



ELECTIONS IN SOUTH SUDAN: LESSONS FROM EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

Nicki Kindersley



Rift Valley Institute
MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK

**JUST
FUTURE**

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JUST FUTURE

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Maggie Dougherty

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SUMMARY

South Sudanese people are suffering under economic and climatic crises and political stasis. The last two years have involved a rapid deterioration of basic living conditions and safety for the majority. Popular engagement with national elections must be understood in the context of this economic crisis, pervasive violence and externally brokered government settlements. People want fundamental change in their everyday financial security and in their relationships with the state.

National elections were scheduled for 22 December 2024, based on the terms of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). On 13 September 2024, President Salva Kiir Mayardit postponed the elections for two years, extending the 2018 peace agreement to an expiry date of February 2027. President Kiir's governing bloc will likely transition the 2018 Transitional Government of National Unity into new forms, either through continued use of presidential powers to make direct appointments from national to county levels, or potentially with the incorporation of new bargains struck under the Tumaini initiative in Kenya.

The central problem is that there is little incentive for an electoral project under the existing governing system. Currently, South Sudan is governed via direct central appointment of dependent political factions down to county level, and funded via the outsourcing of taxation and rent collection to armed entrepreneurs. There has been no real investment in organizing an electoral process that would reform the government. At the same time, increasingly pervasive rent extraction is entrenching the interests of a proliferating range of armed actors, amid growing and often violent competition.

The wider practical and legal issues with organizing elections are secondary to this core problem, although there are a range of such issues. Beyond resources and laws, there is no central political will for elections. This is why South Sudanese people (similar to international actors) simultaneously a) want elections and b) do not think they will happen any time soon.

Still, national elections remain a limited opportunity for popular sway (or simply dissent) over this government in endless transition, even if people generally feel there will likely be more violence and widespread malpractice. Elections are a chance for people to make moral and practical demands on their government. The popular demand for national elections is a demand for at least some forms of better leadership and changes to a bloated government system.

The key practical and organizational issues that must be addressed to make democratic action

possible, include: specific forms of safety and public order; processes for fair candidacy; transparent constituency representation; and the practical problems of who will do the work and how. South Sudanese citizens already practice electoral democracy in associations, unions and an increasing number of customary courts, offering lessons learned based on these community-level elections. In particular, there are possibilities for a national election process to open up space for government reform, local democratic change and the incorporation of some methods of South Sudanese democracy that are already in practice.

INTRODUCTION

South Sudan must eventually face national elections. The latest post-war transitional agreement signed in 2018 demanded elections in 2022; already two years overdue, elections were recently postponed from 22 December 2024 into 2026.¹ This last-minute delay, justified by a technical consultation, has been ratified despite its dubious legalities. The United States, United Kingdom and Norway (the Troika), as well as the EU and civil society and political actors are pushing for a new big tent power balance via the Kenya-led Tumaini initiative.² Whether Tumaini goes anywhere, South Sudanese people now face another two years of an expensive government and undemocratic power brokerage justified by the general emphasis on peace and stability. There are extensive political, legal, economic, logistical and societal challenges that stand in the way of an election even in two years. The three key electoral bodies—the National Election Commission (NEC), the Political Parties Council (PPC) and the National Constitutional

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- 1 The Troika in particular pressed for the December elections throughout 2024, although popular expectations of a further delay were widespread. In the face of a looming deadline to dissolve parliament on 22 September 2024, at the end of August, the office of the president asked the NEC, PPC and NCRC for a technical feasibility assessment for the elections. On 13 September, the office of the president announced a two-year extension of the 2018 peace agreement and therefore the delay of the elections. For more information, see: 'Donor Trio Press for South Sudan Elections', *Radio Tamazuj*, 8 August 2024. Accessed 15 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/donor-trio-press-for-south-sudan-elections>; 'Q&A: "Credible Elections the Best Option for Transition in South Sudan"—UK Envoy', *Radio Tamazuj*, 26 August 2024. Accessed 26 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/qa-credible-elections-the-best-option-for-transition-in-south-sudan-uk-envoy>; Beny Gideon Mabor, 'The Looming Constitutional Crisis in South Sudan and the Way Forward', *Radio Tamazuj*, 21 August 2024. Accessed 21 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/opinion-the-looming-constitutional-crisis-in-south-sudan-and-the-way-forward>; 'Kiir Wants Agencies to Come Clear on Poll Date', *Radio Tamazuj*, 13 August 2024. Accessed 15 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/kiir-wants-agencies-to-come-clear-on-poll-date>.
 - 2 The Tumaini Peace Initiative was launched on 9 May 2024 in Nairobi to mediate between the South Sudan transitional government and 'hold out' political factions that were not signatories to the R-ARCSS in 2018.

Review Commission (NCRC)—are still in a holding pattern to start work.³

It is still unclear what type of elections will take place, under what electoral system and within what constituencies. A full national election would involve at least presidential, national and state assembly, gubernatorial and county commissioner elections. In the 2010 national elections, this involved 12 separate ballots per voter.⁴ A series of laws have expanded the number of geographical constituencies, from the 102 created for the 2010 elections to almost 160.⁵ It is technically possible to move forward, potentially on a small number of national ballots, without an established permanent constitution, clear dispute resolution systems beyond the justice system and high court, clear constituency boundaries and without a census—but all of these missed elements leave large areas of the elections open to dispute.⁶ While the 2010 ‘cooked election’⁷ was far from a free and fair, it at least had county-level electoral commissions, voter education, international partner support and monitoring, financing and a long, clear preparation period.⁸

Despite a deep lack of clarity and confidence over forthcoming national elections, a consistent majority (70–80 per cent) of people surveyed in representative opinion polling in 2022 and early 2024 want elections to happen in 2024 or soon after. More than half of the same people

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- 3 As of early September 2024, the NEC has appointed 7 state offices (of a potential 13 for a total of 10 states and 3 administrative areas) and was allocated only USD 15 million in the 2023/24 budget, out of a requested USD 236 million, which they have spent on renovating offices and buying transport. The PPC has doubled down on their USD 75,000 party registration fee despite the ministry of justice and constitutional affairs ruling it invalid. The NCRC has so far received around USD 800,000 from the South Sudanese government and EUR 4 million from the European Union for its requested USD 43 million budget and has therefore not been able to fully start its 18-month programme. See: Associate Editor, ‘Political Parties Council Passes Election Code of Conduct’, *Radio Tamazuj*, 14 August 2024. Accessed 15 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/political-parties-council-passes-election-code-of-conduct>; ‘Voter Listing in Limbo as Budget Crisis Persists’, *Radio Tamazuj*, 7 August 2024. Accessed 15 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/voter-listing-in-limbo-as-budget-crisis-persists>; ‘W. Bahr El Ghazal State Election Commission Office Lacks Operation Funds’, *Radio Tamazuj*, 14 August 2024. Accessed 15 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/w-bahr-el-ghazal-state-election-commission-office-lacks-operation-funds>; ‘Constitution Making Held Back by Funds Delay’, *Radio Tamazuj*, 12 August 2024. Accessed 15 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/constitution-making-held-back-by-funds-delay>; ‘Constitution-Making Is Significant in Democratic Transition: EU Envoy’, *Radio Tamazuj*, 10 September 2024. Accessed 12 September 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/constitution-making-is-significant-in-democratic-transition-eu-envoy>.
- 4 Justin Willis, ‘Sudan’s Elections: Voting for Authoritarians’, *Africa Review* 3/1 (2011): 47.
- 5 David Deng et al., ‘Elections and Civic Space in South Sudan: Findings from the 2024 Public Perceptions of Peace Survey’, Juba: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung South Sudan Office, June 2024, 4. Accessed 28 June 2024, <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/d8-khpa-pq09>.
- 6 Nic Cheeseman, Luka Biang and Edmund Yakani, ‘How Not To Hold Elections In South Sudan’, discussion paper, Juba: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung South Sudan Office, April 2023, 3, 11.
- 7 Interview with JO, male government official and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.
- 8 Interviews with PM, male government official and 2010 election worker, Juba, 21 May 2024; J, male nominated MP, Eastern Equatoria, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

believe, however, that the risk of violence is high and will increase during elections.⁹ This is the core tension at the heart of election plans for South Sudanese people.

METHODOLOGY

This research is designed to provide detailed views from experienced election workers and a cross-section of South Sudanese society to feed into current technical reviews and large-scale quantitative polling. It seeks to understand both popular hope for elections and the fear of resulting violence. In particular, the research examines the following questions: What do people want from elections? What do people expect, and want, from elected leadership? How can South Sudan go forward to national elections safely?

After obtaining necessary authorizations and security clearances, research was conducted in May and June 2024 in rural and urban areas around Yei, Torit, Kapoeta, Juba, Yirol and Rumbek. A total of 75 interviews were conducted in balanced numbers across all sites, including with 26 women. Selection of study participants included both targeted interviews with past election candidates and workers (56 per cent of participants, including 7 male and 3 female members of parliament), and a broader sample of the population (44 per cent of interviewees, with attention to equal gender balance, selected for participation via a randomized method in urban and rural neighbourhoods).

Interviewees include customary authorities (7 men, 2 women); government staff (10 men, 1 woman); clergy (2 men); youth and women's union and civil society workers (5 men, 1 woman); and a wide range of both self-employed and waged workers, farmers and traders. Of the interviewees, 22 men and 7 women (40 per cent) were employed as election workers in various capacities in the 2010 national elections; 8 men and 5 women stood for election; and 3 men and 1 woman were directly appointed to office. This report surveys both cross-cutting opinion and specific expertise from this mixed cohort of interviewees.¹⁰

9 David Deng et al., 'Policy Brief on Elections: National Survey on Perceptions of Peace in South Sudan', Policy Brief, Edinburgh: PeaceRep (The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform), 2022 (hereafter 'PeaceRep Peace Survey'; Deng et al., 'Findings: Peace Survey'; Jan Pospisil, 'Voting out of Transition? Perspectives on the Planned National Elections in South Sudan', *Sudan Studies* 69 (January 2024): 23.

10 As such, this report is a grounded examination of the core popular tensions highlighted in recent representative polling. It is not exhaustive of the technical or political problems inherent in organizing national elections. A reflective approach based on electoral experience is a key safeguarding element of the project: Interviewees felt safer talking about similarities and differences with the 2010 elections, as well as lessons from that process, than discussing the potential 2024 election.

ELECTORAL EXPECTATIONS AMID CHALLENGING CONDITIONS

South Sudanese people are stuck in a desperate situation. They have little hope that the current leadership is willing or able to change this. In part, this is because Government of South Sudan (GoSS) leadership has consolidated its power and almost comprehensively dismantled opposition economic and military bases. Since 2015, the initial Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) peace agreement allowed President Salva Kiir Mayardit to directly appoint not just state governors but state ministers, secretaries and county commissioners, extending the power of and dependency upon central government down to county level. This was facilitated by the repeated division and re-amalgamation of counties and states from 2015 to 2020. This centrifugal reworking of government allowed for the destabilization of critics, the creation of distracting local conflicts and the construction of weaker patronage-dependent regional leadership subject to constant fire and rehire.

