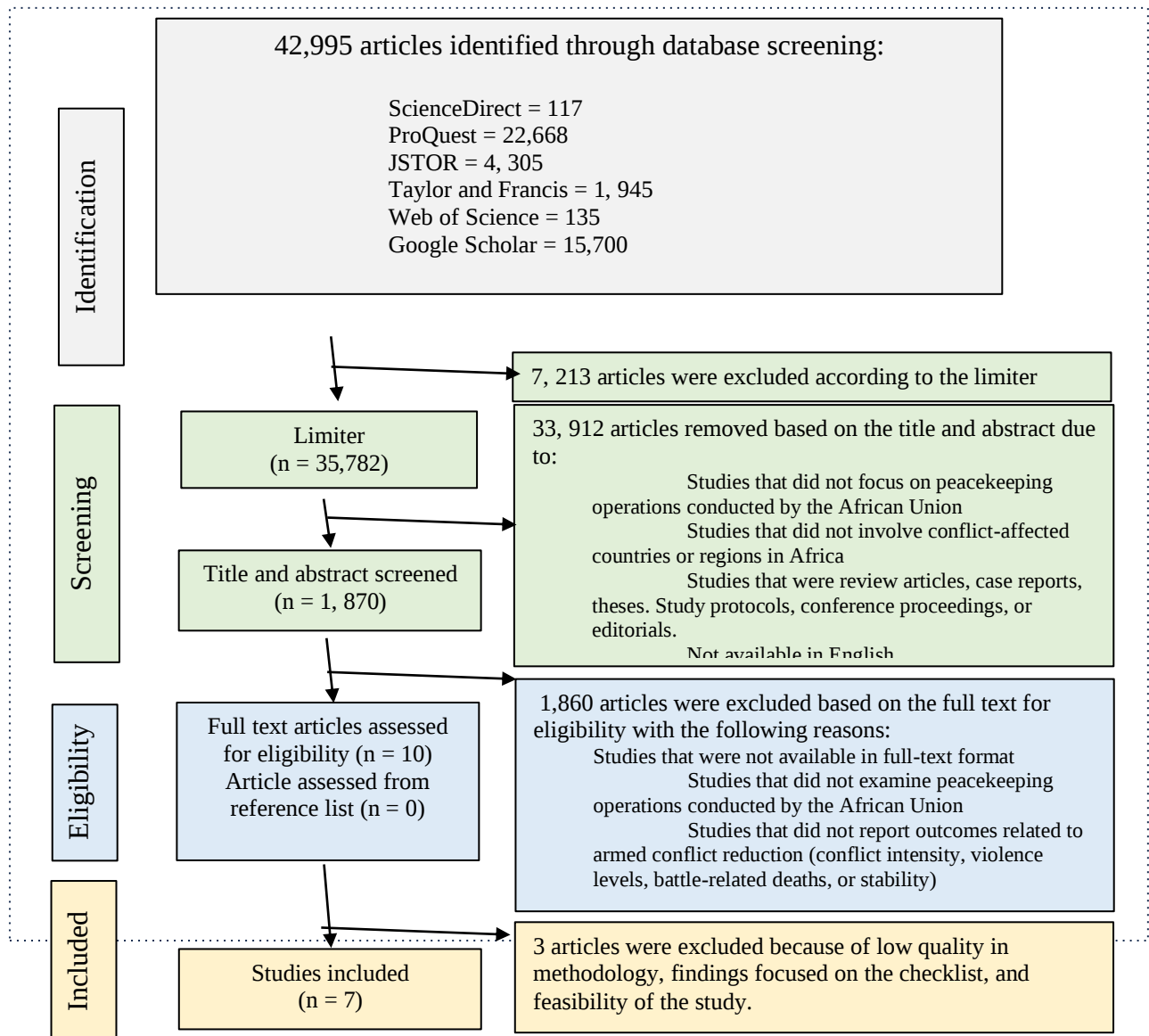


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart

Screening of Articles

The screening process for this systematic review, which examines the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union in reducing armed conflict in Africa, was carried out through a systematic and collaborative approach. Four primary reviewers (MCM, HKP, SMS, and SHB) led the initial stages of the screening process, ensuring methodological rigor and consistency in the selection of relevant studies.

To comprehensively identify eligible articles, predefined keywords and search terms were systematically applied across selected academic databases. The first phase of screening involved a detailed evaluation of titles and abstracts to determine their relevance based on the established inclusion criteria, particularly focusing on studies that examined African Union peacekeeping operations and reported measurable outcomes related to armed conflict reduction.

