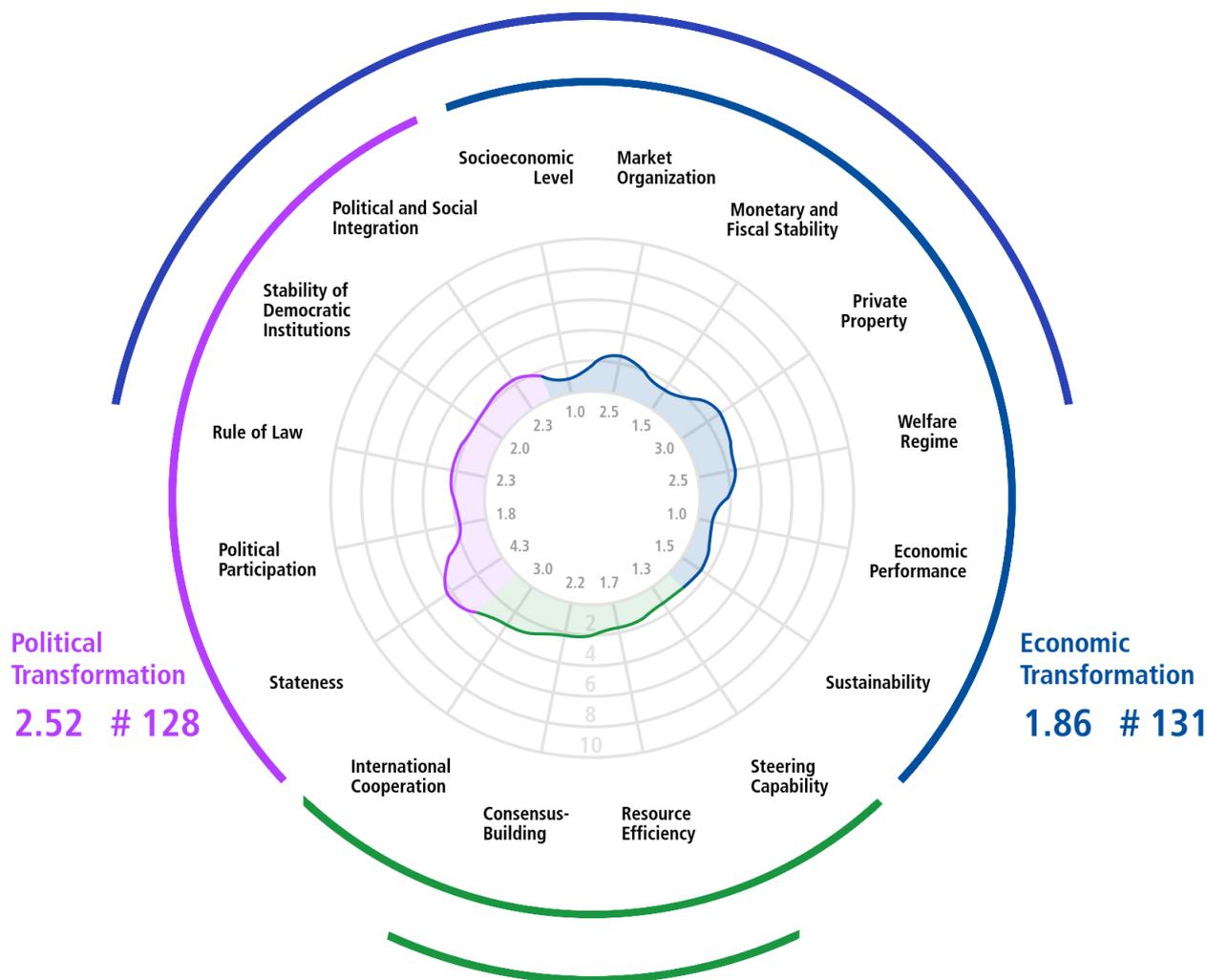


South Sudan

Status Index

2.19 # 130

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
2.52 # 128

Economic Transformation
1.86 # 131

Governance Index

2.01 # 130

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2026**. It covers the period from February 1, 2023 to January 31, 2025. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	11.9	HDI	0.388	GDP p.c., PPP \$	-
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	3.9	HDI rank of 193	193	Gini Index	44.0
Life expectancy	years	57.6	UN Education Index	0.348	Poverty ³	% 86.5
Urban population	%	21.6	Gender inequality ²	-	Aid per capita \$	156.0

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2025. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

South Sudan is in a fragile state between war and peace. In February 2020, after a two-year process, the parties to the conflict, President Salva Kiir Mayardit and former First Vice President Riek Machar, finally agreed to implement the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Machar was once again sworn in as first vice president in a new unity government, officially ending the civil war after seven years of fighting. At the national level, the stalemate is relatively stable, but the potential remains for new violence to erupt at any time. The United Nations has reported a drop in civilian casualties, but there is still substantial local violence ongoing among different armed groups, as well as frequent atrocities against civilians. As part of the peace agreement, South Sudan returned to its previous constitutional structure of 10 subnational states, which Kiir had raised to 32. Governors were sworn in, and some minor improvements in terms of administrative capacity seem to have taken place. During the review period, the United Nations reported noticeable progress in the implementation of the peace deal, most prominently with a working parliament. Other important benchmarks of the peace agreement have not been reached. National elections were rescheduled once again in September 2024 and are now slated for December 2026.

The South Sudanese conflict has been marked by back-and-forth movements. The former ruler of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, actively supported President Kiir's faction in the conflict from 2015 until the 2019 revolution. His overthrow changed this dynamic. Since the outbreak of the Sudanese civil war in April 2023, South Sudan has been burdened with additional refugees and the disruption of its vital oil pipeline. This latter circumstance led to a significant decrease in oil revenues throughout 2024, with severe consequences for the state's fiscal and economic policy. The complex regional dynamics in Sudan and Ethiopia, as well as tensions in the larger region, affect South Sudan's internal and cross-border conflicts.

The Kiir government's approach to peace negotiations during the period from 2015 to 2020 demonstrated its distrust of the international community and its determination to avoid political interference, as the ruling faction manipulated the terms of repeated peace deals. Prior to the 2020 agreement, some international partners were close to canceling all support for South Sudan, while others assessed that there would be no lasting peace with the current generation of political leaders.

The United Nations estimates that by the end of 2024, armed conflicts and natural disasters in the country had left 1.8 million people internally displaced, 2.29 million as refugees in neighboring countries and 9 million – more than two-thirds of the population – in need of humanitarian assistance. An estimated 383,000 people had died in the civil war, it stated. Since 2019, South Sudan has been hit by several severe floods that affected more than 1 million people. The level of socioeconomic development is extremely low, among the lowest in the world. The U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) ranks South Sudan second-to-last of 193 states on its Human Development Index. The rule of law is not guaranteed. A mixture of political, economic and military power makes it nearly impossible to investigate corruption and prosecute powerful actors. Prospects for peace remain uncertain.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

South Sudan's independence resulted from the January 2011 referendum in which the people of South Sudan voted overwhelmingly (98.83%) in favor of becoming an independent state. The high voter turnout rate and the overwhelming vote in favor of a separate state were rooted in the bitter relations between northern and southern Sudan. These relations were framed by regionalism (north versus south), race (Arabs versus Africans) and religion (Muslims versus Christians). Because of this framing, state-building in South Sudan has tended to focus on addressing the causes of the broader north-south civil wars while ignoring historic tensions within South Sudan itself. Following the 1991 split in the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), violence among various factional groups within South Sudan displaced and killed more civilians than the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) had since the civil war began in 1983. Among the prominent SPLA commanders who broke away was Riek Machar, the leader of the rebellion and vice president from 2011 to 2013, and again after 2020. The failure to address historic grievances within South Sudan led to increasing levels of violence and factionalism within the SPLA following the outbreak of the civil war in 2013.

Since its creation as the political wing of the SPLA in 1983, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) claimed to be a transformative movement aiming to promote democratic principles, the rule of law and the formation of a nondiscriminatory "New Sudan." But from the start of the interim period in 2005, it became evident that the wartime framing of support for democracy was merely a strategy to win the war. At the beginning of the interim period, for example, the SPLM claimed to have changed from a rebel movement to a political party based on democratic principles. However, the SPLM's leadership continued to be dominated by generals within the national army (SPLA). At the same time, the executive branch of the government

(cabinet ministers, state governors and county commissioners) was dominated by the military, which was led by members of the executive branch appointed by the president, who was also the SPLM party chairman. The National Legislative Assembly consisted of SPLM members appointed by the president at the start of the interim period. Because of the ethnic targeting of civilians after the outbreak of violence in December 2013 and July 2016, a large proportion of members of parliament either abandoned their positions to join the rebellion, sought protection from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) or fled to neighboring countries. In response, the president appointed new members, who came mainly from the Dinka ethnic group and were expected to be loyal to his government, to replace them. The overlap among the executive, legislature and army has made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between the roles of the three institutions. SPLA generals use their military positions to advance the SPLM's interests and intimidate the opposition in the National Legislative Assembly. As the executive is also dominated by the army, its members have used their military positions to push for a constitution that gives the executive powers to dismiss elected officials. This has also given executives at various levels (the president, state governors and county commissioners) the power to rule by decree, often bypassing elected legislatures.

Shortly after independence, the government passed several controversial bills that restricted the political space for the emergence of new political parties. The Political Party Act includes several conditions that are rarely met by an emerging political party. The limited political space was exacerbated by the National Security Bill, passed in March 2015, which prohibits the freedoms of assembly and expression without the consent of the Ministry of National Security, which is also dominated by the SPLM/A.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

As of January 2025, the South Sudanese state's monopoly of force is still contested in multiple ways, and government control is directly enforceable only in small parts of the country.

First, large parts of the country are inaccessible to government forces and officials because of inadequate infrastructure. This is especially true in the rainy season (May – October), and a significant increase in flooding in recent years has exacerbated these access issues. Even before the South Sudanese civil war began in December 2013, establishing a monopoly of force throughout the country was challenging.

Second, as a result of the civil war, the SPLA, the dominant armed actor in South Sudan, has been split into parts, and (former) army units have been organized into regional and personal commands under political-military factions. Political and military power are interlinked, and many political figures are connected to an armed group or have the ability to raise or co-opt fighting forces, including armed civilians. In practice, there has been no progress on much-needed security sector reform and the reintegration of fighters.

Third, despite the national-level cease-fire, the state's monopoly on the use of force is contested by multiple smaller armed groups, such as militias and self-defense groups connected to clans or villages, which in general were not parties to the national-level civil war. These actors ostensibly provide local security for roads and communities, but in practice they are often parties to local conflicts.