FROM CENTRALIZED OIL PATRONAGE TO DISPERSED RENT-SEEKING

During the 2000s and 2010s, the South Sudan government depended on oil revenues, which have an estimated 13-year further output from known reserves.¹¹ Since 2011, oil revenues have dropped by around 72 per cent, with a further sharp decline in prices over the 2020–2021 period.¹² By the time of the 2013 civil war, the government had started to fund itself by selling oil futures via loans against future production and oil consignment advance sales, as well as by monetizing the national deficit. As of June 2023, the total public debt was estimated by the IMF at 51 per cent of GDP, or around USD 3.72 billion, after the government took a series of IMF rapid credit facility loans in 2020 and 2021.¹³ By the time of the Sudan war in 2023, oil pipeline exports were at an 11-month low due to the ongoing war in Yemen. The main Petrodar pipeline

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- 11 UN OCHA, 'Humanitarian Needs Overview: South Sudan', Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023, Juba: UN OCHA, November 2022, 14; 'Crude Dealings: How Oil-Backed Loans Raise Red Flags for Illegal Activity in South Sudan', *The Sentry*, February 2023, 5.
 - 12 Paavo Eliste et al., 'Transforming Agriculture in South Sudan: From Humanitarian Aid to a Development Oriented Growth Path', Country Investment Highlights No 14, Rome and Washington DC: Food and Agriculture Organization and World Bank, 2022. Accessed 18 December 2024, <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/37951>.
 - 13 James Alic Garang, 'It Takes a Village to Raise a Child: South Sudan's Reengagement Strategy with Key International Financial Institutions', *Weekly Review*, Juba: The Sudd Institute, 2 August 2022, 1.

through Sudan has suffered stoppages since February 2024 and was then shut down. On 16 March 2024, the Dar Petroleum Oil Company (DPOC) consortium (Nilepet, the China National Petroleum Corporation, Sinopec and Petronas) declared *force majeure* over all deliveries of oil from the Port Sudan terminal. There are rumours of serious crises at Nilepet and other South Sudan oil companies. The USD exchange rate varied between SSD 1,000 and 2,000 to the dollar until 2023, when central loan defaults contributed to a rising SSP 4,000+ exchange rate.¹⁴ The GoSS is being ordered to pay defaulted loans and fines by various international courts in amounts of multiple USD billions. On 30 June 2024, the ministry of finance and planning suspended all payments until further notice.¹⁵

In practice, the oil patronage economy is coming to its end (even if the oil, its pollution and its infrastructure can still cause political, environmental and medical chaos). To mitigate the corresponding loss of revenue, the South Sudan government, security and military systems—especially outside of Juba—have rebuilt older systems of extractive taxation. These are similar to older wartime forms of government self-funding but with much further reach and layers of extraction across roads, markets, towns and border posts. Government and military authorities can sell contracts and licences, organize and tax markets and checkpoints, privatize and sell land, lease and tax mining and agricultural production, and amass other localized and privatized income from commercial sales and rents to aid and development organizations.¹⁶

In turn, this renewed economic pressure on everyday economies has created localized violent competition for control of these resources, markets and land. The sharp rise in conflicts across South Sudan since 2018, including over safe farming and grazing lands, waters and markets, has been instrumentalized in the fights of armed entrepreneurs for patronage and position.

ECONOMIC CRISIS FOR THE MAJORITY

South Sudanese people are suffering a deep and sustained economic and climate security crisis. Trapped in this inflationary and predatory governance system, most people need to seek a balance between maintaining food self-sufficiency despite repeated ecological crises, and finding cash incomes despite multiple taxations to pay for market goods, school fees and medical costs. In 2024, food insecurity is at record highs, with up to 70 per cent of the population estimated to need emergency food aid during the July–September 2024 period, with a serious risk of famine

14 'Currency Crisis Threatens South Sudan's Economy', *Radio Tamazuj*, 18 July 2024. Accessed 18 July 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/currency-crisis-threatens-south-sudans-economy>.

15 'Opinion: South Sudan's Economic Reckoning Is Coming', *Radio Tamazuj*, 12 July 2024. Accessed 18 July 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/opinion-south-sudans-economic-reckoning-is-coming>.

16 In late 2024 there were protests specifically against illegal checkpoints. The national government issued orders to shut them down. Revenues continue to be collected at legally authorized checkpoints. 'Central Equatoria to review checkpoint ban', *Radio Tamazuj*, 22 January 2025. Accessed 28 January 2025, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/central-equatoria-to-review-checkpoint-ban>.

for the flood-prone areas in the next 12 months.¹⁷ Cycles of flooding and drought jeopardize even short-term planning. This has meant expensive food and medical supplies. For the minority of skilled paid workers, office employment options have narrowed down to the USD-paid development and humanitarian industries and the mostly SSP-paid private construction, hotel, private security and transport industries. Government workers have not been paid for more than nine months as of December 2024 (other than a one-month token payment in July 2024). This includes the national army, government staff, teachers, and public sector doctors and health workers. People continue to leave the country in large numbers.¹⁸

Economic crisis and political stasis have catalysed protests and strikes across the country in recent years over the cost of living, lack of payment of government salaries and high taxes. Violent confrontations between civilian residents and soldiers of various battalions have also broken out across the country, including in Pochalla in September 2023 when the army deployed helicopter gunships against residents in local villages.¹⁹

A POLITICS OF DELAY

Since 2015, this economic crisis is matched by years of stasis during the ARCSS and Revitalized ARCSS (R-ARCSS) agreements. The performance of government has been managed through a politics of delay. The latest wave of electoral preparations for December 2024 is the third round of abortive electoral planning after national elections for 2015 and 2018 were cancelled.²⁰ At the same time, controls over public space and civic freedoms have been extended, most recently by the Transitional National Legislative Assembly passage of legislation that gives the National Security Service the authority to conduct arrests and detentions without warrants. Inflation,

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- 17 'South Sudan Acute Food Insecurity Classification, July 2024–January 2025', FEWS NET, July 2024. Accessed 19 August 2024, <https://fews.net/south-sudan-acute-food-insecurity-classification-july-2024-january-2025>; 'South Sudan: Food Security Outlook, June 2024–January 2025: Forecasted Severe Flooding Elevates the Risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) in Flood-Prone Areas—South Sudan', ReliefWeb. Accessed 9 July 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-food-security-outlook-june-2024-january-2025-forecasted-severe-flooding-elevates-risk-famine-ipc-phase-5-flood-prone-areas>.
- 18 Interviews with ADO, male teacher and former 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 26 May 2024; AL, male lawyer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; CO, male civil society worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; JN, female market worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; JB, male 2010 election staff and farmer and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; JN, female farmer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; LG, female worker and 2010 election worker, Torit, 3 June 2024; MI, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024; MJ, male worker, Torit, 3 June 2024; ML, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; MN, female worker and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; MM, male worker and 2010 election worker, Torit, 1 June 2024; NP, female worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; OJ, male soldier who did not vote in 2010, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024; PI, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024; PL, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024; anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024; ME, female elected MP, Juba, 24 May 2024; DM, male government official, Yei, 4 June 2024; SK, male clergy and 2010 election staff, Yei, 4 June 2024; SL, female worker, Torit, 1 June 2024.
- 19 'South Sudan Army Confirms Using Air Power to Fight Civilians in Pochalla', *Sudans Post*, 20 September 2023. Accessed 26 September 2024, <https://www.sudanspost.com/south-sudan-army-confirms-using-air-power-to-fight-civilians-in-pochalla/>.
- 20 Joseph Geng Akech and Luka Biong Deng, 'Operationalizing the 2023 National Elections Act: Opportunities and Challenges', *Weekly Review*, Juba: The Sudd Institute, 24 October 2023, 2.

limited funding, immediate humanitarian crises and sustained security threats have weakened civil society organizations (CSOs) and delimited their programming.²¹

The Tumaini initiative is the latest version of the sustained reworking of the revitalized big-tent peace deal framework of ARCSS from 2015. Signed on 15 July 2024, the Tumaini protocols now provide alternative forms of continued transition to the once again extended R-ARCSS. Kiir's government has already begun to dismantle parts of the old R-ARCSS transitional committee structures in favour of a new Tumaini-formed oversight commission.²² Even in mid-2024 before the elections were put off again, interviewees for this study discussed how elections are likely to be repeatedly postponed and strung out (even beyond 2026) as part of this process of maintaining the status quo.

WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT TO VOTE FOR?

This background of economic crisis and political stasis is critical for understanding why people want a national election even if many believe that an election will spark further violence. Most fundamentally, people want something to shift in the entrenched economic collapse and political stagnation. Most study participants do not see any other processes (including the Tumaini initiative) as providing pathways to actual structural change. In their view, an election might at least force some degree of change or offer chances for popular pressure. As this interviewee explains:

Those who say [there should be] no election have no love for the country—because how long can we be under leadership that nobody likes? Why are we not then doing an election to change leaders, and see the better, new version of South Sudan? The only thing that makes a change is elections.²³

Interviewee hopes for the election reflect their existing relationship with the state and their understanding of what a government can and should provide. Study participants who are waged employees either in government or at NGOs or CSOs—more conversant and invested in rescuing functional state systems—want a constitution to rationalize a state that might work, even if it has no viable financial foundation. These interviewees commonly emphasize their hope for a rationalization of government positions and systems that are seen as a drain on

21 Interview with NK, male civil society worker, Juba, 24 May 2024.

22 'Leaked Tumaini Agreement Reveals "New Transitional Plan"', *Radio Tamazuj*, 23 June 2024. Accessed 27 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/leaked-tumaini-agreement-reveals-new-transitional-plan>; Chany Ninrew, 'Tumaini Initiative Peace Parties Reach Agreement on 8 Protocols', *Eye Radio*, 15 July 2024. Accessed 27 August 2024, <https://www.eyeradio.org/tumaini-initiative-peace-parties-reach-agreement-on-8-protocols/>; 'The Political Impacts of the Tumaini Initiative in South Sudan', *Radio Tamazuj*, 22 August 2024. Accessed 27 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/opinion-the-political-impacts-of-the-tumaini-initiative-in-south-sudan>.

23 Interview with CO, male civil society worker, Torit, 31 May 2024.

budgets and a key element of anti-democratic patronage politics.²⁴ As this interviewee explains, ‘Five vice presidents for a country doesn’t make any sense. The people want to reduce this kind of corruption through the election.’²⁵

Several interviewees argue that a pathway to forcing the restructuring of a less bloated state and a functional, more financially viable government could be provided through a constitutional reform process as part of the election pathway.²⁶ This study participant elaborates:

The structure of the government was formed that time like a pyramid with few leaders or experts on the top and more people in the middle and many people in the operation or implementation stage. ... After the formation of the Government of South Sudan [in 2011], there was more recruitment at the top of the pyramid and it became more expensive.²⁷

Everyone else—especially women market workers, urban non-salaried workers, and both male and female rural farmers and labourers—imply that there is no real state anymore to reform. As such, maybe elections might be a chance to shake up the multiple taxation systems and change some faces. Some interviewees hope to push for a new government that is committed to rationalizing and hopefully lightening the taxes levied by multiple levels of an unfunded army and state.

THE ELECTION-ECONOMY CAUSALITY DILEMMA

Most people—especially interviewees outside Juba—do not believe that national elections will happen, whether in December 2024 or in the medium term. Interviewees argue this on two grounds: first, that nobody will pay for the elections to happen; and second, that there are not strong enough incentives for those in power to actually change the status quo.

The main utility of a national election is to provide popular legitimacy for the government and leadership, including national and state assemblies. State and even county-level government officials, ministry staff and MPs are now directly appointed either by the president or their state governor. National media is constantly reporting the latest direct appointments and sackings by decree.²⁸ At county level, these appointments create regular accusations of family monopolies

24 Interviews with SA, male customary authority and 2010 election worker, Yei, 5 June 2024; SK, male clergy and 2010 election staff, Yei, 4 June 2024; B, male customary authority, Yei, 1 June 2024; JH, female MP and 2010 election staff, Juba, 27 May 2024.

