

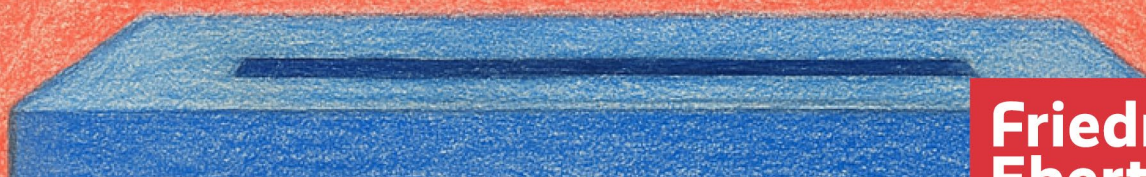
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# Trends in Civic Space and Elections in South Sudan:

*Findings from the 2025 Public Perceptions of Peace Survey*

September 2025



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# Executive Summary

The report draws on recent opinion polling data collected by Detcro, the [Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform \(PeaceRep\)](#), funded by the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and the Raising Civil Voices program by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), funded by the European Union. The survey collected views from 4,582 respondents across 15 locations in all 10 states and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), bringing the total dataset since 2021 to 22,621 individuals. It examines trends in public opinion related to peace and safety, national elections, civic and political space, and trust in political institutions.

Findings point to a significant deterioration in perceptions of safety, with nearly a quarter of respondents in 2025 saying they feel unsafe – more than double the 2024 figure. This decline correlates with rising insecurity, renewed conflict between government and opposition forces, community tensions, and escalating regional tensions. Public confidence in South Sudan being ‘at peace’ has also fallen sharply since 2024.

Despite these challenges, the appetite for elections remains strong. Most respondents feel ready to vote and support holding elections on time in December 2026, even in the face of widespread concerns about electoral violence. Two-thirds of respondents anticipate a high risk of elec-

tion-related violence, and nearly half believe that holding elections could trigger a return to civil war. Nevertheless, these risks do not appear to dampen public demand for a democratic transition.

The survey reveals stark limitations in civic space. Nearly half of respondents feel unsafe speaking on politically sensitive issues, and confidence in the ability of political parties to campaign freely is uneven across regions and party affiliations. Awareness of the Kenyan-led Tumannini peace process is low, especially among women, and trust in key stakeholders remains fragile. While the ruling Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) party continues to enjoy a clear lead in public support, despite the political and military confrontations with the main opposition outlet, the SPLM-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO), a significant number of respondents are also disillusioned with all political parties.

The findings suggest that South Sudan is entering a high-stakes period in its transition. With time running short and key benchmarks for elections still unmet, national and international actors must consider new approaches to align political incentives behind peaceful and credible elections. Protecting civic space, empowering civil society, and promoting transparency in the electoral process will be essential for restoring public trust and averting further political instability.

# 1.

## Introduction

South Sudan is stuck. With the signing of the revitalized peace agreement in September 2018, the government embarked on an ambitious transitional agenda, including national elections at the end of the transitional period. But political incentives are not aligned behind effective implementation, and the peace agreement has encountered numerous stumbling blocks over the past seven years. If elections were held as planned in December 2026, much of the current political leadership, including many of the 650 members of parliament (MPs), 45 ministers and deputy ministers, and five vice-presidents, would have to step aside. In the past, parliament has responded to political pressures such as these and the failure of the parties to implement key provisions of the peace agreement by extending the term of the executive and legislature, which it has done five times since South Sudan's independence in 2011. However, this strategy is providing diminishing returns, and if the government is not able to organize elections by the end of 2026, it risks losing public confidence in the transitional process entirely.

For the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), one might assume that its relative popularity (as compared to other opposition groups) and the military dominance of the South Sudan People's Defence Force (SSPDF) would justify moving ahead with elections without further delay. Indeed, the party leadership and the President himself have voiced support for the electoral process. Yet there is structural resistance from within the party, especially from high-profile figures who see a risk in losing out during the unavoidable, and possibly hard to control, political reconfiguration after elections.