Fourth, although its mission is to support the state and help restore peace and security in South Sudan, the presence of a 13,200-strong United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) is in itself a symbol of the lack of a clear monopoly of force by the South Sudanese state.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

3

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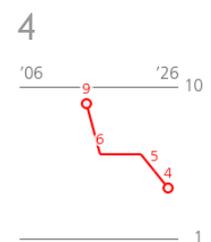
The splintering of several opposition forces after the September 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and again in 2022 further undermined the state's monopoly on the use of force. The United Nations has reported that the permanent cease-fire in place since February 2020 continued to hold in most parts of the country, although the state was still unable to protect the civilian population. As of January 2025, endemic conflict and localized violence involving non-state and government forces was persisting across most eastern regions of South Sudan, along with localized cattle raiding, militia clashes and community violence in areas west of the Nile. National police, government forces and other armed actors linked to the government perpetrate large-scale human rights violations.

An overwhelming majority (98.3%) of the people of South Sudan voted for an independent state in 2011. At the time, the concept of the nation-state and the creation of South Sudan generally enjoyed broad support, as the SPLM's war against the Sudanese regime led to independence. However, during the transition period from 2005 to 2011, there were sustained regional conflicts between state forces and local communities, particularly in Jonglei, and since 2011, the state has rapidly lost legitimacy among large parts of the population. Since independence, in the absence of an external struggle against Sudan, South Sudanese political solidarity has crumbled. Ethnic and regional identities had been politicized and used as mobilizing logics for conflict throughout the civil war with Sudan, and this continued in independent South Sudan, with dominant factions (led by Kiir and Machar) mobilizing support along regional and ethnic lines. This fostered social disintegration and competition for state positions based on ethnic and regional identities and provided political and cultural cover for individual rivalries.

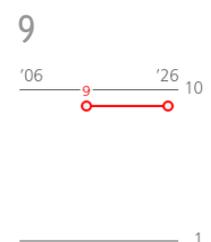
A long-term political process needs to address not only the dominant conflicts within the newly formed government but also the numerous intergroup conflicts at the local level, many of which concern control of resources, land and services. Recent public opinion research indicates that South Sudanese citizens support the principle of a democratic, fair nation-state but believe that many people are treated as "second-class citizens" across the country.

South Sudan is a secular state de jure and de facto. The current transitional constitution of 2011 guarantees the separation of religion and politics under Article 8. The country is predominantly Christian, with particularly large Catholic and Anglican congregations. Most towns have Muslim minorities, while Islam is more widely practiced farther north toward the border with Sudan. In addition to Islam and Christianity, a large proportion of South Sudanese practice traditional religions. The separation of religion and state stems from the war against northern Sudan, which was premised on the imposition of Islam and Islamic law on non-Muslims. This has prevented religion from becoming a contentious political issue, at least for the moment. The churches and faith-based organizations played an important role during

State identity



No interference of religious dogmas



the war. They not only provided emergency relief, education and health services to displaced people, but also facilitated reconciliation processes between communities and at the national level. Religious leaders today play important roles at the local level. It is unlikely that religion will become a political dimension as it did during the north-south civil war.

The constitution of South Sudan provides for an administrative structure based, in theory, on a decentralized system of governance. The country inherited 10 states from Sudan under the constitution; these were in turn subdivided into counties, payams and bomas (bomas are the smallest administrative units). In October 2015, President Salva Kiir increased the number of states to 28 and again to 32 in January 2017, violating the 2015 peace deal. Only when Kiir agreed to reverse his decision did a political process become possible. In February 2020, Kiir announced that South Sudan would return to 10 states in addition to three administrative areas in parallel with the formation of the new government of national unity.

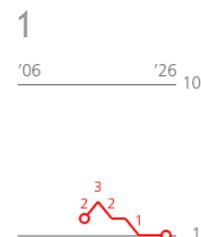
The effects of sustained civil war, economic collapse since 2013 and factional power plays over administrative boundaries together mean that the territorial administration lacks capacity, funding and skilled personnel. Most local administrations are unable to implement government decisions or provide services to the population. Most South Sudanese have no regular access to state-based juridical functions, which are expensive and operate only in towns; most people rely on local customary courts. Since December 2018, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan has operated a mobile statutory law court (since 2020 a Joint Special Mobile Court), but it does not support South Sudanese institutions.

The reduction of project funds has led to a near-complete breakdown in basic administration and service delivery in many parts of South Sudan, especially in rural areas and areas directly affected by the civil war, local violence and floods. As a result, about 75% of the population is suffering from malnutrition. In 2022, according to the World Bank, 41% of the population had access to a basic water source and only 16.1% had access to basic sanitation. About 8.4% of the population had access to electricity in 2022 (the last available data).

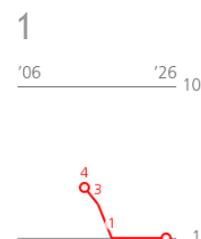
2 | Political Participation

Since the formation of South Sudan as an independent state in 2011, there have been no national or state elections, and the government claims legitimacy based on the 2010 elections. The first national elections in South Sudan were scheduled for 2015. As part of the peace deals of 2015 and 2018/2020, national elections were postponed multiple times. This has cemented the dominant position of President Salva Kiir Mayardit and frozen power relations between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and Vice President Riek Machar's faction, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO). In April 2015, South Sudan's parliament voted to amend the 2011 transitional constitution to extend the

Basic administration



Free and fair elections



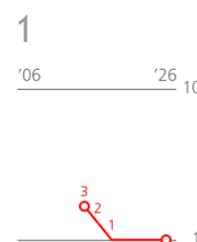
presidential and parliamentary terms until July 9, 2018, by a large SPLM majority. The elections were postponed again in July 2018 to August 2021, in 2022 to December 2024 and in 2024 to December 2026. Kiir's faction of the SPLM is the dominant political power, and the only relevant opposition consists of SPLM splinter groups, which are a mixture of political and armed groups. It seems unlikely that civilian political parties not related to any armed actor could have a realistic chance in future elections. In 2022, observers noted that national elections would likely spark violence before, during and after the ballot. A 2024 opinion poll found respondents divided on this issue.

Since the civil war in 2013, political power has been held by actors with combined economic, military and political power. Many of these actors are rooted in longer factional histories deriving from the divisions of the second Sudanese civil war (1983 – 2005), which have created strong patronage networks, regional military strongholds, and historical rivalries and grievances. In principle, South Sudan's constitution creates a democratic and relatively balanced system of governance; however, in the continuing "transition period" since 2018, the president has had enormous political power, and his decrees generally act as law with regard to border changes, political appointments and other key decisions. This effectively means that elected bodies such as the National Assembly are redundant forums. President Kiir has repeatedly used presidential decrees to replace governors, reshuffle military commands and replace members of parliament at the national and state levels. The biggest reshuffle of state representatives by the president occurred with the creation of new subnational states in 2015 and 2017, and again in 2020 after the reduction to 10 states. Outside the capital Juba, in government-controlled territories, centralized decision-making from President Kiir's ruling faction reaches down to the local level; elsewhere, outside government control, the military commands of rebel factions recreate similar centralized systems of informal taxation and everyday governance.

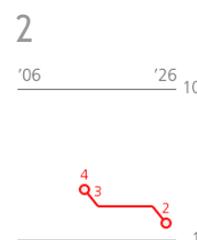
The constitution of South Sudan guarantees the freedoms of association and assembly under Article 25. However, due to sustained localized conflicts in large parts of the country, the exercise of such liberties is threatened by both state and non-state actors. The government introduced the National Security Bill (NSB) in 2015. Contrary to the rights included in the constitution, the measure deems association by citizens without prior approval from national security services, including private meetings, to be illegal and punishable by the state. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as other NGOs, have criticized these regulations as violating the constitution and international law. Additional problems in this regard include insufficient judicial oversight of security forces and the high likelihood of abuse of power. The NSB has presented a further obstacle to political parties and civil society groups critical of the government.

As part of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), the National Security Service Act (NSSA) was meant to have been revised with the aim of limiting the powers of the NSS. Human rights groups

Effective power to govern



Association / assembly rights



continue to criticize the NSS' practices and its human rights violations. In July 2024, however, parliament passed amendments to the NSSA that expanded the NSS' powers, including by giving it the authority to arrest and detain people without a warrant. These provisions became law in August 2024 and have been criticized by civil society and the United Nations for limiting the freedom of civilians and activists. The act formalizes the de facto powers of the NSS and was further emboldening the NSS to surveil and detain democratic activists and protesters by late 2024.

De jure, South Sudan's 2011 transitional constitution guarantees the right to freedom of expression in Article 24; de facto, both the legal framework and government practice inhibit the exercise of this right. The Penal Code Act (2008), the Media Authority Act (2013), the National Security Service Act (2014, revised 2024) and the National Security Bill of 2015 are not in line with the constitution's protection of the freedoms of expression and the media. As the civil war intensified, the government restricted various media outlets, including newspapers. According to Human Rights Watch, the freedom of the press and media is violated mostly by government security forces and, to a lesser extent, by civilian authorities, including governors, ministers and the Media Authority. Other armed actors also threaten and hamper journalists. These developments have led to a rising level of self-censorship among news providers. According to UNESCO, no journalist was killed in South Sudan in 2023 or 2024. Reporters Without Borders describes an uneven trajectory for press freedom since the end of the civil war in February 2020, ranking the country at 136th place globally in its 2024 World Press Freedom Index (2023: 118, 2022: 128, 2021: 139, 2020: 138). A recent example of problematic conduct against journalistic entities is an incident in November 2023 in which the newspaper Al-Watan was closed after it published a presidential letter of condolence to Israel that had been sent to the newspaper by a minister who was later fired.

Freedom of expression

3

'06 _____ '26 10



3 | Rule of Law

South Sudan's constitution establishes a presidential system with separation of powers, set out in Article 48. On paper, South Sudan has a fairly strong separation of powers (for example, a ban on ministers holding a parliamentary mandate). However, legally, far-reaching transitional provisions of the constitution give the president very strong powers that contradict underlying constitutional principles. For instance, allowing a president to appoint members of parliament is a serious violation of the principle of separation of powers. In practice, the already noted blend of political and military power dramatically undermines the separation of powers. Even before the civil war, it was often unclear in which capacity state officials were acting: that is, in military or security roles, or in civil roles such as local public servants or members of parliament. During the civil war from 2013 to 2020, these dynamics accelerated. Because of the combination of political and military power in the SPLM/A, the armed

Separation of powers

2

'06 _____ '26 10



forces can use their power for political purposes. In addition, military personnel cannot be tried in civilian courts. This general pattern did not change after the civil war. In short, the separation of powers does not function in South Sudan.

Formally, Article 122 of the 2011 transitional constitution established an independent judiciary. The South Sudanese judicial system is centralized; there is a national appeals body and no separate jurisdiction in the subnational states (Articles 122 – 134 in conjunction with Annex A No. 8). There is a uniform appeals system, without functional divisions into civil, criminal or administrative courts.