Discussion:

The findings of this systematic review highlight that peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union play a significant yet context-dependent role in reducing armed conflict across Africa. The results demonstrate that AU-led interventions are particularly effective in achieving short-term conflict containment, rapid stabilization, and crisis response, but their long-term impact on sustainable

peace remains constrained by structural and operational limitations. These findings are consistent with recent literature emphasizing the growing importance of regional peacekeeping actors in global security governance (Fawcett, 2025).

A key contribution of this study is the identification of the AU's comparative advantage in rapid deployment and early intervention, which allows it to respond swiftly to emerging conflicts before they escalate. This supports the findings of Khudaykulova (2023) and Apuuli (2020), which highlight the AU's role as a first responder in fragile conflict environments. Similarly, recent studies argue that African-led peace operations have become increasingly central to conflict management due to their regional proximity and contextual understanding, enabling more responsive and adaptive interventions (van Klinken et al., 2023).

This suggests that the AU's effectiveness is closely tied to its ability to leverage regional knowledge and political legitimacy in addressing complex security challenges.

However, while AU peacekeeping operations contribute to immediate reductions in violence, the findings indicate that their effectiveness in achieving long-term peace is limited. This aligns with Yaw Tchie (2023), who argues that the increasing reliance on military-centered approaches may suppress conflict temporarily but does not address its underlying causes. Supporting this, a study by Bunde (2021) emphasizes that regional peacekeeping organizations often face challenges in transitioning from conflict management to conflict resolution, particularly when structural issues such as governance deficits and socio-economic inequalities remain unresolved.

The study also underscores the critical role of international and regional cooperation in enhancing peacekeeping effectiveness. The collaboration between the African Union and the United Nations, as highlighted in the results, reflects a complementary model of peacekeeping, where the AU focuses on rapid response while the UN provides long-term stabilization support. This finding is consistent with recent research suggesting that hybrid and cooperative peacekeeping frameworks improve operational outcomes by combining regional responsiveness with global resources (Khudaykulova, 2023). Nonetheless, the findings also reveal that such partnerships may introduce coordination challenges, reinforcing the need for clearer institutional frameworks and division of responsibilities.

Another important finding of this study is the impact of resource constraints and logistical limitations on the effectiveness of AU peacekeeping operations. Consistent with Apuuli (2020), the review shows that inadequate funding and reliance on external donors significantly hinder the sustainability of peacekeeping missions. This is supported by recent evidence indicating that African-led operations remain heavily dependent on external financing, which affects both their autonomy and operational capacity (Cumming et al., 2024). These constraints highlight the importance of developing sustainable funding mechanisms and institutional capacity-building initiatives within the AU framework.

Furthermore, the findings reveal the presence of unintended consequences and operational gaps, particularly in relation to the protection of local actors and the broader impact of peacekeeping missions. Muller (2020) highlights the vulnerability of local staff involved in peacekeeping processes, which is supported by recent studies emphasizing the risks faced by civilian collaborators in conflict zones (Day & Hunt, 2022). This suggests that while peacekeeping operations aim to enhance security, they may inadvertently expose certain groups to additional risks if adequate protection mechanisms are not in place.

Additionally, the complexity of contemporary conflicts characterized by the involvement of non-state actors, transnational terrorism, and fragmented political systems poses significant challenges to traditional peacekeeping models. The findings align with Greco & Radley (2025), which situate African conflicts within broader global dynamics of militarization and political economy. Supporting this perspective, recent literature argues that modern conflicts require multidimensional and adaptive peacekeeping strategies that go beyond military intervention to include governance reforms, economic development, and community engagement (de Coning, 2020).

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on African peacekeeping by providing a comprehensive synthesis of evidence on the effectiveness of AU operations. The findings suggest that while the African Union plays a crucial role in conflict management and stabilization, its long-term effectiveness depends on addressing key challenges related to funding, institutional capacity, strategic approach, and coordination with international partners.

In conclusion, the results imply that enhancing the effectiveness of African Union peacekeeping operations requires a shift toward more integrated and sustainable approaches, combining military intervention with long-term peacebuilding strategies. Strengthening institutional frameworks, improving resource mobilization, and fostering inclusive cooperation among regional and international actors are essential steps toward achieving lasting peace and security across the African continent.

Implications:

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union in managing and reducing armed conflict across Africa, while also emphasizing the need for more comprehensive, sustainable, and context-sensitive approaches. These results carry important implications for both future research and practical implementation in the field of peace and security.