South Sudan admittedly presents an exceedingly complex environment – politically and operationally – for elections. The arrest of major opposition figures, rapidly deteriorating security situation, resumption of open warfare between the SSPDF and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO), the re-entry of the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) to the battlefield, major cuts to foreign assistance, and the government's repeated failure to attract significant external loans, be they commercial or from development banks such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), all complicate the electoral landscape. However, the risks of proceeding with elections in a fraught political and security environment must be weighed against the risks of perpetual transition that is failing to deliver meaningful results for the people of South Sudan.

Two scenarios present themselves moving forward. In the first scenario, the transitional government manages to get the parties to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) to agree to forgo major benchmarks in the transition – such as the constitution making process, the census, or the full integration of all armed outlets as Necessary Unified Forces (NUF) – and postpone them to after eventual elections. While many of these steps are necessary preconditions for elections, they are likely not feasible in the time remaining before elections. The process may not meet the minimum standards for a credible electoral process, but policymakers can take heart in the notion that 'bad elections are better than no elections' and it minimizes the potential for a return to full-scale war. Considering the lack of progress since the last extension in September 2024, this seems like the less likely of the two scenarios.

In the second scenario, the parties fail to agree on key benchmarks for the electoral process and the required amendments to R-ARCSS, the government chooses not to move ahead with elections in violation of the peace agreement or else fails with the practical organization of the electoral process, and elections cannot be held in December 2026. The only option is for the government to extend its term in office yet again on the promise that this time it will muster the political will and resources, even though it has repeatedly failed to do so in the past. Due to the relatively low popularity of the opposition, as shown later in this report, many opposition figures reportedly favour this scenario, whether or not they acknowledge it in their public statements.

A key question for policymakers in this scenario concerns the nature of the transitional government that is entrusted with preparing for elections, and whether some concessions can be factored into the arrangement to better align political incentives behind the effective implementation of the peace agreement. Mediators and guarantors of the peace process have not been able to get the parties to factor such concessions into previous agreements, and there do not appear to be any immediate prospects for this to happen in the near future.

South Sudan once again finds itself at a critical juncture. The decisions that are made in the coming months and years are likely to affect the trajectory of the country for many years to come. It is therefore important that decisions are based on a firm understanding of the views and

aspirations of the people of South Sudan. This report takes stock of trends in public perceptions of peace, including issues relating to civic space and national elections. It presents data from the sixth iteration of a national opinion poll on perceptions of peace and of the peace process that Detcro and the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep) have conducted since 2021, with support by the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (FES) South Sudan since 2023. Data was collected in 15 locations across all 10 states and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) between March and June 2025. The survey targeted 4,582 respondents in this round, bringing the total sample size for the six waves of data collection to 22,621 people.

After a brief overview of the survey methodology, the report presents data on trends in perceptions of peace and safety, respondent readiness and preferred timing of elections, the perceived risk of electoral violence, civic and political space, policy priorities, and party and candidate preferences. The concluding remarks aim to set a strategic direction for policymakers as they consider options for national elections and the broader transitional process in the months and years to come.

## 2. Methodological Note

The survey counties (referred to as ‘locations’) are a convenience sample of areas that represent principal regions and conflict theatres in South Sudan. Within each county, the team adopted an approximately self-weighting stratified random sampling approach to select individuals. Simple random sampling was not possible due to the absence of recent census data. Therefore, the team divided each county into environments (urban, rural and IDP camps) and evaluated their relative population densities using the GRID3 South Sudan Settlement Extents, Version 01.01 dataset.<sup>1</sup>

Informed by this data, the research team randomly sampled map coordinates in urban and rural areas.<sup>2</sup> Male-fe-

male enumerator pairs began each work day at one of these randomly-selected map coordinates, and then followed a random walk assisted by a smartphone phone app. Respondents from internally displaced person (IDP) camps were sampled using the most up-to-date United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) head counts and International Organization for Migration (IOM) IDP Site Multi-Sector Needs, Vulnerabilities data. Enumerators administered the survey anonymously on smartphones using Kobo Toolbox survey technology. This allowed a high-level of data protection and real-time monitoring of responses and enumerator daily work.