Despite the equality before the law enshrined in the constitution (Article 14), many South Sudanese believe that the political and military elite abuse their power to influence court cases or end criminal investigations, including through the use of direct bribery and intimidation. Despite the presence of corruption and political influence, some judges seem to work independently on low-profile cases. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the government and security forces regularly obstruct the independence of the judiciary. Numerous individuals in the government and armed forces who committed human rights abuses have never been charged. Judges have repeatedly gone on strike over unpaid salaries and poor working conditions since 2017.

Many South Sudanese see the traditional courts as being more inclusive and closer to the people than the statutory courts. However, when the Local Government Act formalized the role of the chiefs in the judicial system, their standing as independent voices and representatives of ordinary people came under pressure.

Following international pressure, the necessary memorandum of understanding between the African Union (AU) and South Sudan was signed on January 30, 2021, but as of January 2025, there had been no progress.

Despite an official zero-tolerance policy, political and economic corruption are endemic in South Sudan. De jure, abuse of power by public officeholders is controlled by several safeguards, first and foremost the separation of powers, the judiciary and several independent bodies. These bodies are the Anti-Corruption Commission (Art. 143 of the constitution), the National Audit Chamber (Art. 186) and other ideally independent institutions, such as the Human Rights Commission (Art. 145), all of which have the mission of controlling the government. Apart from the institutional bodies, freedoms for journalists and other non-governmental actors should ideally foster additional checks and balances in the South Sudanese political system. The separation of powers is, de facto, very weak, and independent oversight is not guaranteed. The mixing of political, economic and military power makes it nearly impossible to investigate corruption and prosecute powerful actors. In addition, both the constitution and the Local Government Act provide senior government officials (members of the executive and legislature) and senior chiefs immunity from prosecution; the same is true for the armed forces.

Independent
judiciary

3

'06 '26 10

3

1

Prosecution of
office abuse

2

'06 '26 10

2

1

The constitution (Articles 9 – 34) provides for civil rights based on international standards. Yet in practice, civil rights are almost nonexistent, especially since the civil war began in 2013. Despite the legal provisions, even the most basic civil right, the “right to life” (transitional constitution Article 11), is far from guaranteed. Both the government and opposition forces have been accused of killing civilians, committing sexual violence and engaging in ethnic targeting, particularly during the civil war between 2013 and 2020. About 3.81 million people were forced to leave their homes as a result of the violence during that conflict, including 1.62 million internally displaced people and 2.19 million refugees.

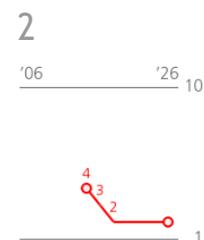
Security forces restrict movement and gatherings, and block public venues and other sites where dissident voices might be heard. The frequency of arbitrary arrests and disappearances has risen in recent years, mostly justified by vague accusations of links to former opposition forces. Reports suggest that government forces’ involvement in robbery, looting of civilian property, rape and murder is increasing. Beyond the war-related human rights violations, the absence of the rule of law allows various violent actors to commit human rights violations at multiple levels. Ordinary citizens increasingly report fearing the authorities and security forces. The official peace agreement in 2018 has not had a significant effect on ending these abuses, particularly in areas of Jonglei, Upper Nile and Warrap state where intense conflicts continued into 2025. Even if the hybrid court – in collaboration with the African Union – begins to function and prosecute war crimes and genocide, it is unlikely that important officeholders or members of the elite will be held accountable without significant political change.

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

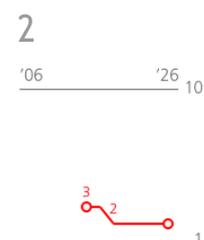
Principles of democracy and the rule of law are enshrined in the constitution. However, some democratic institutions are lacking, and existing ones do not function effectively. The constitution grants absolute power to the executive, particularly the president. For example, the president has the authority to dismiss or replace elected government officials without challenge from the National Legislative Assembly or cabinet ministers. The constitution (Article 188) also gives the president the right to dissolve or suspend the National Legislative Assembly in a state of emergency (including a civil war) and to assume decision-making responsibilities that would normally fall under the jurisdiction of the assembly.

In May 2021, President Kiir dissolved and reconstituted the National Legislature under the terms of the 2018 peace agreement. Both houses were enlarged in the new legislature – the Transitional National Legislative Assembly to 550 appointed representatives and the Council of States from 50 to 100 seats.

Civil rights



Performance of democratic institutions



The Local Government Act of 2009 suggests that chiefs should be directly elected by local communities. The act also suggests that all counties should have an elected legislative council with members representing each payam. There is no evidence that any county has conducted elections for its legislative council. However, some commissioners, in consultation with head chiefs, have appointed council members in their counties.

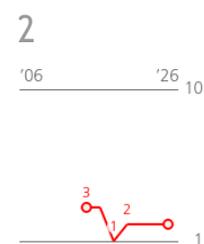
While some local community elections for chiefs have taken place, many chiefs, particularly in rural areas, were appointed by the SPLM/A during wartime or after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). At the statutory judicial level, the court system relies on appointments and is undermined by a lack of civil service pay, corruption and political pressure on the judiciary. In addition, state institutions often lack the financial resources to provide public services. In short, democratic institutions in South Sudan fail to perform their duties effectively.

Political actors in South Sudan are aware of the international value of democratic government and at least present a public face to that effect. All political actors claim to be democratic and to protect democracy and democratic institutions, but they do not act accordingly in practice. President Kiir and his allies use their powers to undermine the broader democratic system as well as the specific checks and balances enshrined in the constitution. Several newly established laws, as well as ongoing government practices, are purposely designed to silence political opposition (e.g., party regulations) and government critics, such as the free press. There is no evidence suggesting that armed opposition groups are more likely to promote democratic institutions.

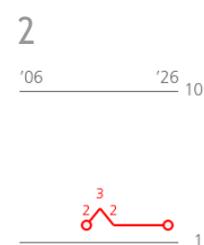
5 | Political and Social Integration

On paper, South Sudan has a multiparty political system. However, because of seven years of civil war and a lack of democratic history, this is largely a facade. The former rebel movement, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), remains technically the dominant political party in the country. To consolidate its political monopoly, the three branches of government, including the army, have collaborated to enact regulations that make it difficult for new political parties to emerge. Political, social and military power are interlinked in South Sudan. As a result of the civil war and a disastrous security situation, political parties and armed movements are usually the same entities. Most political parties are either effectively vehicles for individual politicians' ambitions or political fronts for splinter factions of the SPLM in opposition (SPLM-IO) and other armed groups that have emerged since 2013. Because these opposition groups derive from personal power struggles, they mostly do not espouse clear alternative political programs or mobilize support on the ground via party structures. For instance, the most serious opposition party apart from the SPLM-IO, which tried to challenge the SPLM during the 2010 election, was the

Commitment to democratic institutions



Party system



SPLM-Democratic Change (SPLM-DC, now called simply Democratic Change), headed by Lam Akol. While officially there are about 14 political parties in South Sudan, they cannot really be considered parties in the sense of having a support base, institutional capacities or political programs. Other sources speak of about 50 parties operating in Juba. The South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA) – originally made up of seven, now eight, parties and armed groups, among them the National Salvation Front (NAS) led by Thomas Cirilo Swaka – is part of the 2018 peace agreement. However, the SSOA has experienced multiple splits and reorganizations since 2018. The South Sudan National Democratic Alliance (SSNDA) consists of four armed groups, three of which are splinter groups of SSOA groups, which are not part of the peace agreement.

Because of the SPLM's dominance in the National Legislative Assembly, laws have been passed that hamper new parties from being successful or even relevant. The Political Parties Act, which was slightly reformed in 2022, stipulates that to register a political party, the party must have at least 500 members in two-thirds of the 10 states and must prove that it has not received external funding, including from international NGOs working in South Sudan. The internationally criticized National Security Bill of 2015 makes public gatherings that have not been approved by the SPLM-controlled National Security Service, including those of political parties, illegal. A 2024 opinion poll found that most respondents still rated the SPLM and SPLM-IO as the two dominant political forces. It remains to be seen whether these circumstances will change with a potential normalization of political affairs in South Sudan.

During the CPA period from 2005 to 2011, and in the first years after independence, a lively civil society supported by international donors emerged, including human rights activists, unions, business clubs, and women's and youth associations. Many of these groups are small and operate in specific localities, but some have gained a national presence. Although international funding and support for civil society groups has been substantive, their political influence on the government and the SPLM is fairly limited.

By 2025, influential civil society groups were primarily active in urban centers, especially Juba. The churches represent a major social force that extends into all corners of South Sudan. In particular, the Anglican and Catholic churches have organizational structures that connect local parishes with those at the state and national levels. For years, the church has played an active role in mediating conflicts; since the start of the civil war, it has also become very vocal in its criticism of the warring parties. At the local level, particularly in rural areas, churches remain the most important institutions for managing social life as well as in moderating and mobilizing people's interests.



No public opinion survey data are available to assess the strength of citizens' approval of democratic norms and procedures.

Approval of democracy

n/a



South Sudan has associational cultures rooted in activities promoting community survival during decades of war, including self-help associations, mutual savings groups, committees of the displaced and refugee camp organizations. However, since the CPA in 2005, there have been no serious efforts to reconcile the people of South Sudan or to address intercommunity violence and abuses by armed parties. During the civil war (2013 – 2018) and the continuing conflicts across the country, violence and the politicization of ethnic identity have had a great impact on people's trust in one another and in the government. Because of the lack of the rule of law and the absence of security, people rely heavily on self-help systems in which interethnic tensions, cattle raids, and disputes over land and aid can lead to breakdowns of trust and violence. The extension of social trust beyond immediate kinship networks has been undermined by the conflict. South Sudan has an overwhelmingly young population: About 51% of the population is under age 18, and 72% is under age 30. Many of South Sudan's citizens have grown up outside the country as refugees in neighboring countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya or Uganda, or as internally displaced people in Sudan. Frequent displacement; pressures on mutual aid systems from repeated crises; conflicts over space and land in urban centers; and chronic, unresolved conflicts and past violence undermine social organization and association.

n/a

Social capital

2



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

The level of socioeconomic development in South Sudan is among the lowest in the world. Internationally comparable indices are scarce due to a lack of statistical data. The U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) ranked South Sudan 192nd out of 193 countries on its 2022 Human Development Index, with a score of 0.381, representing a minor decline from 2021. The World Bank estimates that 82.3% of the population lives below the poverty line. The adult literacy rate is estimated at 35%, and at only 29% for women. The World Bank estimates the gross enrollment rate at the primary education level at 82%, but this instruction is often interrupted as teachers go unpaid, and further undermined by limited training, conflict and environmental crises. Many