25 Interview with B, male customary authority, Yei, 1 June 2024.

26 Interviews with KM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 1 June 2024; JB, male 2010 election staff and farmer and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; MN, female worker and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

27 Interview with DM, male government official, Yei, 4 June 2024.

28 Interview with JN, female market worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024.

and clan tribalism.²⁹ As one study respondent summarizes: ‘This kind of appointment has created a lot of gaps between the government and the people.’³⁰ MPs and government officials who had been directly appointed emphasize the importance of building this basic electoral accountability for being able to act in their jobs. This government official explains: ‘Because we are appointed by decree, the people in the community complain that we are not fit for the position. They do not even listen to me. ... Most say I am the commissioner for the governor and the president but not for the community.’³¹

At the same time, even government officials and politicians who would benefit from electoral legitimacy—such as the appointed MPs and county commissioners interviewed for this study—are reticent about undertaking the electoral process without due preparation. Given the complex and challenging context of South Sudan, it is possible that the authority gained by popular vote is not enough of a motivating incentive for government staff to press for an election.

Respondent arguments about the economy and the elections present a causality dilemma. About half the interviewees argue that an improved economic situation would build both the capacity and trust needed for a national election, via rationalized taxes, significantly reduced expenditure, the ending of corrupt contracting and the redirection of security budgets into basic pay and services—even if it seems unrealistic to ask for such actions from the current government. The other half argue that a national election would force a new government into existence and thus hopefully catalyse economic change. As one MP asserts, ‘The election should be done because our economy is being drained by the presidency.’³² In contrast, a soldier interviewed for the study explains, ‘All I can say is that people are not prepared for this election. Just let them find another way to talk about improving the economy, rather than elections.’³³

ELECTORAL CONTRADICTIONS: POLITICAL DISILLUSIONMENT AND ASPIRATION FOR CHANGE

All interviewees emphasize that upcoming elections will likely be flawed and violent. Corresponding to wider 2024 opinion polling, a significant majority want the elections to go ahead anyway, in some form, in the near future. This is justified both by the argument that

29 Interviews with AA, female worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; CO, male civil society worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; JN, female market worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; JB, male farmer and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; LI, male worker and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024; AC, male elected government official and 2010 election staff, Yei, 2 June 2024; MN, female worker and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; MI, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024; NP, female worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; PL, male government official, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024; anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024; YJ, male doctor and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024; KE, female customary authority, Yei, 5 June 2024. A common example given in Yei is the controversial election of the Yei River county commissioner, Agrey Cyrus.

30 Interview with LI, male worker and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024.

31 Interview with PL, male government official, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024.

32 Interview with JH, female MP and 2010 election staff, Juba, 27 May 2024.

33 Interview with OJ, male soldier who did not vote in 2010, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024.

something must change and on the grounds that violent conflicts are continuing in any case. In areas of Eastern and Central Equatoria where rebel groups and armed gangs are operating, alongside high levels of criminal violence, residents often emphasize that the situation for them is already so violent that election violence will be part of wider patterns of violence. Other people in areas of comparative stability (such as Lakes state) either say they are willing to risk post-election violence in exchange for political and economic change, or that they believe election conflicts can be managed locally. Some interviewees also note the risk of continued collapse if elections are not held. As this interviewee puts it, ‘People now have questions in mind, that if an election is not conducted it may lead to more violence—but who will I vote for?’³⁴

The majority of both men (66 per cent) and women (58 per cent) interviewed are concerned about the limited electoral options in future elections.³⁵ Many of the faces of this cycling transitional government are the same leadership officially elected in 2010. Study interviewees emphasize that the 2010 elections were not a ‘true election’³⁶ but rather a process of securing the independence of South Sudan under the SPLM (Sudan People’s Liberation Movement);³⁷ that is, ‘a confirmation election’.³⁸ The campaign focused on ‘beautiful speeches’³⁹ alongside the core message: ‘They are eating our oil money. If the country separates, we will control our oil money and build the country.’⁴⁰ Other key statements include: ‘The [development] payback slogan was conditional’⁴¹ and ‘The point was vote for the SPLM and all those things would happen automatically.’⁴² Yet other interviewees note that in practice, in 2010, there was no separation of civil, political and military leadership, with political rallies using military songs.⁴³ Another observes that people voted for ‘SPLM/A [Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army]

34 Interview with RK, elected female customary authority and 2010 election worker, Yei, 3 June 2024.

35 This study did not ask for party preferences for several reasons, including: political parties are still forming; campaigning has not officially begun; and many people do not have access to information about political party statements. Discussing potential voting intentions is also a security risk.

36 Interviews with SK, male clergy and 2010 election staff, Yei, 4 June 2024; MT, male civil society worker, Yirol West, 29 May 2024.

37 Interviews with AM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 29 May 2024; anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024; EE, female MP, Juba, 24 May 2024; SM, male customary authority, Rumbek, 2 June 2024.

38 Interviews with MM, male SPLM mobiliser and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 24 May 2024.

39 Interview with OB, female teacher, Juba, 27 May 2024.

40 Interview with MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 28 May 2024.

41 Interview with MM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024. Similar sentiments are expressed in interviews with BA, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024 and ED, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024.

42 Interview with MN, male MP, Rumbek, 1 June 2024. The same point is made in an interview with MK, male police officer and 2010 election worker, Rumbek, 1 June 2024.

43 Interviews with MT, male civil society worker, Yirol West, 29 May 2024; PC, male MP, Rumbek, 27 May 2024.

veterans who were half in uniform, half in suits'.⁴⁴ Interviewees question how much this has changed. They emphasize the need for candidates and parties that do not simply promise local patronage (such as hospitals and scholarships for their constituencies). Rather, 38 per cent of both men and women interviewees, at all socio-economic levels, emphasize that they want to see specific proposals for interventions in the economic crisis, endemic conflicts and infrastructure development.⁴⁵

This complex situation raises a crucial question: Who is going to bother to vote—or return to South Sudan to vote—without a substantial possibility for structural and political change?⁴⁶ Interviewees emphasize that people will not want to vote purely to provide winning tallies for the same politicians and same politics.⁴⁷ As this study participant explains, 'People vote when there is an interest in the government. The feeling now is that the same faces come back and say the same lies over and over. It will definitely be a joke.'⁴⁸

A key barrier to organizing national elections highlighted by a majority of interviewees is that there is very little for which to vote. This point is of particular importance to women interviewees: 50 per cent of these study respondents emphasize the challenges of dealing with their sense of disillusionment. The independent national government that people were motivated to vote for in 2010 and 2011 now feels as if it is a failure, at best, and, at worse, a big lie. Several interviewees express regret about their vote for secession,⁴⁹ observing that not only South Sudanese people but also international partners are disillusioned and unmotivated to support national elections.⁵⁰ Even clear manifestoes may not motivate people after so many broken promises.⁵¹ Vice President Rebecca Nyadeng de Mabior recently expressed doubts that she and many other politicians would be re-elected due to disaffection and disappointment

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- 44 Interview with AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024. Similar sentiments are expressed in interviews with SK, male clergy and 2010 election staff, Yei, 4 June 2024 and MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 28 May 2024.
- 45 Interviews with AA, female worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; JB, male farmer and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; ML, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; NP, female worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; AL, male customary authority, Juba, 21 May 2024; EE, male clergy and 2010 election worker, Yei, 3 June 2024; JY, male worker, Yei, 2 June 2024; OB, female teacher, Juba, 27 May 2024; ME, female elected MP, Juba, 24 May 2024; R, female market worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; YJ, male doctor and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024.
- 46 Interviews with J, male nominated MP, Eastern Equatoria, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; MI, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024; MJ, male worker, Torit, 3 June 2024.
- 47 Interviews with LI, male worker and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024; MJ, male worker, Torit, 3 June 2024; MM, male government official and 2010 election staff, Juba, 21 May 2024; A, female women's association elected leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.
- 48 Interview with MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 28 May 2024.
- 49 Interviews with JN, female market worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; PL, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024; AA, female worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; R, female market worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; OJ, male soldier who did not vote in 2010, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024.
- 50 Interview with NK, male civil society worker, Juba, 24 May 2024.
- 51 Interview with PK, female market worker, Yei, 4 June 2024.

in their leadership.⁵² It might be difficult for many South Sudanese politicians to now present themselves as responsible national leaders with moral authority and plans for the public good.⁵³ As this woman farmer succinctly summarizes:

The promises were made that roads would be constructed, the hospitals would have good services, food would be plentiful, all government officers would be paid well and on time but not one has been fulfilled now. I have no idea how people will be convinced this time to vote. ... Everyone is angry right now.⁵⁴

Another study participant elaborates, 'In a short time, the leaders have spoiled their relationship with their citizens and many people are not happy with the leaders elected during the 2010 election. ... People are now thinking that we voted for leaders to kill us and take our blood for their wealth.'⁵⁵

Interviewees across the research sites also suggest that many people could abstain from the vote out of frustration and anger. This may create risks of conflict with election mobilizers if, as in 2010, people are instructed to vote. This woman market worker says, 'Even the people in the village are saying the government lied to the people. Right now, they are all aware of the greed the Government of South Sudan has and their intention of benefitting their own families. And they cannot vote.'⁵⁶ Another interviewee reinforces the risk that people will not vote for more tangible reasons: 'Creating awareness will be difficult because now the community doesn't want to listen to anything about the election since there is severe hunger. Probably nobody will be voting. It will lose meaning for citizens.'⁵⁷

52 'VP Nyandeng admits leaders have failed the people', *Radio Tamazuj*, 25 August 2024. Accessed 26 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/vp-nyandeng-admits-leaders-have-failed-the-people>.

53 This observation reflects the arguments of Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch and Justin Willis in *The Moral Economy of Elections in Africa: Democracy, Voting and Virtue*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

54 Interview with JN, female farmer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024. This is echoed in an interview with MN, female worker and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

55 Interview with RK, elected female customary authority and 2010 election worker, Yei, 3 June 2024.

56 Interview with JN, female market worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024.

57 Interview with CO, male civil society worker, Torit, 31 May 2024.

PRACTICALITIES AND POSSIBILITIES

I don't think there will be elections in South Sudan any time soon. If there are elections, it would be a bad election. There are so many fears, from insecurity, resources, the time scale and the capacity of the institutions to handle elections.⁵⁸

In terms of elections, numerous practical, legal and organizational steps have not yet been undertaken or decided upon. Interviewees identify five key concerns, ranking these in order of importance, as follows: 1) security of candidates, election staff and citizens related to various forms of violence and intimidation throughout the entire election process, from start to finish, with critical reference to the lack of trusted impartial security providers; 2) barriers to fair candidacy, including specific barriers for women; 3) questions about representation, with a focus on constituencies, population movements and accurate census data; 4) practical challenges, including staffing, adequate time to plan, key logistics, communication and addressing established voter incentives and mobilization tactics; and 5) institutionalised vote rigging and lack of judicial recourse.

SECURITY OF CANDIDATES, ELECTION STAFF AND CITIZENS

National elections can cause many forms of violence and insecurity. Across all research locations, most interviewees mention security as a key concern for future elections (lowest in Juba at 87 per cent; highest in Yei at 100 per cent). This study finding is supported by the PeaceRep 2024 opinion survey that asks its respondents about the most important factor affecting their choice of candidate to vote for in elections: Security is consistently the most frequent answer across all polling locations, with 44 per cent of people saying this is the most important factor affecting their vote.⁵⁹

What, however, does the term 'security' mean in practice in the context of elections? The findings of this study disaggregate the range of concerns summarized by this term, with interviewees highlighting three core security issues surrounding elections.