<sup>1</sup> Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), Columbia University and Novel-T. 2021. GRID3 South Sudan Settlement Extents, Version 01. Palisades, NY: Geo-Referenced Infrastructure and Demographic Data for Development (GRID3). <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-khpa-pq09>.

<sup>2</sup> This was accomplished using the random point generation tools in ArcMap GIS software, produced by the Environmental Systems Research Institute.

### 3. Trends in Perceptions of Peace and Safety

Previous surveys have shown a consistent trend in which there are small but statistically significant improvements in perceived safety across the sample population as a whole. The gradual improvements in the security situation suggested that the R-ARCSS and permanent ceasefire were delivering meaningful, if modest, results, despite the meagre progress that has been made in implementing the agreement. However, it was also apparent that these fragile gains would not last in the absence of a more concerted effort to ensure security and promote dialogue among the warring groups.

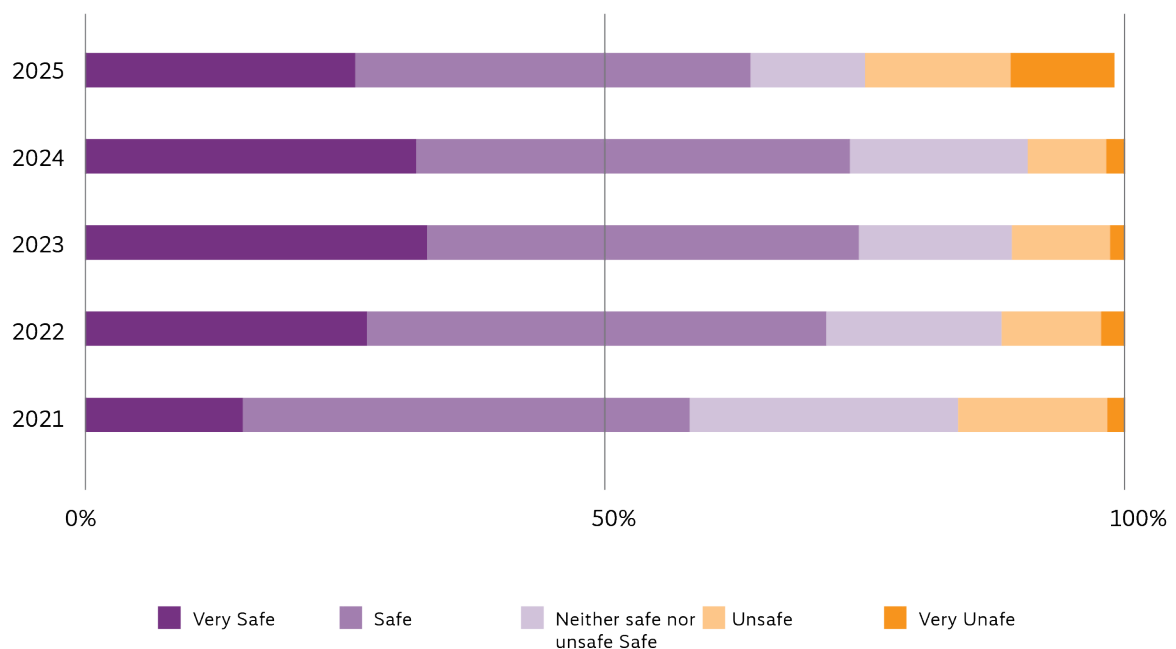
Tensions among the signatories to the agreement came to a head in the first quarter of 2025, with clashes between the SSPDF and SPLM-IO reported in Western Equatoria and Western Bahr-el-Ghazal in January and between the

SSPDF and the White Army in Nasir in February. Government forces, backed by Uganda’s military, launched airstrikes in Nasir and neighboring areas, killing dozens of civilians and displacing thousands.<sup>3</sup> The government blamed the First Vice President, Riek Machar, for the violence, placing him under house arrest.<sup>4</sup> More than 20 other opposition figures were either arrested or went into hiding.