Question Score

Socioeconomic barriers

1



people depend on international NGOs and churches to provide basic public goods, particularly access to health care. An estimated 44% of people in the country have access to primary health care. Urban areas are more developed than the vast rural parts of the country, where humanitarian agencies access have a very difficult time gaining access, even beyond the risk of armed violence. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 9 million people are in need of international help (2023 report: 8.9 million), and 6.3 million face conditions of severe food insecurity, with the number forecast to rise to 7.7 million during the 2025 lean season. The vast majority of South Sudanese depend on small-scale subsistence farming and cattle herding that, in the best-case scenario, produce enough food for their (extended) family and allow families to survive environmental crises. This is supplemented by a growing cash labor market, which allows families to purchase school and health care supplies and transportation, but is also used in many regions to supplement food production. The World Food Programme estimates that more than 40% of households spend more than 65% of their income on food. As of December 2024, about 2.3 million people from South Sudan were refugees or asylum-seekers in neighboring countries, primarily in Uganda and Sudan, according to UNHCR. In addition, 1.8 million people were internally displaced within South Sudan. The recent conflict in neighboring Sudan and a deteriorating humanitarian situation for South Sudanese refugees in the country led to an influx of 0.8 million refugees and returnees into South Sudan. It further led to a substantial halt to the country's oil exports, since the main pipeline dried up in February 2024 and repairs were hampered by insecurity and a lack of funding. As a consequence, the country's currency was significantly weakened, public salaries could not be paid and prices increased dramatically. In early 2025, oil exports via Port Sudan resumed. Insecurity and displacement greatly affect people's livelihoods and food security. Women were especially affected by the civil war; for instance, women in South Sudan face the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, according to UNDP. In addition, women are targets of sexual abuse, especially as refugees, and are discriminated against in most aspects of social life.

Although data are very limited, the years of armed conflict were a major setback for the country's socioeconomic development. In addition, South Sudan is highly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters, which persistently compound the country's humanitarian crisis, jeopardize recovery and undermine development efforts. In 2024, new flooding affected almost half of the country's counties.

Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
GDP	\$ M	-	-	-	-
GDP growth	%	-	-	-	-
Inflation (CPI)	%	10.5	-6.7	2.4	91.4
Unemployment	%	14.0	12.5	12.5	-
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Export growth	%	-	-	-	-
Import growth	%	-	-	-	-
Current account balance	\$ M	-6.6	-596.7	577.9	-
Public debt	% of GDP	50.2	37.3	51.9	50.7
External debt	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Total debt service	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Public education spending	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	0.9	0.6	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	2.6	4.2	6.3	-

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

Business development in South Sudan faces various constraints, including a weak rule of law, widespread corruption and the overall security and humanitarian situation. Furthermore, poor infrastructure, a lack of reliable transport routes, poor access to electricity and internet connectivity, and extremely low levels of education and skills among the population add to these difficulties. Nevertheless, after the CPA, traders and businesspeople from neighboring countries flocked to South Sudan to start retail and wholesale businesses, construction firms, hotel and restaurant businesses, and telecommunications companies. However, the civil war forced many business owners to leave the country, particularly in 2016. People from the diaspora and educated South Sudanese have started companies, often closely connected to people in the government or the military. It is estimated that more than 80% of South Sudanese work in the informal sector, which is also the only area of opportunity for many women, youth and internally displaced persons. South Sudan is an emerging market, and the government aims to create a conducive environment for investors (internal and external).

The economic objectives section of the transitional constitution states that all levels of government shall encourage free markets and prohibit monopoly (Article 37 (2a)). The Investment Promotion Act and the Competition Act of 2009 define mechanisms to safeguard against and prevent the development of economic monopolies in the market. But in practice, senior military and government officials are heavily engaged in economic activities and as local partners of international investors. Agreements among investors, local government license offices, political elites, and military and security forces have created a degree of monopoly over major economic sectors, facilitated by an array of mostly regional commercial actors. As a consequence of the strategy to control trade, the petroleum trading industry is dominated by Somali traders; the hospitality sector by Ugandans and Kenyans; construction by Ugandans, Chinese and Sudanese companies; and water supply by Eritrean workers and companies. Companies operating in fields such as telecommunications, infrastructure development and government procurement are much more dependent on connections, bribes and corrupt practices to succeed. The government and the military are both important contractors. Good relations with people in the government and the army are indispensable.

Market
organization

2

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Competition policy

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Trade is liberalized in South Sudan. The government's main source of income is oil production, and lucrative investment opportunities in mineral and gold mining, logging, coffee, gum arabic, peanuts, and other agricultural products are increasingly being tapped by military-political and commercial actors, with only nominal attempts at the local and national levels to provide regulatory legislation and enforcement. Internal and border tariffs and checkpoint taxes have increased in recent years as part of the localization of military incomes and because of the long-term economic crisis.

Landlocked South Sudan depends on neighboring states for supplies of food, construction materials and various consumer goods. The northern part of the country is mostly supplied by Sudan. In previous years, the government of Sudan often closed its borders with South Sudan when tensions between the governments intensified, resulting in shortages of oil and other goods in South Sudan. Because Sudan's political situation is unstable, relations between Sudan and South Sudan are hard to predict. The conflict in Sudan halted South Sudanese oil exports in 2024 after a pipeline could not be repaired. The southern part of the country is supplied by Uganda and Kenya. Food is brought in from Uganda, while the port of Mombasa in Kenya supplies South Sudan with shipped consumer goods. Land grabbing by foreign investors is a problem. According to the Land Matrix database, until the civil war, investors from the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, and other Arab and Western countries owned about 10% (2.5 million hectares) of the country's land to use for purposes of resource extraction, oil mining or agricultural production. In 2016, South Sudan became a member of the East African Community (EAC), but did not send delegates to EAC meetings for several years. The first delegates to the EAC were elected in September 2022, and the country is still behind in implementing regulations.

Plans were made to build an oil pipeline to Lamu, Kenya, to reduce South Sudan's dependence on Sudan's pipelines, which have tended to be unpredictable and expensive. The escalation of the civil war in that country has substantially reduced oil production, a decline further exacerbated by falling world oil prices. Another plan calls for a highway from South Sudan to Mombasa to facilitate regional transport and trade. Neither project has guaranteed funding yet.

The banking sector is seriously underdeveloped in South Sudan. By the end of 2024, 31 commercial banks were registered in South Sudan, but few operated throughout the country. Most banks have offices only in a few urban areas such as Juba, Yei and the capitals of the 10 states. Few people have bank accounts. The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) reported that in 2017, only 8.6% of the population and 4% of women owned an account at a financial institution or with a mobile money service provider. According to the IMF, many domestic banks are heavily undercapitalized and face rising rates of non-performing loans. The government and the army have been planning to pay salaries through bank accounts, but this has yet to start. It remains complicated to make international bank

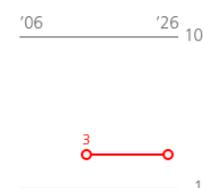
Liberalization of foreign trade

3



Banking system

3



transfers to or from a South Sudanese bank. As a result, most foreign companies, NGOs and international entities have accounts with one of the regional banks, such as Kenya Commercial Bank. Access to loans remains a major problem, so most businesses use international banks. Very few firms, including large firms, take out formal loans. In addition to the formal banking system, an informal money transfer system operates, with small companies transferring money between towns in South Sudan. There is a great shortage of foreign currency (mainly U.S. dollars), which results in a parallel black market. International withdrawals are not yet possible. As in other economic areas, banks are heavily influenced by political actors.

Through the Horn of Africa Digital Market Integration project, the African Development Bank has supported South Sudan and other countries in developing digital financial services and payment systems since 2022. Disruptions in oil exports and a lack of reserves have weakened the South Sudanese pound to an all-time low and left the government unable to pay public sector salaries.

8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

South Sudan's central bank was established following independence in 2011 under the Bank of South Sudan Act. The bank is de jure independent under the constitution and the Bank Act. Shortly after its creation, the bank introduced the South Sudanese pound (SSP) as its currency.

High inflation rates are still driven by heavy dependence on oil exports. In the last two years, inflation increased significantly, to rates of 40.2% in 2023 and 120.6% in 2024. The latter figure was primarily related to a halt in oil exports due to a broken pipeline. The inflation rates in recent years encouraged currency trading on the black market. In late November 2014, the central bank issued an order banning black-market currency transactions. At the time, the official exchange rate was SSP 3.16 to \$1, compared to more than SSP 5 to \$1 on the black market. In December 2016, the central bank allowed the foreign exchange rate to float freely and printed more South Sudanese pounds. This resulted in a rapid rise in the exchange rate, which had been SSP 3 to \$1 in June 2016, to SSP 669 to \$1 by the end of January 2023 and to SSP 850 to \$1 in April 2023. In 2024 and at the beginning of 2025, the exchange rate has skyrocketed to SSP 4,000 to \$1. The rates for the U.S. dollar on the black market are still significantly higher. The difference between the official exchange rate and the black-market exchange rate has created significant distortions in the economy.

President Kiir continues to replace the governor of the central bank and sometimes the deputy governor on a regular basis (January 2017, May 2018, January and November 2020, January and August 2022, October 2023, December 2024), which has seriously hampered the central bank's ability to take regulatory action and calls into question the degree of its de facto independence. In January 2023, the central bank ordered pricing only in pounds; the effect of this order is to be evaluated.

Monetary stability

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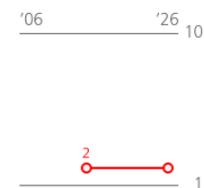


The collapse in oil production in 2012 exposed the vulnerability of the South Sudanese economy due to its reliance on a single source of revenue.

Since the start of the civil war, the economy has been in free fall, culminating in a GDP of \$1.8 billion in 2017. This rose again to more than \$8 billion in 2022, but has since decreased to \$5.24 billion in 2024. The years of civil war have significantly affected the South Sudanese economy, but dependence on oil exports also plays a crucial factor, as recent trends in 2024 have shown. Oil production was heavily affected by the war in South Sudan, and in 2024 the violent conflict in Sudan also affected oil revenues. As illustration, South Sudan produced about 500,000 barrels of crude oil per day before 2012. Since then, production fell and stabilized at about 150,000 barrels per day in 2022. After the near halt of exports in 2024, production resumed at 90,000 barrels per day in early 2025. The significant decrease in oil exports, the weakened currency and an economic crisis led public debt to reach 71.9% of GDP in 2024. The official budget for 2024/25 includes a deficit of 63% of the entire budget. In general, economic data from South Sudan are of poor quality. Projections for the coming years remain uncertain, mainly because of a lack of reliable data and the extremely high level of dependence on oil exports and oil prices. The IMF approved a \$114 million Food Shock Window rapid credit facility (RCF), most of which was directed to the transitional government's foreign reserves in 2023, but it had little effect with regard to stabilizing the currency.