In terms of practice, policymakers and practitioners within the African Union and its partner organizations should prioritize strengthening institutional capacity and resource sustainability. Addressing persistent challenges such as funding shortages, logistical inefficiencies, and reliance on external donors is essential for enhancing operational autonomy and effectiveness. Developing sustainable financing mechanisms, such as increased member state contributions or innovative funding strategies, can reduce dependency on external actors and improve long-term mission viability (M'ikanatha & Welliver, 2021; Spiegel et al., 2026).

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of enhancing coordination and cooperation between the African Union and international partners, particularly the United Nations. Clearer frameworks for collaboration, defined roles, and streamlined command structures are necessary to minimize operational overlaps and maximize the efficiency of joint missions. Strengthening these partnerships can improve both immediate conflict response and long-term peacebuilding efforts.

Another key implication for practice is the need to improve protection mechanisms for local actors involved in peacekeeping operations. As highlighted in the findings, local staff and civilian participants may face unintended risks due to their involvement in peacekeeping activities. Policymakers should establish clear protocols and safeguards to ensure the safety and security of these individuals, thereby enhancing the ethical and operational integrity of peacekeeping missions (Karlsrud & Duursma, 2023).

Finally, institutions should adopt a more integrated and adaptive approach to peacekeeping, recognizing the evolving nature of contemporary conflicts. This includes incorporating multidimensional strategies that address not only security concerns but also political, social, and economic dimensions of conflict. By doing so, peacekeeping operations can transition from short-term stabilization efforts to sustainable peacebuilding initiatives that effectively reduce the likelihood of conflict recurrence.

Research contribution:

Overall, the findings suggest that while African Union peacekeeping operations are essential in addressing armed conflict, their effectiveness can be significantly enhanced through strategic innovation, institutional strengthening, and a shift toward holistic peacebuilding approaches. These implications provide a foundation for advancing both academic inquiry and policy development in the field of international peace and security. This systematic review also contributes by synthesizing empirical evidence from multiple studies, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness, strengths, and limitations of African Union peacekeeping operations that has been fragmented in previous literature.

Limitations:

This study has several limitations. First, the review included only seven eligible studies, which may limit the generalizability of the findings across all African Union peacekeeping missions. Second, the included studies employed different research designs, geographical contexts, and outcome measurements, making direct comparisons difficult. Third, the review relied exclusively on published literature indexed in selected databases, which may have excluded relevant grey literature, institutional reports, or unpublished studies. Finally, because the review synthesized secondary data, the conclusions depend on the methodological quality and reporting standards of the original studies.

Suggestions:

From a research perspective, future studies should move beyond evaluating short-term conflict containment and instead focus on the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of African Union peacekeeping operations. While this review demonstrates that AU interventions are effective in stabilizing conflict zones, there remains a need to examine how these operations contribute to post-conflict reconstruction, governance reform, and durable peacebuilding outcomes. Longitudinal and mixed-methods research designs may provide deeper insights into how peacekeeping interventions influence conflict trajectories over time. Additionally, future research should explore comparative analyses between AU-led missions and other international peacekeeping models, particularly in terms of cost-effectiveness, local legitimacy, and long-term impact (de Coning, 2020).

Moreover, there is a need to further investigate the integration of non-military strategies within peacekeeping frameworks. The findings suggest that overreliance on military force may limit long-term effectiveness; thus, future studies should examine how peacekeeping operations can incorporate political dialogue, economic development, and community-based approaches to address the root causes of conflict. Research focusing on local participation and community engagement in peacekeeping processes would also provide valuable insights into improving mission legitimacy and effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study systematically examined the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations conducted by the African Union in reducing armed conflict across the African continent, revealing that these interventions play a crucial role in short-term conflict containment and stabilization. The findings demonstrate that the AU possesses a comparative advantage in rapid deployment and regional responsiveness, allowing it to address emerging conflicts efficiently. However, the overall effectiveness of these operations is shaped by multiple factors, including institutional capacity, funding constraints, and the nature of intervention strategies. While AU peacekeeping efforts contribute significantly to managing violence, their long-term impact on sustainable peace remains limited by structural and operational challenges.

Moreover, the study highlights that the success of African Union peacekeeping operations is highly dependent on strengthened international cooperation, improved logistical support, and the integration of non-military peacebuilding approaches. Persistent challenges such as resource dependency, coordination gaps, and unintended consequences underscore the need for more adaptive and comprehensive peacekeeping frameworks. Addressing these limitations requires a shift toward holistic strategies that combine security interventions with political, economic, and social reforms. Ultimately, enhancing the effectiveness of AU peacekeeping operations will depend on sustained institutional development, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to long-term peacebuilding across conflict-affected regions.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed substantially to the conception and design of the study. The authors participated in literature searching, study screening, data extraction, quality assessment, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, manuscript drafting, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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