The deteriorating security situation was reflected in the survey data. For the first time in 2025, the data showed a decrease in overall safety, with nearly one-quarter of respondents saying they felt ‘unsafe’ or ‘very unsafe’ in 2025, more than double the number who reported feeling ‘unsafe’ or ‘very unsafe’ in 2024 (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Aggregate Perceived Safety x Year (2021-25) (N = 22,621)

Figure. 1

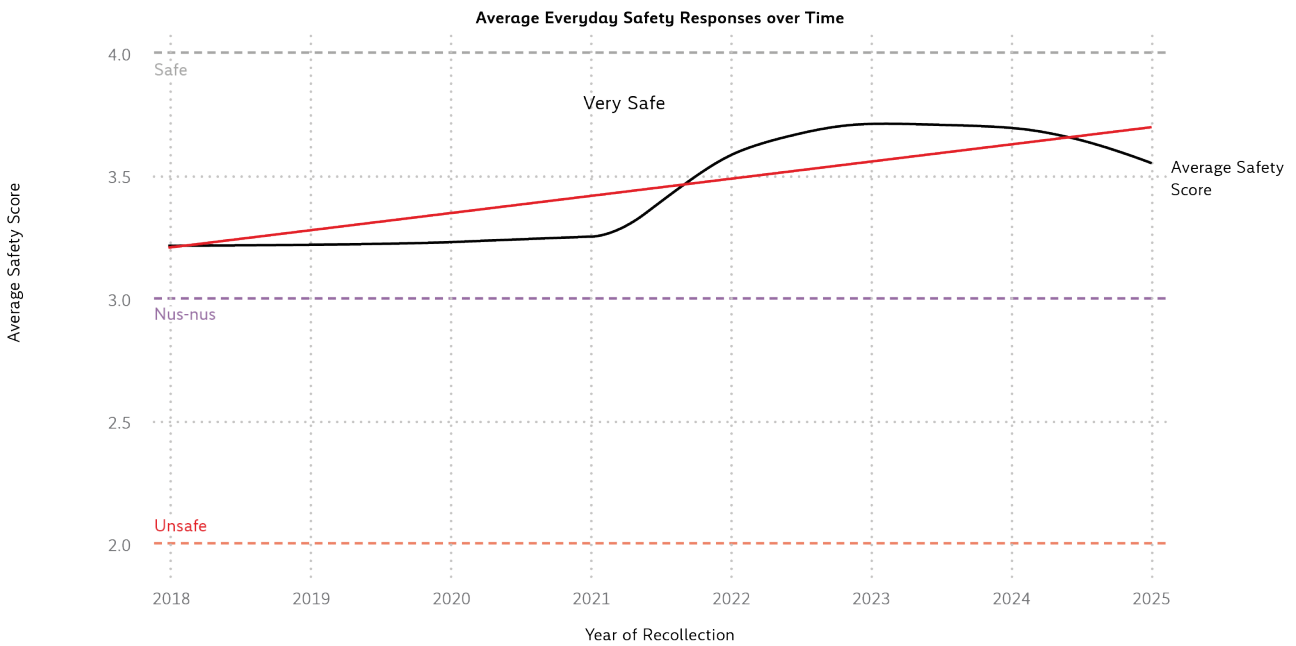


<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch, *South Sudan Army Attacks Displace Thousands in Nasir*, HRW (Feb. 27, 2025), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/27/south-sudan-army-attacks-displace-thousands-nasir>.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Pospisil, *Never Let a Good Crisis Go: On the Political Escalation in South Sudan*, Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep) blog post (4 Apr. 2025), available at <https://peacerep.org/2025/04/04/never-let-a-good-crisis-go/>.