Fiscal stability

2

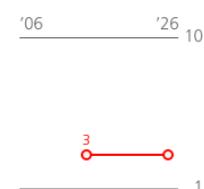


9 | Private Property

Although the transitional constitution guarantees the right to own property (Article 28), including for women (Article 16.5), South Sudan faces numerous property-related problems. These issues most often revolve around land. The Land Act of 2009 created a framework in which land belongs to the people of South Sudan but is regulated by the government. Land is classified as public, community or private. The conversion of community land into public land is particularly contested. Local communities near urban areas, for instance, can be compelled to release communal land for public purposes (with compensation). According to the Land Act, these public interests include urban development, resettlement and reintegration, and control of land for defense purposes (Section 73 (5)). The boundaries between the various types of land use and property are not entirely clear, and, as the chairperson of the South Sudan Land Commission admitted during a meeting, the Act can be interpreted in various ways. The everyday reality is arguably more complicated than the Land Act suggests. First, property rights are easily and often violated by people with political power or armed forces. Moreover, during the civil war, internally displaced people occupied land illegally, and rightful owners have a very difficult time in claiming their rights. Conflicts may also arise when local elites negotiate concessions with companies without prior consultation with the community. The balance of ownership between communities and the government is often unclear.

Property rights

3



Foreign ownership of land is prohibited. In addition, some cultural practices in South Sudan do not acknowledge land ownership by women, which contradicts the right of property ownership in the constitution. Beyond land ownership, the ongoing conflict, the lack of the rule of law and persistently poor security mean the protection of movable property is not guaranteed. Intellectual property rights are regularly violated. The confusion over property and access may be a source of future problems.

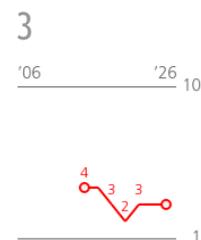
Before the civil war, the government worked to stabilize inflation, implement austerity measures and create an enabling environment to attract investors and develop businesses in South Sudan. This was needed to increase employment opportunities, diversify the economy and improve the country. In the seven years of civil war, those efforts were put on hold. However, a few national and international companies continued operating in the country. These corporations were largely involved in infrastructure projects, telecommunications, transportation and logistics. However, as the war continued, these companies, too, withdrew or scaled back their activities. A stable security environment after the end of the civil war will be essential to improving the business environment and attracting more companies to invest in South Sudan. Drastic floods and macroeconomic challenges in recent years have made these efforts even more complicated. Previous experiences have demonstrated that the success of private investment is determined by the relations between investors and the government, and between investors and the military. This has been problematic in terms of conflicts of interest and has resulted in a lack of clarity regarding the proper process for establishing a private business. Often, investors are confronted with the necessity of paying bribes to speed the lengthy process of business registration. This has led to the expulsion of some foreign investors who were not well connected to the government or the army. To increase foreign and domestic investment in the country, there is a need for structural reform in the private sector, specifically regarding the rule of law. While the government has repeatedly emphasized the importance of commercialization for the economic development of the country, there is a lack of visible legislation and implementation in this field.

10 | Welfare Regime

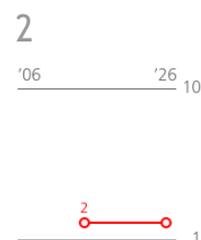
South Sudan lacks a formal welfare system of any meaningful kind. During the CPA period, some progress was made on the public service bill and a civil pension fund.

However, the extent to which these programs function is unclear, and appears to depend significantly on personal connections, including in the case of military pensions. With more than 80% of the population living in rural areas, many people in South Sudan depend on land for their livelihoods, and most social safety nets reflect this dependence on land along with community social support. The lack of safety nets or the presence of only limited ones, and the reliance on markets for food and additional paid work, especially but not only in urban centers, make many civilians vulnerable to shocks such as illness (especially pandemics such as COVID-19), droughts, floods, macroeconomic developments and insecurity.

Private enterprise



Social safety nets

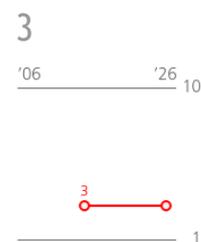


The social structure, which is based on various traditional practices in South Sudan, is a fundamental tool for providing safety nets, but has its downsides. In most urban centers, members of the working class often shoulder the burden of assisting relatives by paying for medical care and helping children from rural areas attend schools in towns, as these services are not available in the countryside. In South Sudan, many children have to work for their families. The South Sudanese diaspora continues to play a significant role in supporting social assistance networks through the provision of remittances. In general, social assistance is provided predominantly by NGOs. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), almost all social protection services are financed by donors.

These services mainly include food, health services and cash. There is a sharp divide between rural and urban areas in terms of the availability of social assistance and in access to key resources like health care, clean water and education. Many people who fled conflict during the civil wars (2013 – 2018) have remained in regional refugee camps in part because of access to some services and safety. Urbanization resulting from the wars has also increased the strain on urban communities. In addition, international aid is not able to reach a significant portion of the country's rural areas, especially in the rainy season. How this will develop after the end of the civil wars – given that South Sudan is experiencing rapid climate change – remains very hard to predict. Life expectancy has stagnated at 55.6 years compared with previous years. As in other conflict zones, the quality of these data is questionable.

Despite numerous articles in the transitional constitution on equal opportunities regardless of gender, ethnic or religious affiliation, there is little evidence that this is guaranteed in practice. The government has cited the lack of representation of women in the public and private sectors as a major concern. In 2013, the government developed a six-year affirmative action plan to increase the participation of women in education and the economy. At the political level, the representation of women in the government was institutionalized by the introduction of a 25% quota, which was increased to 35% in March 2013. To help achieve this goal, international and national NGOs support women in securing employment opportunities through affirmative action programs. But in practice, the ratio of women in various sectors, including the public sector, is far below the initially projected 25%. In national and state assemblies, women held only 32% of seats in 2021. Significantly fewer girls are enrolled in school than boys. According to the World Bank, only 28.9% of women aged 15 or older were literate in 2022, compared with 40.3% of men. An Oxfam study identified early marriage as the main reason that girls were not attending school. More generally, poverty increases risks for women such as gender-based violence (GBV), child marriage, forced marriage, unintended pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections such as HIV and AIDS. Women and girls experience higher poverty rates than men and boys.

Equal opportunity

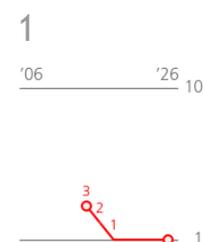


At a general level, the notion of “equal opportunity” has revolved around a lack of transparency, with high levels of patronage and clientelism. Patronage and clientelism are often tied to whether someone participated in the north-south civil war. For example, employment opportunities are often given to people who participated in the civil war or who are perceived to be sympathetic to the SPLM. Alternatively, positions are granted for reasons of “accommodation” to keep people who might otherwise (violently) oppose the government happy. Although there are no hard data on the privileges of some ethnic groups over others, the fact that the perception of such privileges is widely shared is an impediment to governance in the country. The involvement of the Dinka and Nuer on the SPLA side of the war was reflected in better subsequent employment opportunities for Dinka and Nuer people, particularly in government institutions. During the civil war (2013 – 2020), a large proportion of Nuer people lost their government positions because they were dismissed or fled. The ethnic dimension of employment has led to the widespread perception of “Dinka dominance” in government institutions, and it remains to be seen whether this will fully change if the peace deal is fully implemented.

11 | Economic Performance

Given the political and security situation in South Sudan, the country’s economy is underperforming and cannot generate sustainable, inclusive economic growth. However, quantitative data on South Sudan remain significantly limited, and data quality is questionable. Given the immense size of the informal sector, the lack of trade data and poor data-collection capacity, figures may be inaccurate. Amid the near halt in oil exports in 2024, the South Sudanese pound significantly weakened, and the country suffered an inflation rate of 120.6%. This compounded the economic crisis resulting from the civil war. About 98% of the government’s annual budget and 80% of its gross domestic product (GDP) are derived from oil production and exports, which were disrupted and diverted by the civil war and, in 2024, by the violent conflict in Sudan. In terms of infrastructure, the conflict not only resulted in the abandonment of development projects underway before the civil war, but also contributed to the destruction of existing infrastructure, especially in areas repeatedly hit by conflict. The forced displacement of large numbers of civilians by the war and environmental crises in recent years, and their subsequent inability to contribute to sustained, equitable and commercial economic production, offer some indication of the negative economic impact of the civil war. About 9 million (last report: 8.9 million) people are in need of assistance. The unemployment rate was 12.3%, according to the World Bank, which forecast GDP growth of 3.8% for 2025.

Output strength



12 | Sustainability

The existing legal framework of South Sudan places strong emphasis on environmental protection, an emphasis that stems from Article 41 of the constitution. In 2016, a separate Ministry for Environment and Forestry was instituted as part of the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ACRISS). In the same year, the National Legislative Assembly passed a national strategy governing the use of environmental resources. Following the formation of the new unity government in February 2020, the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) was not established until January 2025.

Despite increasing flooding, droughts and displacement from environmental crises, and amid continuing local conflicts across large areas of the country, environmental protection ranks very low on the national agenda. There are also conflicts between the mining sector and efforts to promote wildlife tourism. Little funding is provided for environmental programs, and new environmental protection regulations remain unimplemented, despite discussions in 2022 over potential river dredging for flood protection as part of a wider public crisis over the proposed Jonglei Canal scheme. Exactly what functions the new EMA will carry out in the future remains unclear.

Achieving progress in the quality of education is crucial not only for economic development but also for restoring conditions of peace and security in South Sudan. A large number of young people are unemployed, with few job prospects. This has led to a sharp increase in the recruitment of young people into the armed forces of the various conflict parties, as well as a rise in the prevalence of criminal activity. In general, South Sudan lacks institutions to educate and train the professional workforce it needs to function as a state. As in other areas, however, the lack of data makes it difficult to obtain a clear picture of the state of education in South Sudan. According to UNESCO (no World Bank data available), South Sudan spent about 1.54% of its GDP on education in 2022 (the latest data available), a very low share. Consequently, South Sudan performed poorly on the U.N. Education Index in 2022, with a score of 0.35. No data on research and development spending is available.

The adult literacy rate is estimated at 35% (2018) and at only 28% for women. However, the World Bank estimates the gross enrollment rate at the primary level of education at 82%. UNICEF has reported a significant increase in the number of children who are not attending school, from 2.2 million in 2018 to 2.8 million in 2024. Many people depend on international NGOs and churches to provide basic public goods, particularly access to health care. An estimated 44% of people have access to primary health care, although this also depends on the prevailing security situation. Urban areas are more developed than the vast rural parts of the country, where humanitarian agencies have a very difficult time gaining access even absent the effect of armed violence.