First, and most importantly, interviewees emphasize **the lack of any trusted, reliable or**

58 Interview with KM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 28 May 2024.

59 Deng et al., 'PeaceRep Peace Survey', 10.

impartial provider of security for the election process. Security for elections needs to be provided by an array of civil and armed actors. Interviewees identify the risks to personal and local-level security generated by political campaigning by a diversity of political parties. This includes potential conflicts between groups or between political agents and local residents. Interviewees note 2010 experiences of various forms of intimidation and threats of violence from and between candidates, party agents and paid voter mobilizers, noting as an example the tense competitive campaign between Jama Nunu Kumba and Joseph Bangasi Bakasoro for the governorship of Western Equatoria. A polling station observer explains how he received frequent threats to his life from the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) for complaining about party interference.⁶⁰ Not all efforts for protecting and securing the election process were coercive or negative, however. For example, one woman explains how chiefs met with young men to mediate a peaceful period for the 2010 elections.⁶¹ Other study participants also tell stories about how apparently overly zealous campaigners were arrested or kept away from polling stations after complaints of harassment.⁶²

Despite past experience, many people are concerned about whether upcoming elections can be policed and secured by fragmented public bodies, including the supposedly unified armed forces, police and security services as well as local civil servants. Several interviewees emphasize that national security, military police and even local police forces are ‘all not trusted’ but are instead understood to be partisan.⁶³ Some even ask if the security services are working for the nation or for specific individuals.⁶⁴

Clearly, the situation in 2024 is significantly different to that in 2010. The 2010 elections were secured mainly because of the collective mobilization for the SPLM and the drive for national independence. As this interviewee explains, ‘There was still a feeling that if separation didn’t happen, going to war was not to be ruled out. That’s the basis upon which many of our chiefs choose to fight for the SPLM.’⁶⁵ Another study respondent says, ‘The police, army and other organized forces were hoping for a better South Sudan and everyone acted responsibly.’⁶⁶

In contrast, the military of 2024 is fragmented and personalized. The National Security Service

60 Interview with J, male nominated MP, Eastern Equatoria, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

61 AA, female worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024.

62 Interview with B, male customary authority, Yei, 1 June 2024. This is also emphasized in interviews with PO, male worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; PM, male government official and 2010 election worker, Juba, 21 May 2024; EE, male clergy and 2010 election worker, Yei, 3 June 2024; FL, female worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 2 June 2024; AA, female worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; LI, male worker and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024.

63 Interview with JY, male worker, Yei, 2 June 2024.

64 Interview with MM, male SPLM mobiliser and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 24 May 2024. This is also noted in an interview with IW, male worker and 2010 election staff, Juba, 25 May 2024.

65 Interview with SM, male customary authority, Rumbek, 2 June 2024.

66 Interview with A, female women’s association elected leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.

(NSS), directly connected to the office of the president, has become heavily militarized and is well-equipped with artillery and detention facilities since 2015, acting as an effective command in the 2016 regional wars in Central Equatoria.⁶⁷ Its powers are balanced against specific South Sudan People's Defence Force (SSPDF) battalions under the direct command of regional commanders, drawing on mostly mono-ethnic local recruitment drives. Budgets from the office of the president are allocated directly to commanders for specific security tasks such as border control and counter-insurgency work.⁶⁸ Other community fighting forces, such as the White Army, the Arrow Boys and the *Terchuong* (Justice Fighters), have organized often strong forms of leadership and decision-making that are ostensibly outside the government and army. At the same time, some local militias (notably the *Terchuong*) have been so instrumentalized by local political actors in violent confrontations and raiding that they have been forced to disband.⁶⁹ Commanders are also frequently removed or redeployed. Army factions on all sides, including among opposition forces, frequently clash with one another and with armed civilians. Interviewees emphasize this lack of government security control, even in its heartland of Warrap.⁷⁰ As this interviewee pointedly asks: 'How can we hold elections when the civilians in Warrap can defeat the government forces three times?'⁷¹ Another study respondent supports this when he explains that in some places 'the civilians have more guns than the soldiers'.⁷² In short, there is no (state) monopoly on the use of force.

The lack of army pay also means that security is for hire. Interviewees note that because nobody has been paid, there is a risk not only of a lack of organized security but of the cheap market for hiring armed security and private militias by potential candidates. Consequently, an election security market is likely. The logistical organization of an election offers opportunities for competition over various forms of ad hoc income. This includes military, police and security workers (especially those far down the chain of command), along with other unpaid local government workers potentially being employed as political agents and mobilizers or as party protection and personal security. Interviewees expect high levels of harassment and aggressive voter mobilization in any election, facilitated by paid party organizers, which creates violence.⁷³ The election also provides an opportunity for further protest by frustrated workers such as

67 Kuyang Harriet Logo and Moncef Kartas, 'Challenges to Small Arms and Light Weapons Control in South Sudan', Briefing Paper, London: Saferworld, October 2022, 11.

68 'Crude Dealings', *The Sentry*, 6; Joshua Craze, 'Displaced and Immiserated: The Shilluk of Upper Nile in South Sudan's Civil War, 2014–19', Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA), Geneva: Small Arms Survey, September 2019; Joshua Craze, "'And Everything Became War": Warrap State Since the Signing of the R-ARCSS', Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA), Geneva: Small Arms Survey, December 2022, 34.

69 Chany Ninrew, 'Unity State Governor Disbands Notorious Terchuong Militia Group', *Eye Radio* (blog), 25 July 2024. Accessed 27 August 2024, <https://www.eyeradio.org/unity-state-governor-disbands-notorious-terchuong-militia-group/>.

70 Interview with anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024.

71 Interview with SK, male clergy and 2010 election staff, Yei, 4 June 2024.

72 Interview with YJ, male doctor and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024.

73 Interview with LI, male worker and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024.

police and soldiers, who perhaps hope to be bought off if they threaten enough disruption.⁷⁴ One study respondent elaborates: ‘If this is not handled properly anyone can be a rebel. People can use innocent youths to incite violence because they are desperate and hungry for food. They can accept an offer and do more harm, even when the election is taking place.’⁷⁵

Voter mobilization will therefore be fraught with tensions and risks. Interviewees note that voting is a right, not a duty, but ask if people will be allowed to withhold their votes.⁷⁶ Respondents express genuine concern that people will reject the electoral process as a government stitch up or as a pretence for increased security presence, violent disarmament and state intervention in regions in tension with central authorities.⁷⁷ Several respondents suggest that the Murle might not accept election campaigners in the Pibor region ‘because they are saying they have their own government’.⁷⁸ Aside from areas that may violently reject election organization, people in towns across the country are gearing up for confrontational rallies, much as in 2010. A key example is when then President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir was shouted down in Yei with chants of ‘Wole!’ (an expression of strong disagreement).⁷⁹ Recent online discussions using terms such as ‘the big rat’ and ‘the big fish’ as euphemisms for rapacious politicians who block public service delivery and government change echo the slogans and jokes made during protests and strikes over 2023 and 2024.⁸⁰

The second core security concern interviewees identify is **the threat of violence and intimidation against voters, civil society and election workers before and during the elections**. Citizens are already afraid to discuss potential elections in the context of extremely restricted freedoms of expression and repeated disappearances and extrajudicial detentions

74 Interviews with ADO, male teacher and former 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 26 May 2024; AA, female worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; CO, male civil society worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; FL, female worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 2 June 2024; HL, male worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 1 June 2024; JN, female farmer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; MM, male worker and 2010 election worker, Torit, 1 June 2024.

75 Interview with PL, male government official, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024.

76 Interviews with NP, female worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; R, female market worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; PI, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024.

77 Interviews with ADO, male teacher and former 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 26 May 2024; R, female market worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024.

78 Interview with YJ, male doctor and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024. This point is also emphasized in an interview with ADO, male teacher and former 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 26 May 2024.

79 ‘Yei residents protest against President al-Bashir’s visit,’ *Catholic Radio Network*, 3 March 2010. Accessed 2 January 2025, <https://catholicradionetwork.org/2010/03/03/yei-residents-protest-against-president-al-bashirs-visit/>.

80 See, for example: Editor In Chief, ‘Bor Residents Protest High Cost of Living’, *Radio Tamazuj*, 17 June 2024. Accessed 19 August 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/bor-residents-protest-high-cost-of-living>; ‘Wounded Soldiers Stage Violent Protests over Unpaid Wages’, *Radio Tamazuj*, 14 February 2024. Accessed 15 February 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/wounded-soldiers-stage-violent-protests-over-unpaid-wages>; ‘University of Bahr El Ghazal Students Protest Tuition Fees Hike’, *Radio Tamazuj*, 10 August 2023. Accessed 10 August 2023, <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/university-of-bahr-el-ghazal-students-protest-tuition-fees-hike>; ‘Teachers in Panyijiar County Protest Unpaid Salaries’, *Radio Tamazuj*, 7 December 2023. Accessed 7 December 2023, <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/teachers-in-panyijiar-county-protest-unpaid-salaries>.

of potential government critics. This study respondent explains, ‘The people fear to speak the truth because of the military and arrests of the innocent.’⁸¹ This observation is reflected in the PeaceRep 2024 opinion survey, with some 44 per cent of all respondents indicating that they feel unsafe speaking publicly about politically sensitive issues.⁸² This insecurity is higher in internally displaced person (IDP) camps and in areas of continuing violence and armed mobilization, where ‘people are scared even to discuss an election’.⁸³ Basic political critique is very dangerous: ‘Today, many politicians and civilians have been arrested for speaking the truth about governance, corruption and the worsening economic situation in South Sudan. Hence this is not a good environment to conduct an election.’⁸⁴

Many people also have experience of active voter intimidation, either from the 2010 Sudan national elections or from other local election practices. Even in supposedly secret ballots ‘everyone is seeing the way you are voting’.⁸⁵ One study respondent explains how in 2010, ‘Everybody was forced to vote for people they didn’t want, and with no confidentiality, because everyone sees where you voted. People were afraid of being attacked after voting because of following their own choices.’⁸⁶ Another interviewee confirms this: ‘I can say some people felt forced to vote.’⁸⁷ Election preparations provide many more opportunities to intimidate and coerce people, including election officials and civil society mobilizers. Several interviewees who worked at the electoral commission or for NGOs during the 2010 elections indicate that they are scared of losing their jobs or being personally attacked if they complain about malpractice by the SPLM.⁸⁸ This form of intimidation has started to escalate with the possibility of 2024 elections:

Recently, I was called to Juba with a team of civil society organizations to attend the [SPLM] endorsement of the president. ... After we arrived in Juba, the organizers asked me to put on an SPLM t-shirt and hat but I refused. ... I was threatened by [name redacted]. ... They shouted at me: ‘Why don’t you put on the SPLM t-shirt?’. I told them that I am civil society and do not represent a party. I represent the women of this country.⁸⁹

The third immediate security risk if election preparations proceed identified by interviewees

81 Interview with SK, male clergy and 2010 election staff, Yei, 4 June 2024.

82 Deng et al., ‘PeaceRep Peace Survey’. This is reinforced in an interview with PI, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024.

83 Deng et al., ‘PeaceRep Peace Survey’, 10. This is reinforced in an interview with PI, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024.