Figure. 2

### Average Perceived Safety x Year (2021-25) (N = 22,621)



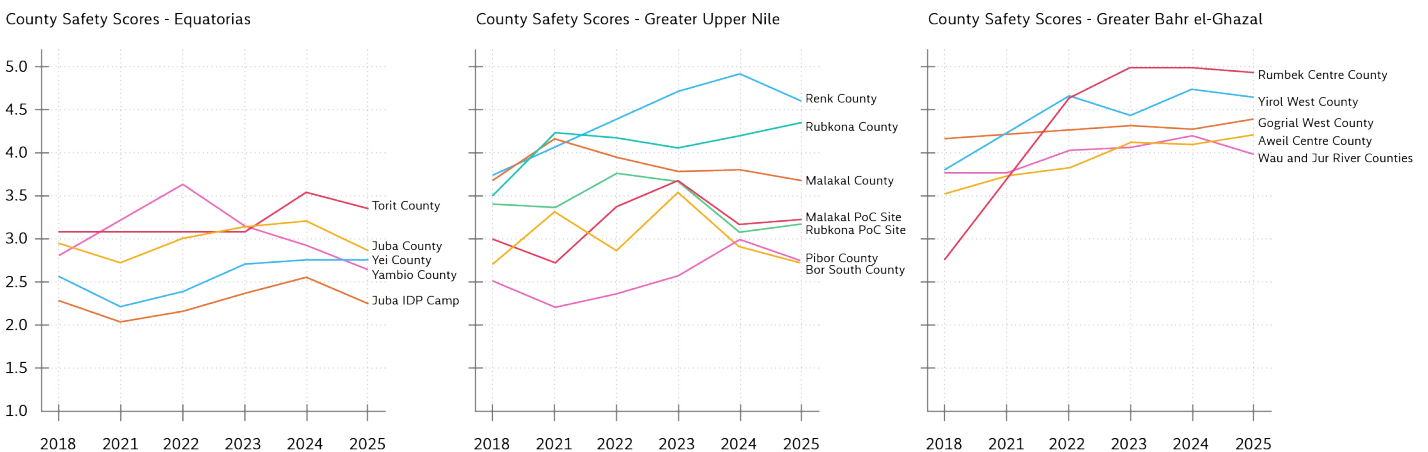
Safety Indicator: All

The subnational data provided additional nuance to these trends. All but six of the 17 locations in Figure 3 below show a deterioration in perceived safety between 2024 and 2025. In addition to the escalating violence described above, other contributing factors to feelings of insecurity include mass displacement caused by the conflict in Sudan, climate shocks (particularly flooding), and economic hardship. Improvements in perceived safety were only documented in Aweil and Gogrial West in Greater Bahr-el-Ghazal and Rubkona, the Rubkona IDP site, and Malakal IDP site in Greater Upper Nile. In Greater Equatoria, levels of safety in Yei were essentially unchanged between 2024 and 2025.

This may appear surprising considering the battles that erupted between SSPDF and SPLM-IO in Panyume on the border between Yei and Morobo in April 2025, just a few weeks before data collection for the survey took place. However, as noted in the section on the Tumaini process below, the more recent escalation in fighting around Yei is taking place against the backdrop of a counter-insurgency campaign by the government that succeeded in coopting several generals in the National Salvation Front (NAS). This has limited the opposition group’s capacity to wage war against the government and may have contributed to a more stable security context in the short-term.