Environmental
policy

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Education policy /
R&D

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In general, South Sudan has yet to make much progress in building educational institutions. Efforts by various international NGOs have contributed to the development of primary and secondary education, leading to a general increase in enrollment. However, the quality of teaching and school infrastructure remains very low. UNICEF figures indicate that fewer than 50% of teachers have received formal training, and that more than 80% are volunteers not paid by the government. Overall, teacher pay is very low. There is also a high rate of turnover among female teachers due to insecurity. Moreover, most schools are concentrated in urban centers. In rural areas, a shortage of schools has led to overcrowding and a lack of available teachers. Because of the poor quality of primary and secondary education, wealthier families send their children to East African countries such as Kenya and Uganda for schooling.

Because primary and secondary schools receive support from international non-governmental organizations, the government has tended to focus on funding higher education. South Sudan's three universities were developed by the government of Sudan before South Sudan achieved independence.

President Kiir serves as chancellor of all public universities, another way of exerting influence over every part of people's lives. In addition to the state universities, there are several private universities in South Sudan. Prominent among them are the Catholic St. Mary's University and the Bridge University. The University of Juba and the University of Bahr El-Ghazal also offer a wider variety of programs, including medicine.

Like primary and secondary education, universities in South Sudan face numerous challenges, including funding and staffing. In principle, all government universities are funded by the government. However, government financial cuts and ongoing conflict have been strongly detrimental to the education system. Furthermore, prior to independence, most lecturers in government universities were from northern Sudan. After the secession, almost all northern Sudanese lecturers abandoned their teaching positions to join universities in Sudan. This resulted in an acute shortage of teaching staff in South Sudan. Exacerbating this issue was the fact that after independence South Sudan adopted English as the official language. This presented another challenge to some lecturers who had received their education in Sudan, where Arabic was the language of instruction in universities. As of the end of the review period, the vast majority of state teachers and public university staff (like all other civil servants) had not received salary payments since December 1, 2023.

Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

The leadership of South Sudan builds on the hierarchy of the decades-long fight against the government in Khartoum. These old cadres dominated the leadership, especially in the early years after the CPA. Over the years, younger members of these political factions were gradually allowed to take part in governing the country. The structural constraints on governance and development remain extremely high even compared to those in other conflict-ridden African countries.

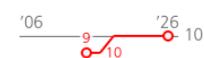
Among these structural constraints is the lack of infrastructure, such as a reliable road network, especially given the country's landlocked geographic position. During the rainy season, vast areas of the country become inaccessible. Some places are entirely flooded, while in other areas there are no bridges allowing rivers to be crossed. With a few notable exceptions (the towns of Yei and Maridi, for instance), power infrastructure is absent; the whole country runs on diesel generators. These infrastructure and access issues have worsened, and will continue to worsen, as South Sudan is exceptionally exposed to climate change and increasingly regular environmental disasters, including flooding and drought, as has been demonstrated multiple times in recent years.

In addition to the country's lack of physical infrastructure, the service sector is struggling. As with the education sector, other public service sectors (such as health care, sanitation and the provision of drinking water) for local people were financed mainly by the donor community and delivered by implementing NGOs. Because of the civil war, some implementing NGOs have left the country, while others have shifted funding to the provision of relief for people displaced by the civil war.

However, the country's largest structural problem is persistent insecurity nationwide. According to OCHA's situational reports, the civil war, local conflicts and natural disasters have left 1.8 million people internally displaced, 2.29 million as refugees in neighboring countries and 9 million in need of external assistance. In addition, since the outbreak of the civil war in neighboring Sudan, around 888,000 Sudanese have fled to South Sudan and need assistance. Yet insecurity was omnipresent in people's lives even before December 2013 because of the lack of the rule of law. Insecurity creeps into all other aspects of life: It undermines trust between communities, leads to poor harvests and interrupted education, and seriously impedes people's faith in the government. The seven years of civil war, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Sudan have only exacerbated a situation that was already worrisome.

Structural
constraints

10



1

Civil society traditions in South Sudan have largely centered on churches. Many faith-based organizations have deep roots in South Sudan and are active across the state. The church has also played a role in mediating conflicts in South Sudan during the interim period and since independence. The church continued to play a role in the civil war, though with increasing difficulty.

For years, the number of civil society organizations operating in the country has also steadily increased. Numerous youth groups, women's groups, farmer groups and human rights groups have been established, often with support from international donors. The lack of a proper tradition of civic representation results in a civil society that is not always as inclusive as many donors hope. In many villages and towns, a rather small local elite participates in local politics, associative life and the church.

With the end of the civil war, constructive intervention by civil society is increasingly crucial and will be even more so given the current fragile situation. Civil society organizations will be expected to play a role in promoting national healing and reconciliation among the various groups. However, civil society is also divided by the same political tensions and politicization of ethnicity as the rest of society, especially after nearly a decade of internal conflict. As tensions have grown between the government and NGOs, the government has become increasingly suspicious of civil society groups, as shown by the 2015 National Security Bill and the National Security Service Act, amended in 2024. Furthermore, the withdrawal of some NGOs or the downscaling of their activities because of the civil war has negatively affected the performance of civil society groups that depend on the donor community.

Civil society is even weaker in remote, rural areas, which make up most of the country. Chiefs and other traditional leaders could act as pillars of civil society. However, the Local Government Act has co-opted chiefs and integrated them into the SPLM patronage system. Consequently, there is a risk that chiefs will be used by the government to achieve its own objectives rather than serving as checks and balances on excessive government action for the benefit of society.

Community conflict has been a major issue since the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 and has remained intense ever since. Intense conflicts continued during the transitional period (2005 – 2011), during South Sudan's early post-independence period (2011 – 2013), and until and after the civil war, including several border skirmishes with Sudan. Small-scale conflicts have repeatedly escalated into broader conflicts, and conflicts rooted in power struggles among political elites have been transformed into conflicts between communities and ethnic groups. In addition to persistent conflicts between various cattle-herding groups and between farmers and pastoralists, new forms of conflict have emerged, sometimes between communities with no history of ethnic violence. The causes of these conflicts are often multifaceted and intertwined, but land plays a central role and is often the initial trigger, especially as environmental disasters have increased across the country in the last decade and displacement and pressures on safe lands

Civil society traditions



1

Conflict intensity



1

and water supplies have intensified. The high number of refugees from Sudan since the 2023 outbreak of the civil war there only adds to the already difficult political and humanitarian situation.

The start of the civil war in 2013 was a clear manifestation of the dynamic and multifaceted conflicts in South Sudan. The conflict began as a power struggle among SPLM elites, especially between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Vice President Riek Machar. Yet in less than 24 hours, the violence assumed an ethnic dimension and became a war between Dinka and Nuer groups. The targeting and killing of people from other ethnic groups demonstrated how quickly a political crisis can spiral out of control. The civil war that ensued has left deep traces, even if the 2020 government of unity lasts longer than the previous interim governments. The violence has seriously polarized and divided society.

The intensity of conflicts in South Sudan is also due to contradictions in the legal framework and the failure to resolve the root causes of conflict. Resolving cases through the courts is complicated and expensive, and thus effectively beyond the means of many local people. As a result, many people do not pursue their disputes through the legal system, but instead take the law into their own hands and resort to violence.

II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

When the civil war broke out in 2013, it quickly became clear that the government and its adversaries prioritized settling their differences through violence. Economic plans and priorities were put on hold for about seven years. Both sides and the remaining institutional structures focused more on financing the war than on formulating a strategy to boost the economy or for stabilizing the situation for the civilian population.

All levels of government, including parliament, the army and the executive, became sharply divided as a result of the civil war. The succession of conflicts affecting South Sudan is rooted in power struggles between senior SPLM members.

After two years of fighting, hopes that the signing of the August 2015 agreement would reunify the divided ruling party and secure peace lasted only a few months. In July 2016, three months after the agreement took effect, violence broke out again. After two additional years of war, both sides agreed to a new peace deal in September 2018, but it took another two years to form a new unity government in February 2020. It remains unclear whether the agreement will last this time or whether violence will break out again if national elections are finally held, a prospect that is not foreseeable at the moment. Apart from power struggles between political elites, South Sudan

Question
Score

Prioritization

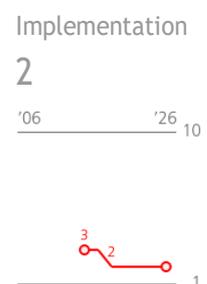
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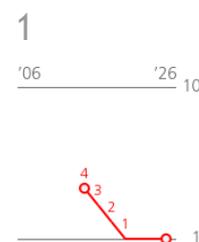
continually deals with dozens of splinter groups and other armed entities that are not under the direct command of rebel or military leaders, and thereby have the potential to spoil the current peace process. Governance by President Kiir's ruling faction appears to be oriented toward the short-term and shaped primarily by calculations of immediate utility and the maintenance of political, economic and military dominance. One case in point is the recent reshuffling of key security positions around the president. Also, likely in response to the fiscal crisis caused by the continued shutdown of the oil pipeline running from South Sudan to Sudan and the subsequent lack of oil-export revenue to keep the country's rivalrous security elites aligned, Kiir appears to have resorted to restructuring his patronage network, particularly in the security sector.

Since the start of the civil war, the government's priorities have been to contain the rebellion as much as possible. It tried to maintain strict control over areas under its influence and prevent others from joining the opposition. Intimidating and jailing journalists, NGO workers and church workers are tactics used to contain criticism. Threatening to dismiss the elected parliament and governors is another method to maintain the status quo in areas where there is no active fighting between the government and opposition forces. The government has also canceled elections multiple times. Consequently, the government has extended its mandate to 2026 in a way regarded by most opponents as illegal. Even the peace agreement signed in August 2015 was a government strategy to contain the rebellion. Later events demonstrated that the government was not serious about reaching a peaceful settlement of the violence. The new peace deal of September 2018 is seen as a "copy-and-paste" version of the 2015 agreement, cementing the current power relations. As the last agreement failed and the general situation has not changed significantly, the likelihood of yet another collapse is relatively high. Talks mediated by Kenya to include the exiled opposition in the deal are currently deadlocked. The government's strategy to contain the civil war in war-affected states has failed. The scale of the war and the level of harm inflicted on various communities suggest that it will not be easy to implement the new agreement. None of the priorities that were set by the government prior to December 2013 have received any meaningful attention in recent years. The recent financial crisis stemming from a lack of oil revenues has led to further disruption, as the president has reshuffled key security positions, appointing loyal persons. Also, the situation for the opposition and the freedom of expression have deteriorated, as highlighted by the United Nations. At the subnational level, some states have tried to continue working toward service delivery, tax harmonization and local security. However, with the disruption of the constitutional state system by raising the number of states from 10 to 28, then to 32 during the period from 2015 to 2020, with a subsequent drop back to 10, these efforts are likely to be in disarray. It remains to be seen whether regional administrations will reach a point where they can pursue targeted policies without having to deal with acute crisis situations, power struggles or violence.