84 Interview with PM, male government official and 2010 election worker, Juba, 21 May 2024.

85 Interview with FL, female worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 2 June 2024.

86 Interview with PI, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024.

87 Interview with JN, female market worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024.

88 Interview with J, male nominated MP, Eastern Equatoria, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

89 Interview with A, female women’s association elected leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.

is **violent competition for selection in party primaries**. Violent confrontations between potential candidates and their supporters are most likely to happen during and in the aftermath of primary processes for the major parties. In the 2010 elections, the main locus of conflicts that risked (and in Jonglei, sparked) armed confrontation was the SPLM primaries.⁹⁰

Despite a proliferation of smaller parties, the largest parties—the SPLM and the SPLM-IO (SPLM-In Opposition)—are still likely to win most seats based on 2024 polling.⁹¹ The SPLM in particular is currently absorbing former opposition politicians into the party who are likely to seek seat nominations. The risk is from internal competition for key nominations for safe SPLM and some SPLM-IO seats and governorships, much as during the 2010 SPLM primaries, which in effect were SPLM versus SPLM.

As such, the 2010 primaries are instructive. Other than the MPs who were hand-picked by the SPLM political bureau and presidency, the 2010 SPLM primaries were conducted through a 24-member electoral college (EC) that vetted nominees.⁹² The EC members were appointed by the SPLM national political bureau.⁹³ This is ‘where most of the malpractices started. ... Some generals would come with guns, a lot of personal bodyguards, a copy of his SPLM/A ID and a hand-written application to contest for the position. This was the highest level of chaos.’⁹⁴ This interviewee explains that:

Bias was very visible and there was no talking about it. ... There was no space for complaints. ... Reconciliations were attempted after the elections but it was too late. Some of the promises and concessions that were made didn’t materialize after the elections. Some people were promised jobs to leave space for the SPLM prepared candidates. Some were promised money, cars and houses for that matter. Those things didn’t come.⁹⁵

According to one elected official, in 2010, things had to be calmed down, which was assisted by the collective effort to obtain an SPLM government moving towards national independence the following year.⁹⁶ The primaries sparked sustained political tensions and violent conflicts by rejected candidates; for example, by George Ater (Jonglei), Lado Gore (Central Equatoria)

90 Interviews with anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024; MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 28 May 2024; BA, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; ED, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; MM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; AM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 29 May 2024; PC, elected male MP, Rumbek, 27 May 2024.

91 Deng et al., ‘PeaceRep Peace Survey’, 12.

92 Interview with AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024.

93 Interviews with MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 28 May 2024; AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024.

94 Interview with PC, elected male MP, Rumbek, 27 May 2024.

95 Interview with MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 28 May 2024.

96 Interview with AM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 29 May 2024.

and Dau Aturjong (Northern Bahr el-Ghazal); when Daniel Awet Akot was voted out in the SPLM primaries, the army allegedly threatened the EC ‘because a five-star general couldn’t be humiliated like that’.⁹⁷ In the 2010 elections, ‘The independent candidates who won were all members of the SPLM who were defeated in primaries.’⁹⁸

In any upcoming elections, it is highly likely that the risk of violence in primary candidate selection will be swiftly followed by the risk of violence between campaigning groups. While opposition parties are currently hobbled by financial rules, legal restrictions and direct intimidation, if the election schedule reaches the regulated period of open multiparty campaigning, then there are real risks of violence. This is especially the case in areas where opposition parties may find popular support, depending on which candidates are selected by the SPLM. In 2010, in contrast, ‘There was a freedom for all parties to do rallies because the SPLM/A was certain of the outcome of the elections.’⁹⁹

BARRIERS TO FAIR CANDIDACY

The decayed structures and aims of the SPLM party no longer provide a collective institutional framework or common interests. Other parties are either seriously weakened by a lack of financial backing and leadership (such as the SPLM-IO) or are in various processes of formation.¹⁰⁰ The relatively popular National Salvation Front (NAS) in Central Equatoria remains an outlaw armed opposition group. The PeaceRep 2024 opinion survey question ‘Which political party do you think has the best vision for South Sudan?’ reveals high levels of frustration with existing political parties: 17 per cent of survey respondents answer ‘No party’ and 12 per cent do not respond.¹⁰¹

A further barrier to a multiparty system (as opposed to a multi-candidate system) is the SPLM-In Government (SPLM-IG). In effect, this is currently the only body that is allowed to campaign as a party, including in youth union elections.¹⁰² To demonstrate this SPLM intransigence over

97 Interview with MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 28 May 2024. This is also noted in interviews with an anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024 and SR, female worker, Juba, 24 May 2024.

98 Interview with MM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024. This is also noted in interviews with BA, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; ED, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; AC, male elected government official and 2010 election staff, Yeï, 2 June 2024.

99 Interview with AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024.

100 Research respondents emphasize the importance of coherent party structures, regardless of the number or names of parties involved in the elections. In part, this is because the collapse of the SPLM party leadership is seen as a key catalyst of the war in December 2013. It is also because people note that: ‘The SPLM-IO and SPLM-IG [In Government] are the same people who have done nothing for the people. ... They have all failed.’ Source: Interview with MT, male civil society worker, Yirol West, 29 May 2024. This is reinforced in an interview with IW, male worker and 2010 election staff, Juba, 25 May 2024.

101 Deng et al., ‘PeaceRep Peace Survey’, 28–29.

102 Interview with AP, male worker, Juba, 27 May 2024.

multiparty democracy, study respondents point to the idea of the SPLM 21-year entitlement to rule. This is based on the idea among some SPLM party cadres that the SPLM should be in power for the same amount of time as they fought for liberation (from 1983 to 2005), although some party members argue they should count from independence in 2011.¹⁰³

Women face specific challenges in seeking elected office at all levels. It is a popular view across the country that if a female candidate has married someone from another location, she is considered to have divided loyalties. As this female interviewee explains, for example, ‘If a lady from Yei is married to someone in another county such as Morobo, she cannot stand for any position in Yei.’¹⁰⁴ This elected politician reinforces this point: ‘I am representing my husband’s people and my home region will not allow me to represent them.’¹⁰⁵ Standing for election is also expensive: Rallies, materials, campaign agents, party fees and transport are usually paid for by the candidates themselves.¹⁰⁶ Accessing this level of funding is particularly difficult for women candidates.¹⁰⁷ Hence, this male politician concludes: ‘Politics is a men’s affair, even at the party level.’¹⁰⁸

REPRESENTATION FOR WHOM?

The human geography of South Sudan has significantly changed since independence in 2011. Populations have moved, villages have dispersed and reformed, and more than 2 million people have sought refuge across state borders.¹⁰⁹ In the 2010 elections, the Mugwo and Otogo formed a constituency of around 35,000 people but ‘now most of the population is in the refugee camp in Uganda’.¹¹⁰ The chronic economic crisis as well as cycles of drought, flooding and localized violence continue to force people out of South Sudan and into refugee camps elsewhere. These factors also provide motivation to relocate to other countries for work or education.

Local government boundaries do not need to be changed but they do need a roughly fair level of voter representation. It is still unclear how many constituencies need to be formed. People do care about the constituency to which they are assigned. This is reflected in the 2010, when

103 Interviews with anonymous male nominated customary authority, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; JO, male government official and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

104 Interview with A, female women’s association elected leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.

105 Interview with EE, elected female MP, Juba, 24 May 2024. This is also noted in an interview with SR, female worker, Juba, 24 May 2024.

106 Interviews with EE, elected female MP, Juba, 24 May 2024; ME, female elected MP, Juba, 24 May 2024.

107 Interview with ME, female elected MP, Juba, 24 May 2024; JH, nominated female MP and 2010 election staff, Juba, 27 May 2024.

108 Interview with AM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 29 May 2024.

109 Interview with AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024; SL, female worker, Torit, 1 June 2024.

110 Interview with B, male customary authority, Yei, 1 June 2024.

some people refused to vote because of how the electoral lines were drawn or because of a lack of clarity over their constituency.¹¹¹ Interviewees emphasize the risks of anger over unjust representation and potential allegations of rigging if constituencies are mapped onto older *payam* (second-lowest administrative division, below a county) population data. Residents across the research sites note that some *payams* are filled with people who have been internally displaced by conflict and flooding, while other areas are virtually evacuated. In a situation of almost no available government funding, *payam* populations might struggle to share electoral resources without conflict.¹¹²

A census is risky business. Previous attempts to delineate new local boundaries after the president created 32 states in 2017 were fraught with tension, inconclusive and ultimately doomed to failure. Continued popular concerns over the rigging of electoral constituencies, including through forced displacement, appear justified by the recent disputed 2021 Population Estimation Survey results released in spring 2023. Published by the National Bureau of Statistics with the UN Population Fund, these statistics set out very high annual population growth rates in President Kiir's home state of Warrap (14.2 per cent) and in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal (12.8 per cent), with low (negative) population growth rates in Jonglei (-1.9 per cent) and the SPLA-IO dominated Upper Nile (-1.4 per cent).¹¹³

Mass displacement and flight from Upper Nile and Jonglei due to conflicts, floods and impoverishment make the latter statistics more justifiable. The rates of growth in the former are, however, extremely high. While this might be justified by the relative political stability experienced in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, this is not the case for Warrap due to experiences of flooding and conflict. It is possible that these surprising statistics are realistic reflections of the very uneven effects of conflict, climate crisis and resulting displacement and population change in South Sudan since the last (disputed) census in 2008. As Augustino Tiing Mayai, the new head of the National Bureau of Statistics appointed in January 2024, notes, however, when these population estimates are applied to political constituencies, they would significantly skew political representation in the national parliament, with 36 per cent of seats taken by Warrap and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal out of the total 10 states.¹¹⁴

The majority of interviewees argue for a census based on a combination of these grounds. An updated census or voter registration exercise based on recent estimates might risk directly fuelling conflicts over boundaries and places of permanent residence. Using the disputed 2008 census and the 2010 constituencies might be practically feasible but deeply unrepresentative

111 Interviews with AC, male elected government official and 2010 election staff, Yei, 2 June 2024; AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024.

112 Interviews with AC, male elected government official and 2010 election staff, Yei, 2 June 2024; SA, male customary authority and 2010 election worker, Yei, 5 June 2024.

113 Augustino Tiing Mayai, 'The 2021 Population Estimation Survey: Scientific, Political, and Policy Implications', Juba: The Sudd Institute, 11 April 2023.

114 Tiing Mayai, '2021 Population Estimation Survey', 3.

and likely unpopular. The findings of this study correspond to the qualitative PeaceRep 2024 opinion survey that shows around 80 per cent of South Sudanese people believe a census is necessary for elections. The small number of respondents for this study who were against a census process mostly argue this on the basis that it would be logistically and financially impossible.¹¹⁵

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES OF RUNNING THE ELECTIONS

A core issue identified by all interviewees, especially those who worked as election organizers and administrators in 2010, is the array of practical challenges involved in organizing and mobilizing for the election, ranging from voter registration to balloting. This concern is often based on direct experience of problems during the 2010 elections. Most fundamental is the problem of staffing. Even if elections are able to be organized in this context, interviewees point to a fundamental question: Who will do the work and for what pay?