### Mean Safety Score x Year x Region (2018-25) (N = 22,621)

Figure. 3

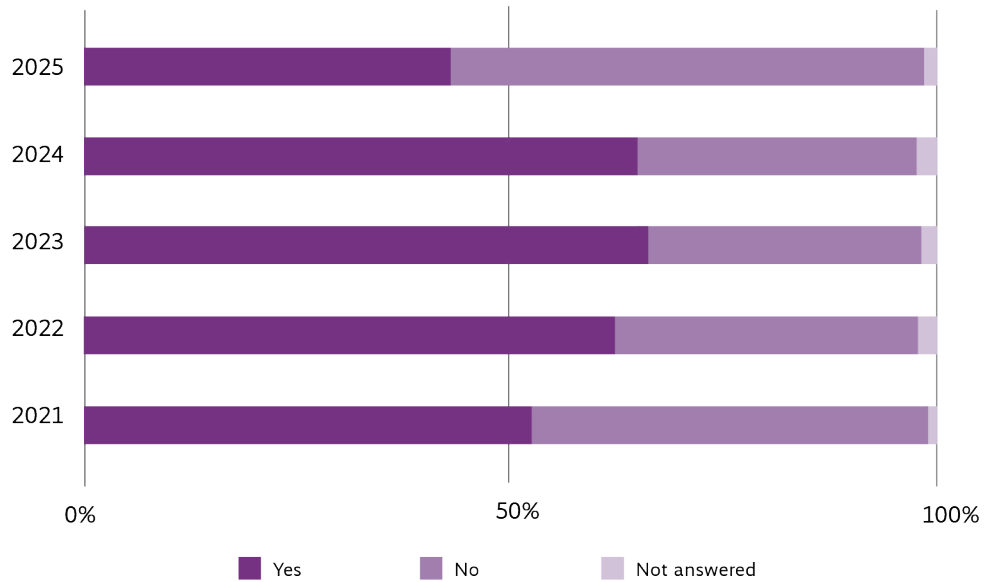


The trend was also apparent in respondent perceptions of peace. In 2025, a majority of respondents said that South Sudan was not at peace as compared to just one-third of respondents who said the country was not at peace in 2024 (see Figure 4). Similar views were expressed about the pro-

spects for peace over the next three years (see Figure 5). These findings suggest that public confidence in the R-ARCSS and its ability to secure lasting peace may be waning.

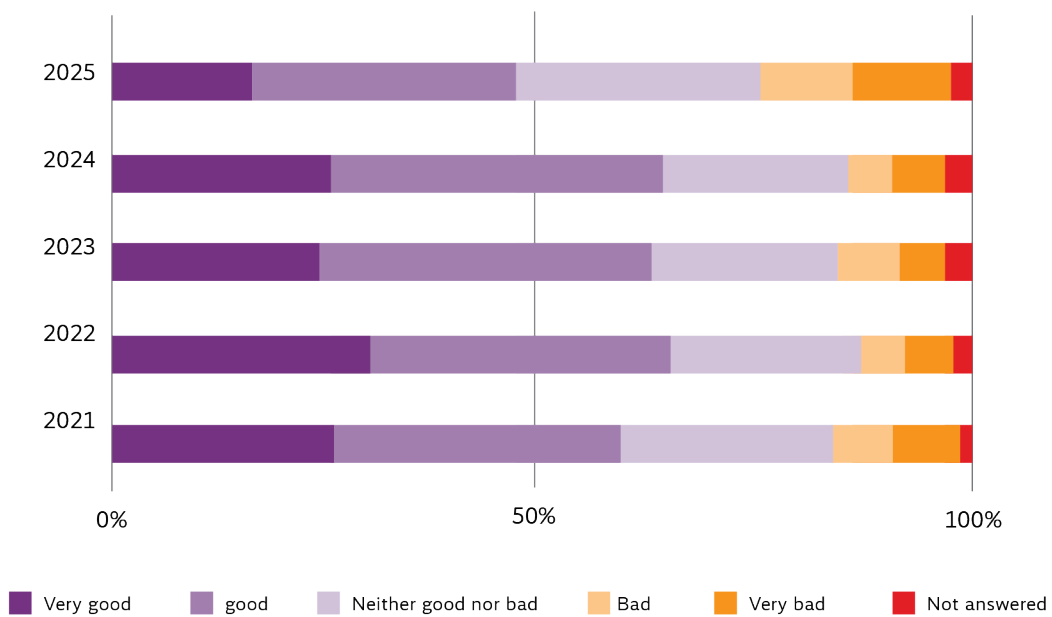
*Is South Sudan at peace?  
(2021-25) (N = 22,621)*