Because of years of urgent crises, both government and international agencies have become more responsive to immediate issues, and learning from past policy implementation has been very limited. The international community used to play a substantial role in providing policy frameworks, implementation models, and monitoring and evaluation capacities. In most national governments, external technical assistants produced budgets, annual reports and development plans. The institutionalization of frameworks for policy design, implementation and evaluation is still ongoing. During the civil war, many donors put their support for the government of South Sudan on hold. Much of the funding was reoriented toward humanitarian needs. It is likely that some of the initial progress in this field has ebbed due to the new priorities of both the government and the international donor community. Recent trends suggest that the financial crisis in 2024 limited government action considerably.

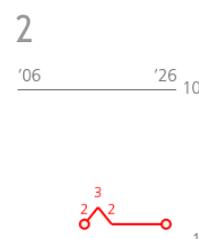
Policy learning



15 | Resource Efficiency

Because of oil revenues, the government of South Sudan has for years had more financial resources available to it than many of its more stable neighbors. For instance, because of South Sudan's small population, it had a much higher GDP per capita than either Uganda or Ethiopia. However, even though data from the IMF, the World Bank and the United Nations differ significantly, they all indicate that, because of seven years of civil war, South Sudan is now among the most troubled states in the world. The country remains severely underdeveloped, and available funds are invested only modestly in public goods such as education (3% of government spending) and health (1%). The bulk of the official budget is allocated to the security sector (38%), and for years it has been used to finance the war. Overall, there is significant political influence over the appointment and dismissal of state personnel; this tends to reflect patronage networks, specifically those of the president. All major areas of administration depend on political networks and patronage. In late 2024, a major reshuffling of key security positions took place, in part because the government was unable to maintain control over these networks as oil revenues decreased significantly. For most of 2024, administrative staff members did not receive full pay.

Efficient use of assets



Because of weak state structures and seven years of civil war, the level of government efficiency is difficult to assess. Overall administrative capacity is low, and data are often unavailable or of doubtful quality. According to the 2023 Open Budget Survey, South Sudan has a transparency score of 13 out of 100 (a small decrease from 15 in 2021) and ranks 107th out of 125 countries in the category of budget transparency. The process of agreeing on and releasing the official budget is usually delayed, and it is usually published late, as was the case in 2024.

Because of the long wars, many South Sudanese have lived and/or studied abroad, either within the region or in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada or Australia, all of which have large South Sudanese diaspora communities.

Many have returned home over the past few years, bringing the capacities they acquired abroad. However, because of the lack of transparency in recruitment procedures and the need to accommodate certain individuals in government or the military, returnees may have difficulty using their skills effectively to benefit the public administration and the country.

In general terms, policy coordination is poor. This is due in part to a lack of institutional capacity and economic development, as well as to persistent insecurity, particularly since the start of the current civil war. The lack of policy coordination is sometimes a deliberate attempt by the ruling elite to undermine the authority of some institutions, particularly the subnational institutions of states, payams and lower levels of governance. The change from 10 states to 32 – and back to 10 again with the 2020 peace deal – has made coordination among these new and ill-equipped structures very difficult.

Despite numerous policies and guidelines defining the distribution of roles across sectors, the central government is often accused of interfering in matters that fall under the jurisdiction of lower levels of governance, such as community land leases. The lack of policy coordination is also evident in the security and land sectors. In addition, patronage and corruption undermine state structures and the coherence of policy implementation, and repeated changes in key positions have lacked transparency.

Generally, the executive tends to dominate other pillars of government. In addition, the national level tends to dominate state-level policies. Some states are trying to make progress in certain domains, but they are often hindered by confusion over roles and responsibilities, a lack of funds, and the national level's dominance. Officials at the state and county levels often complain about interference from the national government that comes without proper advance warning. Tax and revenue collection, for instance, is one area in which a lack of coordination impedes the activities of lower levels of government. It remains to be seen whether this will change with the recent tax increases agreed in late 2024, the implementation of which is still uncertain.

Finally, the executive's apparent control of the judiciary and the legislature is another area that highlights the lack of policy coordination. At the national level, the president has tended to rule by presidential decree, which significantly undermines the work of the legislature. When policies are presented to the National Legislative Assembly for deliberation, the president tends to dictate what should and should not be adopted. Building on the practices at the national level, state governors and county commissioners have tended to rule by decree as well, though this contradicts all existing laws.

Policy
coordination

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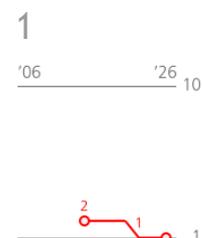
Despite pronouncements about accountability and measures against abuse of office, a widespread and endemic lack of transparency hampers the fight against corruption. Many senior government officials feel entitled to their positions because of their contributions to the fight against the north or their positions within patronage hierarchies. These hierarchies have been considerably hampered by the lack of oil revenues in 2024, leading to the dismissal of persons perceived as comparatively less loyal. Corruption, patrimonial politics, opaque deals and abuse of office are part of the country's political practice. The financial resources that became available during the first years after the signing of the CPA, both in terms of oil revenues and development aid, were unprecedented for the semi-autonomous government. There was no system in place to monitor the use of the funds, and billions of dollars were reportedly stolen from the government of Southern Sudan. Transparency International ranks South Sudan among the most corrupt countries in the world. Government security services interfere with all major industries and demand payments from them.

The Anti-Corruption Committee, established during the interim period, has its functions set out in the transitional constitution (Articles 143/44). The constitution gives the Anti-Corruption Commission the powers to investigate and prosecute. According to the independent Sudd Institute, however, the problem is that the “Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2009 has not been amended to include the prosecutorial powers for the Commission.” None of the officials investigated by the Commission has been subject to prosecution. Moreover, although anti-corruption policies exist, implementing and enforcing them is challenging because courts are controlled by the executive. NGOs have criticized the September 2018/2020 peace deal for once again failing to address corruption effectively. In general, cases of corruption are rarely investigated or made public. NGOs and journalists receive no security when they investigate corruption.

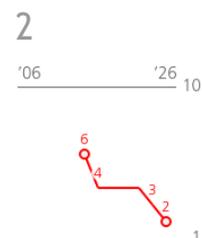
16 | Consensus-Building

At the time of independence, the people of South Sudan and many of its leaders agreed on the urgent need to provide conditions of safety, democracy and inclusive development. However, many in the political and military elite seem to pay no more than lip service to these values, and to be more concerned with their resources and power bases than with peace and democracy. Combined with the personal ambitions of some of the war's protagonists, these divisions have left South Sudan more divided today than at any time since independence in 2011. Recent years have also shown how deeply divided the leadership is over whether to prioritize peace and democracy or instead to continue fighting over power. The violence in December 2013 and the seven subsequent years of civil war were caused by these divisions. As the civil war continued, more factions emerged, with splinter groups breaking away from SPLM. In 2024, there were also severe tensions within the ruling elite, as well as among other

Anti-corruption policy



Consensus on goals



groups across the country. The fact that SPLM continues to narrow the political space makes it difficult for new political actors to emerge. Rural areas, on the other hand, are mostly under the authority of chiefs and local military units, often directly under the command of regional military and political structures. Paramilitary forces from Sudan have reportedly crossed the border repeatedly. Some NGOs (mostly in the development field), professional groups such as lawyers, and individuals work to promote democratic values, especially in the context of elections. But for now, there is no question of consensus-building.

Although there is a proclaimed general consensus on the principles of a market economy, ongoing conflict and power struggles within the ruling party are major impediments to a functioning market economy. Similarly, the oil revenue crisis throughout 2024 considerably hindered planning and the development of further economic consensus.

The evaluation of democratic actors and support for democracy in South Sudan have two perspectives: On the one hand, despite the high levels of factionalism, violence and seven years of civil war, all parties involved in the conflict claim to have the goal of protecting democratic rights. This was also the case in the conflicts that predated South Sudan's independence. Both those fighting against the government and the government itself claim to be fighting for the restoration of democratic principles and values in the country.

In practice, various political actors have used violence to stay in power, gain access to power or regain previous government positions. Repressive government policies (for example, restrictions on the freedoms of assembly or expression and intimidation of emerging political parties) are often used strategically to retain power. The rebellion of Riek Machar and other groups was in part a reaction to the government's repressive policies, but was primarily motivated by their dismissal from powerful positions. Political actors in South Sudan are aware of the international value of democratic government and act accordingly. In conclusion, various groups have claimed to be working toward the consolidation of democratic rights as a means of justifying their power struggle to external actors and donors. Although South Sudan is trapped in a violent conflict, none of the actors within the government or the opposition can be considered outright anti-democratic. Ironically, all armed opposition to the government over the past 10 years started in the name of democracy. In practice, however, many of these armed groups were mainly concerned with their personal well-being rather than with the public good, which indeed makes them rather anti-democratic. Examples of militia leaders who "fought for peace" after the 2010 elections include George Athor, who was killed by the government in December 2012; Peter Gadet, who rejoined the SPLA in August 2011 but then rebelled in December 2013; and David Yau Yau, the Murle leader who signed a peace agreement with the government in January 2014 in which he was granted autonomy over the Greater Pibor Administrative Area.

Anti-democratic actors

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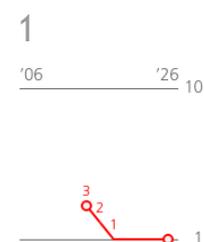


The current rebellion differs from other rebellions in both impact and in the motivations of the opposition forces. The anti-democratic tendencies exposed in the South Sudanese government in the years leading up to the violence were a source of concern to many South Sudanese leaders. In addition to the armed opposition, there were many members of the SPLM leadership, other political parties and civil society leaders who had doubts about the government's direction. The actions of potential democratic reformers and the opposition, as well as an increase in state repression, have been prominent in recent years, and arbitrary detentions have been common. In July 2024, the government adopted legislation that preserves detention powers routinely abused by the National Security Service – a move that will further empower and embolden state repression – despite pleas for revisions from numerous national, regional and international entities. Elections have been delayed again and are now scheduled for 2026, although it is far from certain that they will be held that year.