The 2010 election demanded a huge amount of unpaid work in often dire conditions.¹¹⁶ Much of this work was done by young graduates and university students.¹¹⁷ These research findings evidence the abysmal transport situation and support crisis during the 2010 elections, as indicated in a range of reports.¹¹⁸ Some workers suggest that their salaries were partially or wholly stolen, and several election officers note that they were not paid as ‘the *payam* was not given any money from the election committee’.¹¹⁹ Workers used their own transport, including bicycles and motorbikes, to organize the election after promised transport failed to arrive or where roads were impassable by car.¹²⁰ In some instances, transporting election materials to polling areas required staff to find canoes, as in Lake Nyibor, which has large dispersed

115 Interviews with AA, female worker, Torit, 2 June 2024; MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 1 June 2024; PL, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024; MM, male government official and 2010 election staff, Juba, 21 May 2024; MM, male SPLM mobiliser and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 24 May 2024; AC, male elected government official and 2010 election staff, Yei, 2 June 2024; DM, male government official, Yei, 4 June 2024; AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024; SK, male clergy and 2010 election staff, Yei, 4 June 2024.

116 Interview with IW, male worker and 2010 election staff, Juba, 25 May 2024.

117 Interviews with KK, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024; CA, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024; FD, female worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 2 June 2024.

118 See, for example: Willis, ‘Sudan’s Elections’; Edward Thomas, ‘Sudan’s 2010 Elections—Victories, Boycotts and the Future of a Peace Deal’, *Review of African Political Economy* 37/125 (1 September 2010): 373–79; Ali Verjee, ‘Disputed Election, Deficient Observation: The 2011 Election in South Kordofan, Sudan’, African Elections Project Research Paper, Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, August 2011.

119 Interview with MM, male government official and 2010 election staff, Juba, 21 May 2024. This is also noted in interviews with A, female women’s association elected leader, Yei, 3 June 2024 and PM, male government official and 2010 election worker, Juba, 21 May 2024.

120 Interviews with EE, male clergy and 2010 election worker, Yei, 3 June 2024; SA, male customary authority and 2010 election worker, Yei, 5 June 2024; LI, male worker and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024; MN, male MP, Rumbek, 1 June 2024; MK, male police officer and 2010 election worker, Rumbek, 1 June 2024.

populations, with workers carrying ballot boxes on foot from roads and riversides.¹²¹ Staff slept in schools and boiled dirty water to drink, ‘as if we were in military training’.¹²² One election officer laughs when recounting a story that cows nearly ate the ballot papers at one point.¹²³

These experiences of the 2010 elections highlight the time needed to arrange and implement the various steps of an electoral process (setting aside the further task of holding a constitutional consultation or conducting a census). The vast majority of South Sudanese people still live in rural areas with roads that are often poorly maintained or only have seasonal access, limited access to communication networks and basic communication technology, and frequently with limited positive interactions with central government.¹²⁴ This means that considerable time is needed to reach the majority of people with adequate information about and explanation of the election process, its purpose and democratic standards. In 2010 when these discussions were rushed or skipped, election staffers were sometimes refused permission to work by customary authorities.¹²⁵

The 2010 elections were fundamentally shaped by a lack of transport and physical access, despite private companies and government officials personally funding transport for voters for both the 2010 election and the 2011 referendum.¹²⁶ While advanced electronic systems might reduce corruption and save time and logistical burdens, interviewees argue that they are unlikely to work in practice.¹²⁷ Not only were election materials delivered late but the concentration of election centres led to long queues with limited access to water and shade, which created arguments and small fights that had to be diffused by security actors and local chiefs.¹²⁸

There are currently no available estimates or plans for either the number of or location for polling centres and stations. There are also no clear plans for registration and voter identification. Access to voter registration and balloting is particularly difficult for mobile workers, such as cattle herders and fishing sector workers seeking remote water sources during dry seasons, and farmers moving to highlands during early rainy seasons, all of which impact on the timing of

121 Interviews with KK, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024; CA, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024; LI, male worker and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024.

122 Interview with YJ, male doctor and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024.

123 Interview with JO, male government official and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

124 Interviews with ADO, male teacher and former 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 26 May 2024; AA, female worker, Torit, 2 June 2024; AL, male lawyer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024.

125 Interview with ADO, male teacher and former 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 26 May 2024.

126 Interviews with AP, male worker, Juba, 27 May 2024; JY, male worker, Yei, 2 June 2024.

127 Interviews with B, male customary authority, Yei, 1 June 2024; MM, male government official and 2010 election staff, Juba, 21 May 2024.

128 Interviews with CO, male civil society worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; JS, female worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 3 June 2024; LG, female worker and 2010 election worker, Torit, 3 June 2024; MI, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024; PM, male government official and 2010 election worker, Juba, 21 May 2024; KE, female customary authority, Yei, 5 June 2024.

the elections.¹²⁹ The delay between registration and balloting in 2010 meant that many mobile workers ended up wanting to vote in a different location to their registration site.¹³⁰

Many interviewees note that logistical barriers excluded a range of people from participating in the 2010 elections. This included physically disabled and sick people, the elderly and those living long distances from election centres, some of whom missed election day due to travelling over difficult terrain.¹³¹ With limited access to birth certificates and other identity documents, younger voters were also often excluded, especially young unmarried women.¹³² In some voting centres, however, young men who lacked the necessary registration documentation were allowed to vote to increase SPLM turnout.¹³³ In addition to the pressures of constant domestic responsibilities, the timing of the 2010 elections in the middle of the rainy season left women in particular too busy working on farms doing weeding to take the time to queue.¹³⁴ Voters who lost their registration cards or did not register were frustrated at the polling stations.¹³⁵ Many voters found the 12 different ballots and four different electoral levels in 2010 (for presidencies, state governors, assemblies at national and state levels, county commissioners and party lists) far too complicated to understand.¹³⁶ Several interviewees indicate that they only voted for the ballots they thought were important; that is, mostly the presidential and county commissioner contests.¹³⁷

Extensive information and multilingual communication about all aspects of the election

- 129 Interview with J, male nominated MP, Eastern Equatoria, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.
- 130 Interviews with KK, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024; CA, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024.
- 131 Interviews with AA, female worker, Torit, 2 June 2024; AA, female worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; EZ, male worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; FL, female worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 2 June 2024; JO, male government official and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; AP, male worker, Juba, 27 May 2024; SL, female worker, Torit, 1 June 2024; JS, female worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 3 June 2024; MN, female worker and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024; KK, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024; CA, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024.
- 132 Interviews with AL, male lawyer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; JO, male government official and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; PL, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024; A, female women's association elected leader, Yei, 3 June 2024; KM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 28 May 2024; ML, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.
- 133 Interview with A, female women's association elected leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.
- 134 Interviews with anonymous male nominated customary authority, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; JO, male government official and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; EE, elected female MP, Juba, 24 May 2024; AP, male worker, Juba, 27 May 2024.
- 135 Interviews with JO, male government official and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; MM, male government official and 2010 election staff, Juba, 21 May 2024.
- 136 See Willis, 'Sudan's Elections', 47.
- 137 Interviews with MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 1 June 2024; AL, male lawyer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; CO, male civil society worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; J, male nominated MP, Eastern Equatoria, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; PM, male government official and 2010 election worker, Juba, 21 May 2024.

process are needed to mitigate high levels of political suspicion and anger at the general lack of transparency and accountability in South Sudanese politics. Information needs to move through trusted networks such as ‘through churches, market days, funerals, marriage ceremonies and other community meetings’.¹³⁸ Multiple languages and dialects need careful translation, including sign language interpretation into both Sudanese and East African sign languages.¹³⁹ Without adequate time for the provision of essential information, interviewees note there is a risk of people refusing to cooperate, along with accusations of vote rigging and political disruption against those refusing to cooperate.¹⁴⁰

RIGGED VOTES AND NO LEGAL RECOURSE

Election organization also needs to contend with established incentive practices for voting and voter mobilization. In 2010, voters were encouraged to participate in the national elections through a variety of forms of incentive.¹⁴¹ National and state MPs funded refreshments at polling stations,¹⁴² especially the National Congress Party (NCP) of then Sudanese President al-Bashir in an effort to win favour from voters.¹⁴³ In some areas of Kapoeta, party campaigners were expected to offer incentives to customary authorities in exchange for allowing campaign activities and encouraging voter turnout for them.¹⁴⁴ Incentives included food, bicycles and cash.¹⁴⁵ Whereas some voters apparently expected to be paid to register to vote,¹⁴⁶ others were actually paid to vote for specific candidates or parties. As this voter says, ‘When I arrived to the polling station, I was approached and given [money] so that I would vote for the NCP candidates. I took the money and went to vote for the candidates of my choice.’¹⁴⁷ This does not necessarily count as corruption but as a kind of demonstration of party engagement with the needs of people: ‘Just to be clear, people need food. If the candidates come for a campaign and gave my people food and tobacco ... they would succeed because this is what people need most now.’¹⁴⁸

138 Interview with B, male customary authority, Yei, 1 June 2024.

139 Interviews with YJ, male doctor and 2010 election staff, Kapoeta, 23 May 2024; AL, male lawyer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024.

140 Interviews with PO, male worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; PL, male government official, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024.

141 The 2011 referendum on secession also involved some incentives, although people were strongly motivated to vote for secession.

142 Interview with JH, nominated female MP and 2010 election staff, Juba, 27 May 2024.

143 Interview with PL, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024.

144 Interview with AL, male lawyer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024.

145 Interviews with JN, female market worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; FL, female worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 2 June 2024; PI, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024.

146 Interview with ADO, male teacher and former 2010 election worker in Kapoeta.

147 Interview with J, elected male youth union leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.

148 Interview with PL, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024.

According to most interviewees, the upcoming elections are likely to be kicked down the road, then rigged and then challenged. Discussing practicalities for elections drew many interviewees into reflecting on the ‘cooked election’ of 2010,¹⁴⁹ and how rigging and fixing of election results is likely in any future election. In 2010, observers collected extensive evidence on the variety of forms of election fraud practiced across South Sudan.¹⁵⁰ Voters and election staff alike, across all research sites, note a number of issues, including: the strategic siting of voter centres by county commissioners;¹⁵¹ extensive experiences of voter and staff intimidation;¹⁵² and various forms of stuffing ballot boxes both at the polls and afterwards, by SPLM party officials and election officers alike.¹⁵³ These risks all come before the actual election outcomes, when ‘the candidates think they will have been cheated when the result comes because they have high expectations, and this can lead to fights’.¹⁵⁴

There is currently no legal recourse for electoral disputes other than through the understaffed judicial system in South Sudan. This is similar to the 2010 national elections, when all complaints either needed to be routed through the National Election Commission (NEC) or via the local judiciary. Interviewees for this study believe upcoming elections will be relatively similar to those in 2010. *Payam* and county electoral commission committees did not appear to have either the capacity or interest to follow up complaints. In short, there ‘were no good structures to handle complaints at that time.’¹⁵⁵ Complaints were also shut down: ‘There was a bit of harassment from politicians when the community tried to complain. They shut them up and threatened people.’¹⁵⁶ Candidates and voters were concerned about potential violence if they pursued complaints to courts.¹⁵⁷ This 2010 election worker elaborates:

There were complaints. I can you tell these problems were either not addressed or deliberately ignored. I was the mobilizer and at the same time, I was part of the state that was making decisions behind closed doors. The police, army, judiciary and the

149 Interview with JO, male government official and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

150 For example, see: Willis, ‘Sudan’s Elections’; Verjee, ‘Disputed Election’; Thomas, ‘Sudan’s 2010 Elections’.

151 Interview with J, male nominated MP, Eastern Equatoria, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

152 Interviews with SA, male customary authority and 2010 election worker, Yei, 5 June 2024; SR, female worker, Juba, 24 May 2024.