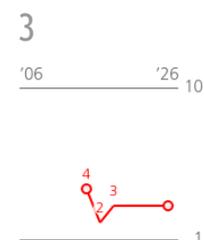
In addition to ethnic divides, there are numerous social cleavages in South Sudanese society. Conflicts in rural areas often concern access to resources, such as grazing land for cattle. Resource conflicts have been central to disputes in areas where a large proportion of the population depends on cattle for their livelihoods. In the years after the CPA, disputes over land have become central to conflicts between communities, and have often assumed an ethnic dimension. Although labeled “ethnic” or “land” conflicts, the root causes are broader. However, ethnicity or land are often used as strategies by political elites to mobilize support for their specific interests, whether political or economic. In recent years, these cleavages have led to intense intercommunal violence. Another cleavage involves competition within the public sector workforce. Those who fought for the SPLA feel that they have a right to public employment opportunities despite their lack of experience or skills. Those educated in Sudan during the war are regarded with suspicion and are often marginalized. Citizens who have returned from the diaspora face similar doubts. Language, age and gender are other fractures in society that need to be addressed. The patronage system controlled by the ruling elite further strengthens these cleavages.

Civil society plays an important role in South Sudan. The South Sudan Civil Society Forum (SSCSF) claims to have a membership of more than 200 civil society organizations, and frequently engages in political debates. A few key organizations, such as the Sudd Institute, the Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO) and various churches, play instrumental roles in bridging the gap between the state and society. Despite continued efforts to contribute positively to state-building in South Sudan, civil society groups have been negatively affected by the civil war, with some organizations taking sides in the conflicts. Some civil society groups have also been internally divided in their support for the government or opposition forces. This has resulted in many civil society groups becoming increasingly partisan. As mentioned earlier, the public space accorded to free expression, deliberations over policies and laws, and investigative journalism has steadily decreased in recent years. In July 2024, legislation that preserves powers of

Cleavage /
conflict
management



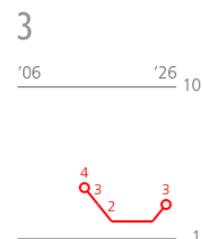
Public
consultation



detention routinely abused by the National Security Service, which is known for illegal detention and “ghost houses,” will further erode freedoms, as arbitrary detentions remain common. Thus, ending the still-unresolved political conflict and restoring the rule of law are key to ensuring that civil society groups can perform their duties and benefit society and the country.

Conflict mediation and reconciliation are critical tasks for many communities in South Sudan. Despite the high number of casualties caused by violence since the 1991 split within the SPLM, churches and traditional leaders were able to reconcile communities involved in conflicts with minimal intervention. But from the start of the interim period in 2005, political elites increasingly politicized conflicts and exploited ethnic cleavages, making it difficult to resolve local disputes, particularly those involving communities from different ethnic groups. In December 2012, the parliament approved a reconciliation campaign to be led by the then-Vice President Riek Machar. Although reconciliation became a major topic of conversation in South Sudan, many distrusted Machar’s intentions. Moreover, President Kiir interpreted this as a political strategy by Machar to win political support. This led Kiir to cancel the reconciliation process. In December 2016, Kiir issued a decree to form a National Dialogue Steering Committee. The civil war added yet another layer of grievances for the South Sudanese people, making any future reconciliation process potentially more divisive. Reconciliation remains central to South Sudan’s future development, but it is not going to be an easy process. On December 17, 2020, the National Dialogue Steering Committee issued its final report, concluding that under the current leadership of Kiir and Machar, a reconciliation process seemed unlikely. In November 2024, President Kiir signed the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation, and Healing Act 2024 into law after holding public consultations with support from the United Nations and civil society. The act will establish a mechanism to investigate human rights abuses, war crimes and other atrocities. Although both the United Nations and South Sudanese civil society have increased pressure to move forward, it remains to be seen whether these actions will be implemented in the near future.

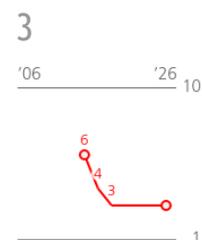
Reconciliation



17 | International Cooperation

The international community and development partners, particularly the World Bank, the European Union, Norway, the United States and the United Kingdom, have supported state-building in South Sudan since independence. Major donors have focused on infrastructure projects, diversification of the economy, security sector reform and police capacity. To provide technical assistance, numerous professionals from other countries have been deployed in various capacities within the government of South Sudan. However, the civil war has affected relations between the government and the donor community, international NGOs and national NGOs that receive external support. The NGO bill of 2015 was, in part, a reaction to growing tensions between the government and the international community, which resulted in

Effective use of support



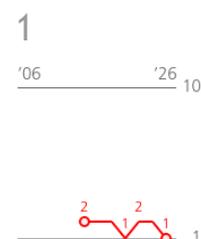
the government placing restrictions on the work of NGOs in the country. In January 2017, for example, the government banned relief agencies from operating in the then-rebel-controlled areas. In 2011, South Sudan published its first National Development Strategy (NDS) for a three-year period, as well as a “South Sudan Vision 2040” agenda document. During the civil war, no new NDS was prepared. After the 2018 peace deal, an NDS for the period from 2018 to 2021 was published, and in 2021 a Revised National Development Strategy (R-NDS; 2021 – 2024) was published. No newer strategic document existed as of the close of the review period. Bilateral relations between South Sudan and various other countries stabilized in recent years, but the region faces several challenges. With the start of the civil war, donors shifted the focus of their development aid to humanitarian assistance. Donor countries have stopped their direct and indirect support for the South Sudanese government. Nevertheless, members of the international community are seeking ways to continue assisting the South Sudanese people.

The relationship between the government of South Sudan and the international community has deteriorated in recent years. Although independence in 2011 led to initially high expectations, the civil war, human rights violations and defiance of peace agreements have caused the government and other parties to the conflicts to lose credibility. This is partly because it became increasingly apparent that South Sudan’s political elites primarily care about power struggles rather than working toward a better future for the country and its population. For years, neighbors such as Sudan and Uganda clearly favored the Kiir government as a vehicle to protect their own interests. The civil war in Sudan has destroyed any post-revolution hopes for better and closer relations between the two countries. The international community has remained neutral and has tried to foster mediation among the parties to the conflict. The Kiir government interpreted this as support for the armed opposition and accordingly tried to reduce the opposition’s influence in the country. Prior to the 2020 agreement, as a result of repeatedly broken peace deals, some international partners were close to canceling all support for South Sudan. Others have assessed that there will be no lasting peace as long as the current generation of political leaders remains in power.

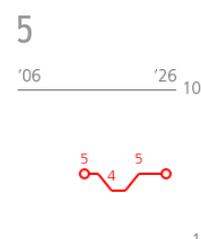
Relations with the international community and neighboring countries have been strained during the civil war. All neighboring countries have economic, political and strategic stakes in South Sudan, and for this reason were directly or indirectly affected by the conflict. With multiple political conflicts within and among the states of the region, as well as significant political change in recent years, it remains an open question as to whether the new unity government can gain momentum and cooperate with its neighbors on the challenges ahead.

After the civil war began in 2013, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) launched a mediation process. The neutrality of IGAD’s efforts was compromised by the presence of the Ugandan army on South Sudanese soil. More

Credibility



Regional cooperation



broadly, there was a disconnect between the objectives of the regional body IGAD (responsible for the peace talks and an observation mission monitoring earlier-signed cease-fires) and those of the individual member states (each with their own interests). After renewed violence in 2016, Ethiopia initially led IGAD's mediation efforts. Amid political change in its own country, the negotiations were handed over to Sudan, which sought to put heavy pressure on the opposition to agree to the peace deal. Khartoum found common ground with Kiir and supported a peace deal similar to the 2015 one, which favors the Kiir side. This changed again after the revolution in Sudan and again with the outbreak of the civil war in Sudan in 2023. The political and economic consequences of such relationships (for example, on oil exports and refugee flows to South Sudan) pose the most important regional challenge for South Sudan.

South Sudan is an important trading partner especially for Uganda, but also for Kenya. Each neighbor holds to its own interests while pushing the regional body IGAD to find a permanent solution. For now, instability in the country has inhibited South Sudan's potential economic role in the region. The country became an IGAD member in 2011 and ratified the new IGAD treaty in September 2024. The new treaty does not contain major steps toward regional integration, but it shows that countries in the region continue to consider cooperation with the IGAD framework to be important. In 2016, South Sudan became a member of the East African Community (EAC) but did not send delegates to EAC meetings for several years. Its first delegates to the EAC were elected in September 2022, and President Kiir chaired the EAC in 2024. Within the EAC, there are discussions on options to unlock the landlocked state via new highways and oil pipelines, but these have been delayed for years. Overall, South Sudan's regional cooperation seems to have improved somewhat after some very difficult years.

Strategic Outlook

South Sudan continues to face enormous political, social and economic challenges. The official end of the civil war with the creation of a new government of unity in February 2020 was a first step, but violence could still erupt again at any time (for instance, triggered by a disruptive event such as the death of a central political figure). The huge problems of the country can be addressed only if the warring parties show some interest in working together and the will to work for the benefit of the population. Around 383,000 people died in the civil war. The 2015 agreement lasted only briefly, and the 2018 R-ARCSS took two years to generate a fragile stalemate. Against this background, observers remain skeptical about the near future of South Sudan, especially if elections are finally held.

In a best-case scenario, the international community could facilitate cooperation among the parties to the conflict and contribute to an inclusive peace process. All sides would implement the agreement and work together to establish a new constitution (as agreed in the treaty) and avoid starting new national or local conflicts. In addition to stronger financial engagement by the international community (especially directed toward the reintegration or disarmament of forces and support for civil society organizing), a stronger U.N. mission with a credible, better-staffed and better-equipped UNMISS force could help control a disarmament process and restore security. However, the flow of substantial additional resources or serious engagement by the international community in the conflict is unlikely. The African Union will continue to delegate the primary responsibility for South Sudan to IGAD. In a worst-case scenario, the new peace deal will collapse and fighting will start again.

The 2018 agreement is largely a copy of the failed 2015 accord, which is not encouraging. Power relations within and around South Sudan have changed in the past few years. While the cease-fire agreement at the national level seems relatively intact, there is little sign that the underlying dynamics of power and violence in South Sudan are changing. Intercommunal disputes and local conflicts are fueling new violent clashes. Serious human rights violations occur regularly, disproportionately targeting women.

According to the United Nations, by the end of 2024, armed conflicts and natural disasters had resulted in 1.8 million people being internally displaced, 2.29 million refugees and 9 million in need of humanitarian assistance. To stabilize state structures and prevent collapse, the state needs support from the international community. However, donors remain skeptical and reluctant to invest political and economic capital in South Sudan. In January 2025, the new U.S. administration imposed a broad freeze on foreign aid for at least 90 days. As the United States is one of the biggest donors to South Sudan, three months without funding might be partly offset by other donors. A long-term cut could have devastating consequences. Apart from resolving the conflict between the primary adversaries, all actors need to address the basic needs of the population and foster reconciliation to arrest further social fragmentation in South Sudanese society. This will not be an easy process.