153 Interviews with J, male nominated MP, Eastern Equatoria, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; JB, male farmer and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; JS, female worker and 2010 election staff, Torit, 3 June 2024; JN, female farmer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; MM, male government official and 2010 election staff, Juba, 21 May 2024.

154 Interview with R, female market worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024.

155 Interview with NP, female worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024. This is also noted in interviews with JO, male government official and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024.

156 Interview with NP, female worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

157 Interview with OB, female teacher, Juba, 27 May 2024. This is also noted in the interview with MM, male SPLM mobiliser and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 24 May 2024.

politicians were on side. Sometimes their grievances that were minor were either bought off by the party structures or promises were made if complaints came from a member of the party.¹⁵⁸

Because complaints apparently were neither investigated nor forwarded to the judiciary, interviewees note that rebellions were the direct result of this approach.¹⁵⁹ As one elected official explains, ‘This was why there were so many militia groups after the elections.’¹⁶⁰ In the disputed Central Equatoria governor election, for example, which Lieutenant General Alfred Lado Gore was popularly believed to have won, President Kiir called Lado Gore for a private meeting. Gore’s house was surrounded by soldiers, causing local panic. As a study respondent explains, ‘We didn’t know what they discussed but after the meeting, the case ended and Wani [Clement Wani Konga] started his work as the government of Central Equatoria state.’¹⁶¹

158 Interview with AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024.

159 Interviews with AP, male worker, Juba, 27 May 2024; OB, female teacher, Juba, 27 May 2024; J, male nominated MP, Eastern Equatoria, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

160 Interview with KM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 28 May 2024.

161 Interview with anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024. This example is also raised in interviews with EE, elected female MP, Juba, 24 May 2024; IW, male worker and 2010 election staff, Juba, 25 May 2024; ME, female elected MP, Juba, 24 May 2024; MM, male SPLM mobiliser and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 24 May 2024. See also ‘General Gore decries elections rigging in the counting,’ *Sudan Tribune*, 20 April 2010. Accessed 2 January 2025, <https://sudantribune.com/article34603/>.

LESSONS FROM CURRENT SOUTH SUDANESE ELECTORAL PRACTICES

There is a future for democracy in the country. I can say without fear of contradiction. Many South Sudanese believe in representation.¹⁶²

Despite the bleak prospects for national elections, many interviewees point to wider practices of electoral democracy and accountability in everyday local government, political, civil society and church organizations in South Sudanese society. These existing practices may offer insight about the productive possibilities of moving towards elections and developing democratic practice at the national level. As one study respondent aptly summarizes: ‘The *benywut* [cattle camp leaders] were elected way before the colonialism.’¹⁶³

All interviewees who participated in this study, from every class and social background, have local experience of electoral politics. Even if their recollections are somewhat rose tinted, they highlight the democratic nature of South Sudanese society.¹⁶⁴ For example, elections for customary authorities and committee membership (notably in refugee and displaced camps) are becoming more common across South Sudan, albeit in uneven patterns.¹⁶⁵ As in various other types of elections—for women’s and youth associations or in churches—voters want to closely consider the character and experience of potential candidates, including via open

162 Interview with MN, elected male MP, Rumbek, 1 June 2024. This point is also made in interviews with MK, male police officer and 2010 election worker, Rumbek, 1 June 2024.

163 Interview with MN, elected male MP, Rumbek, 1 June 2024.

164 Interviews with MM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; BA, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; ED, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024. Also see: Pospisil, ‘Voting out of Transition?’, 24.

165 Interviews with PK, female market worker, Yei, 4 June 2024; AA, female worker, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; anonymous male nominated customary authority, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; CO, male civil society worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; JN, female market worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; MN, female worker and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024; PL, male government official, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024.

selection and popular committees.¹⁶⁶

Several study respondents note that good young candidates were sidelined in 2010 on the basis of their age. As this interviewee explains, “They were told to wait. There was a future for them. ... But not many of them are alive today.”¹⁶⁷ Candidates in chief elections are slowly becoming younger, in their forties or even thirties.¹⁶⁸ In recent local elections for chief positions or women’s union leadership, people write their applications for candidacy or apply via a CV.¹⁶⁹ The youth unions in Kajokeji, Jonglei, Rumbek and Bor have recently conducted successful elections based on candidate qualifications and strong union constitutions, using a mix of hidden ballots and open voting by show of hands. Women’s associations do the same.¹⁷⁰ Church youth organizations also often follow similar practices.¹⁷¹

These elections generally take three distinct forms: open balloting, via creating lines for candidates¹⁷² or raising hands;¹⁷³ secret ballot;¹⁷⁴ or consensus-based decisions reached through discussion.¹⁷⁵ There are comparative benefits and deficits to each form. Whatever form of electoral practice is used, it can be translated into existing multilingual electoral terminologies to create trust and understanding. Open balloting or consensus-making is transparent and makes

166 Interviews with TP, male elected MP and 2010 election staff, Juba, 27 May 2024; B, male customary authority, Yei, 1 June 2024; AC, male elected government official and 2010 election staff, Yei, 2 June 2024; anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024. Based on findings from this research sample, voters generally want to vote for non-combatant school graduates, preferably educated to diploma level, who have few other professional commitments. See: Interviews with MT, male civil society worker, Yirrol West, 29 May 2024; B, male customary authority, Yei, 1 June 2024; JR, female worker, Torit, 4 June 2024.

167 Interview with KM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 28 May 2024. This point is also made in interviews with MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 28 May 2024.

168 Interview with EE, elected female MP, Juba, 24 May 2024.

169 Interviews with SA, male customary authority and 2010 election worker, Yei, 5 June 2024; A, female women’s association elected leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.

170 Interviews with ADO, male teacher and former 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 26 May 2024; CO, male civil society worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; JB, male farmer and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; OB, female teacher, Juba, 27 May 2024; A, female women’s association elected leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.

171 Interviews with NK, male civil society worker, Juba, 24 May 2024; SR, female worker, Juba, 24 May 2024; MM, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 28 May 2024; DM, male government official, Yei, 4 June 2024; EE, male clergy and 2010 election worker, Yei, 3 June 2024; JM, female government official, Yei, 4 June 2024.

172 In Rumbek, the term for this practice is ‘*kooc*’.

173 Interviews with PL, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024; IW, male worker and 2010 election staff, Juba, 25 May 2024; SR, female worker, Juba, 24 May 2024; AP, male worker, Juba, 27 May 2024; JH, nominated female MP and 2010 election staff, Juba, 27 May 2024; KK, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024; CA, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024; RK, elected female customary authority and 2010 election worker, Yei, 3 June 2024.

174 In Rumbek, the term for this practice is ‘*chueth*’.

175 Interview with AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024.

it difficult for candidates to argue for rigging; results are visible and declared immediately.¹⁷⁶ At the same time, this form of voting also creates visible divides.¹⁷⁷

The declaration of results is a critical point: ‘We need a model that leaves people in no doubt about outcome of the elections.’¹⁷⁸ The rapid declaration of results and the open concession of defeat is centrally important.¹⁷⁹ This suggests that systems for state and county-level declarations of electoral results could be more trustworthy and quicker than central declarations from Juba. As this interviewee explains, ‘Here, when you are defeated fairly in chief elections, you concede defeat in a good faith.’¹⁸⁰ Other study respondents express the same sentiment, linking the possibility of fair concessions to electoral models with clear and trusted results.¹⁸¹

Throughout their participation in this study, interviewees all discussed whether the election models and methods used to vote for chiefs and leadership of women’s and youth associations, churches and other civil society organizations (CSOs) could work on a larger scale. Interviewees emphasised how local election processes were designed to be ‘more transparent than modern [state] elections.’¹⁸² In particular, interviewees focused on what lessons could be drawn based on how these local-level have been organized, with specific attention to their successes and failures as discussed above. As some interviewees note, however, it is possible that local election systems are ‘too transparent and cheap’ and ‘cannot be replicated in large polls’.¹⁸³ Even if the three election models identified by the study respondents are not practical for adaptation in national-level ballots, their elements can nonetheless be instructive for designing electoral systems.

176 Interviews with AL, male lawyer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; MM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; BA, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; ED, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024.

177 Interview with KE, female customary authority, Yei, 5 June 2024.

178 Interviews with MN, elected male MP, Rumbek, 1 June 2024; MK, male police officer and 2010 election worker, Rumbek, 1 June 2024.

179 Interviews with J, elected male youth union leader, Yei, 3 June 2024; MM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; BA, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; ED, elected male MP, Rumbek, 2 June 2024; AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024.

180 Interview with PC, elected male MP, Rumbek, 27 May 2024.

181 Interview with MK, male police officer and 2010 election worker, Rumbek, 1 June 2024. This point is also made in interviews with MM, male SPLM mobiliser and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 24 May 2024; JB, male farmer and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 21 May 2024; ML, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024.

182 Interview with AK, female market worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 25 May 2024.

183 Interview with PC, elected male MP, Rumbek, 27 May 2024.

PATHWAYS FOR BUILDING DEMOCRACY

South Sudanese citizens have a clear appetite for democratic progress and change. It is therefore useful to examine ways in which the electoral process and preparations for eventual elections could contribute to improved democratic practices.

ELECTION PLANNING: A VEHICLE FOR DEMANDING A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL SETTLEMENT

Election planning processes offer many opportunities for attempting reform and even structural change. This is most possible with the National Constitutional Review (NCR) process. There has never been a consultative constitution-making process in South Sudan, although popular debates over a potential permanent constitution were underway in 2013 before the war ignited in December.¹⁸⁴ As in 2013, South Sudanese citizens still want a new constitution, one specific purpose of which is to reorganize government structures. This is not limited to ending the financial drain of having five vice presidencies. As one elected official says, “There is a debate about the nature of the government we should run in this country.”¹⁸⁵ Making a new permanent constitution is an opportunity for challenging the bloated structures of government that have expanded since the first peace agreement in 2015.

Many interviewees also indicate that a constitutional process might re-centre the fraught historical question of federalism and the devolution of power and rights from the centre. Prior to December 2013, there is a wealth of analysis about debates over federal systems in particular, as well as more widely on the structure and form of government and a potential constitution,

184 Kevin L Cope, ‘The Interestic Constitution: Lessons from the World’s Newest Nation’, *Virginia Journal of International Law* 53 (2013). Accessed 17 December 2024, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2159604>; Akolda Ma’an Tie et al., ‘My Mother Will Not Come to Juba: South Sudanese Debate the Constitution’, Juba: Rift Valley Institute, 2013. Accessed 7 January 2016, <http://riftvalley.net/publication/my-mother-will-not-come-juba>; Katrin Seidel and Timm Sureau, ‘Introduction: Peace and Constitution Making in Emerging South Sudan on and beyond the Negotiation Tables’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9/4 (2 October 2015): 612–33.

185 Interview with KM, elected male MP, Rumbek, 28 May 2024. This point is also made in an interview with B, male customary authority, Yei, 1 June 2024.

which should be taken up again.¹⁸⁶ Federal systems have been central proposals in a number of key processes, including the 2016–2020 National Dialogue, the 2018 peace agreement and, most recently, the National Economic Conference in 2023.¹⁸⁷ All of these processes have produced clear demands and suggestions based on popular consultation, even in the face of dismissal and disapproval from national leadership.

Another national consultation might not be necessary if these previous popular consultations are brought together and coherently synthesized. Endless performances of dialogues and listening exercises are likely going to be increasingly alienating, given both past consultations and lack of action. Interviewees clearly state that elections could fail to function—the process may be rejected or boycotted—without some attempts at reconciliation between the government and its citizens.¹⁸⁸

At least some government steps towards constitutional change might re-establish a degree of government credibility. This needs to be matched by government attempts to address widespread predatory taxes and return to at least some investments in public services before an election. Without basic economic changes, not least the payment of government staff, an election is both practically difficult and risky. An unmitigated economic crisis and deep food insecurity, particularly for those repeatedly displaced by flooding and violence, are likely to generate electoral rhetoric that connects economic inequality, ethnic identification and claims to land.

THE POTENTIAL FOR COUNTY AND ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATIC SPACE

Before the most recent delay, there was already discussion taking place about which elections should be called in December 2024. Some proposals suggested that only the presidential and state governor elections should be held, which would avoid issues of population estimation and constituency boundaries. In contrast, several study respondents suggest that a path to

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- 186 Douglas H Johnson, 'Federalism in the History of South Sudanese Political Thought', Juba: Rift Valley Institute, 2018. Accessed 2 January 2025, <https://riftvalley.net/publication/federalism-history-south-sudanese-political-thought/>; Alfred Sebit Lokujji, 'South Sudan: Devolution by Presidential Decree versus Constitutional Federalism', in *Contemporary Governance Challenges in the Horn of Africa*, eds. Charles Manga Fombad, Assefa Fiseha and Nico Steytler, London: Routledge, 2022; Lovise Aalen, 'The Paradox of Federalism and Decentralization in South Sudan: An Instrument and an Obstacle for Peace', Sudan Brief, Bergen, Norway: Chr. Michelsen Institute, September 2019; Lovise Aalen and Mareike Schomerus, 'Considering the State: Perspectives on South Sudan's Subdivision and Federalism Debate', London: Overseas Development Institute, 2016. Accessed 8 October 2016, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10837.pdf>; Mwangi S Kimenyi, 'Making Federalism Work in South Sudan', in *One Year After Independence. Opportunities and Obstacles for Africa's Newest Country*, ed. Africa Growth Initiative, Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 2012. Accessed 18 December 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/06-federalism-work-kimenyi.pdf>; Kenneth Okeny, 'The Rejection of Federalism and Emergence of Southern Sudanese Nationalism, 1950–1972', PhD dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1992. Accessed 30 December 2016, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/303980940/abstract/91AE124C3E904777PQ/1>.
- 187 Interview with SK, male clergy and 2010 election staff, Yei, 4 June 2024.
- 188 Interviews with anonymous male government official, Juba, 24 May 2024; JN, female farmer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024.

representative democracy might be more easily found via the potentially less contentious election of national and state assembly members.¹⁸⁹ This suggestion draws on the idea that legitimately elected assemblies might be more empowered to hold government bodies to account. Other interviewees propose first electing county commissioners and *payam* administrators. Elections at this level are potentially more practical and feasible. They could also draw on established local democratic practices and existing models. Moreover, ‘these are layers of authority that are closer to the people and they need to be accountable to them.’¹⁹⁰

LOGISTICAL STRATEGIES

With national ID and passport issuance already prohibitively expensive for the vast majority of the population, the practice of voter registration must be open and inclusive, especially for young women.¹⁹¹ It is entirely possible people will decide not to vote or that voter registration processes will be potential points of coercion and intimidation. Thus, messaging that voting is a right not a duty must be clear, accessible and widespread.

Based partly on experiences of the 2010 elections and lessons learned, interviewees for this study propose a variety of logistical ideas for all stages of elections, including mapping registration and voting centres, as well as spreading this information well in advance.¹⁹² They also indicate the need to supplement these fixed sites with mobile centres on bicycles or boats.¹⁹³ They identify a further need to make women a priority in queues so that they can return home or to the fields for work.¹⁹⁴ Explanations of the whole process should be clearly translated, using local terminologies for existing election practices where possible, to be as transparent and open as possible throughout. Some women study participants suggest that a majority of women electoral commission staff could serve to encourage a greater sense of trust in election-related processes.¹⁹⁵

Interviewees note that the timings are complex. September to December, after the first harvests but with continued rains, is a period when food is more widely available, agricultural workers have some time and when cattle camps are closer to settlements.¹⁹⁶ During this time, however,

189 Interviews with AC, male elected government official and 2010 election staff, Yei, 2 June 2024; PM, male government official and 2010 election worker, Juba, 21 May 2024.

190 Interview with KK, male worker and 2010 election staff, Rumbek, 3 June 2024.

191 Interview with J, elected male youth union leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.

192 Interview with AP, male worker, Juba, 27 May 2024.

193 Interview with MM, male government official and 2010 election staff, Juba, 21 May 2024.

194 Interview with AL, male lawyer, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024.

195 Interviews with SR, female worker, Juba, 24 May 2024; A, female women’s association elected leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.

196 Interviews with anonymous male nominated customary authority, Kapoeta, 24 May 2024; B, male customary authority, Yei, 1 June 2024; PL, male customary authority, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024.

women continue to be busy with weeding and harvests.¹⁹⁷ In contrast, other interviewees point out that transportation is easier during the January dry season, which means an election at this time would be much more representative and trustworthy.¹⁹⁸ A January election would also leave schools and churches free to be used for polling centres.¹⁹⁹

There is no resolution to the question of security. Interviewees suggest demilitarizing areas around polling centres, banning candidates from polling centres and relying on UN peacekeeping forces for election security. As one interviewee sums up: ‘Because... I don’t trust our army not to be intimidated by the politicians.’²⁰⁰

EMPLOYMENT IN ELECTION WORK AS AN ECONOMIC AND DEMOCRATIC GOOD

Timing and logistic success means little if nobody wants to vote in an election for a government that they believe is neither accountable nor fit for purpose. Interviewees note, however, that the process of organizing elections might provide opportunities for good work, both in terms of pay and its democratic value. In the 2010 elections, enthusiastic young people were the backbone of the electoral mobilization force. Paid election employment is a chance to muster the support of young men and women, especially those who have been unable to find sustainable work after secondary and university education, in building a democratic process focused on seeking fundamental government reform.²⁰¹

This suggestion matches recent research and policy directions away from electoral peace messaging and towards a focus on democratic culture, justice and political accountability, all of which are heavily emphasized by study respondents across class, gender and regional lines.²⁰² Employing young men and women in the election process—as in 2010—would provide desperately needed economic support. Importantly, it might also provide an opportunity for disenfranchised young people to come together to test some of the democratic ideas emerging from the past six years of national dialogues and conferences.

197 Interview with PO, male worker, Torit, 31 May 2024.

198 Interview with J, elected male youth union leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.

199 Interviews with JM, female government official, Yei, 4 June 2024; RK, elected female customary authority and 2010 election worker, Yei, 3 June 2024.

200 Interview with MN, female worker and 2010 election worker, Kapoeta, 25 May 2024. This point is also made in interviews with CO, male civil society worker, Torit, 31 May 2024; VT, male worker, Yei, 3 June 2024; RK, elected female customary authority and 2010 election worker, Yei, 3 June 2024.

201 Interviews with PL, male government official, Kapoeta, 22 May 2024; JB, male government official and 2010 election staff, Juba, 24 May 2024; J, elected male youth union leader, Yei, 3 June 2024.

202 Gabrielle Lynch, Nic Cheeseman and Justin Willis, ‘From Peace Campaigns to Peaceocracy: Elections, Order and Authority in Africa’, *African Affairs* 118/473 (1 October 2019): 621.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR KEY NATIONAL AND GOVERNMENT ACTORS

There must be some clear attempts by the national government to address the immediate economic crisis and demonstrate a commitment to providing public goods. Strengthening current state and county attempts to mediate and formalize taxation systems that are fairer, transparent and that directly fund public goods will help to generate public engagement with a national election process.

The National Constitutional Review (NCR) process should not once again go over ground from the National Dialogue and National Economic Conference. Endless consultations such as rounds of research on the same problems are frustrating without implementation of their recommendations. The NCR process should build on existing national resolutions from these conferences to collectively draft a rationalized system of governance and representative democracy. Government commitment to the constitutional review process, alongside other election preparations, is critical for engaging with the core citizen concerns set out in this report.

In the absence of a single trusted security provider, working with international partners to arrange independent external security for future elections may be necessary for trust and the safety of all.

The National Election Commission (NEC) could consider established South Sudanese methods and standards of electoral practice to see where good practices and high standards could be replicated in national elections. The goal would be to draw on widely understood and established practices to encourage popular support and trust in the process.

National bodies could consider supporting elections at lower levels of government or for assemblies first, where the electorate and elected officials are supposedly most directly accountable to their public and constituents.

In the absence of a full national population census, voter registration may be fraught with tension. As such, this needs careful political consideration for local contexts, especially in relation to the risk of exclusion of young women, the elderly and disabled people. National bodies could prioritize the organization of localized and rapid election tallies and declarations to avoid accusations of rigging by authorities in Juba.

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND CIVIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGNERS

Working with the NCR process may be a more productive path to engaging disaffected and angry citizens than a more general voter mobilization campaign. This could include continued two-way discussions over the aims of elections as plans take shape.

Civil society campaigns could take up the language and ideas of recent national consultative processes, including the emphasis on South Sudanese local-level democratic practices and accountability. This would best reflect key popular demands for the election and constitutional process. While this will likely involve more controversy and risk for civil society campaigners, this approach would also avoid an over-focus on more generic peace messaging that can result in repression of public discourse and unresolved grievances. Similarly, pressing for inclusivity and diversity in the elections is a useful space for arguing for wider structural changes in government, especially for women; for example, by advocating for gender quotas from the political parties to the national parliament.

FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND DONORS

South Sudanese citizens are asking for real structural reform. International donors and organizations should press forward with difficult conversations around genuine constitutional change at the highest levels. Funding plans should focus on projects that incorporate the recommendations of the National Dialogue process and similar popular consultations. This will support pathways to better governance and also encourage voter engagement with electoral processes that actually reflect their demands.

Working to avoid or mitigate obvious risks of conflict in the election process—for example, during voter registration, in party primaries and in voter mobilization during balloting—is of course essential. The findings of this research, however, add a more nuanced perspective. That is, study respondents repeatedly indicate that citizens want to confront political powers over injustice and inequality through the elections. This suggests two constructive forms of engagement on the part of international partners and agencies. They should actively support civil society efforts to call for peaceful protest and confrontation to demand greater justice and equality, as well as accountability. Second, they should temper their emphasis on maintaining peace and security throughout the election process with a greater emphasis laid on justice and equal representation as essential to democratic transition in South Sudan. An overemphasis on peace and security by international actors risks perpetuating state justifications for repression.

Funders and organizations undertaking large-scale projects focused on the election through local partners should carefully consider funding both sustained employment and training in democratic processes for as many people as possible. Paid employment in democratic work is one way to re-engage disaffected and underemployed young men and women with the institutions of government.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS, WORDS AND PHRASES

ARCSS	Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
CSO	civil society organization
EC	electoral college
GoSS	Government of South Sudan
NCP	National Congress Party
NEC	National Election Commission
NCR	National Constitutional Review (process)
NCRC	National Constitutional Review Commission
<i>payam</i>	(<i>South Sudanese Arabic</i>) second-lowest administrative division, below a
county	
PPC	Political Parties Council
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
SPLM-IG	Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In Government
SPLM-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In Opposition
<i>Terchuong</i>	(<i>Nuer</i>) Justice Fighters

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