Figure. 4



*What are the prospects for peace in South Sudan over the next three years? (2021-25) (N = 22,621)*

Figure. 5



## 4. Tumaini Peace Process

The Tumaini (meaning ‘hope’ in Swahili) peace initiative was launched in May 2024 under Kenyan mediation to bring in armed ‘holdout’ groups that did not sign the 2018 R-ARCSS.<sup>5</sup> The process aimed to bring back several past political and military leaders, most prominently, the former Chief of Defence Forces, Paul Malong, and the former SPLM Executive Secretary, Pagan Amum. However, under the auspices of an (over)ambitious Kenyan mediation and political manoeuvres by leaders that saw an opportunity to use the Tumaini process to legitimize another postponement of elections, the talks arguably turned into a substantive exercise of writing a new comprehensive peace agreement without credible representation from many of the major political forces on the ground.<sup>6</sup>

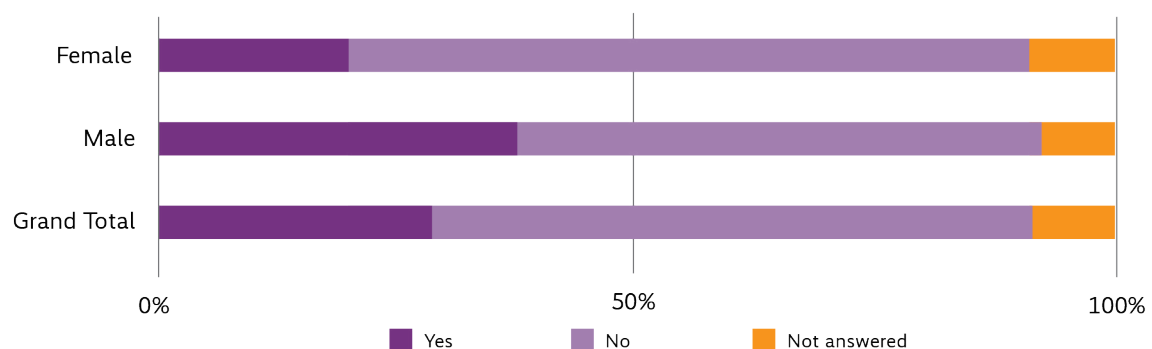
The Tumaini process produced a Declaration of Commitment and eight agreed protocols on governance, security reforms, and responsibility sharing. By late 2024 and early 2025, negotiations had largely stalled due to distrust among the negotiating parties, mainly fuelled by scepticism among the political leadership in Juba, who felt as though the talks had substantially deviated from the initial plan.<sup>7</sup> The South Sudan government changed its delegati-

on several times and opposition parties accused the government of reneging on agreed protocols, with the government alleging that Tumaini had exceeded its mandate. Following this logic, Presidential Advisor Kuol Manyang Juuk, who leads the government delegation, publicly declared the initiative “dead”, accusing it of attempting to supplant the R-ARCSS and to legitimise armed opposition abroad.<sup>8</sup>

Survey data showed considerable gaps in awareness about the Tumaini process among populations in South Sudan. Sixty-three percent of respondents said they never heard of the Tumaini process (see Figure 6). Levels of awareness were particularly low among women, 71 percent of whom had not heard about Tumaini as compared to just 54 percent of men. Those who were aware of the process expressed the highest levels of trust (depicted in the darker columns in Figure 7 below) for other stakeholders (e.g., faith leaders, civil society, women, youth, etc.), while the lowest levels of trust (depicted in the lighter columns) were expressed for holdout groups and the R-TGONU. More than a third of respondents assigned the lowest score of ‘1’ to both the holdout groups and R-TGONU.

*Have you ever heard of the Tumaini peace talks that are currently underway between government and opposition groups in Nairobi? x Gender (2025) (N = 4,582)*

Figure. 6



5 Peace and Security Council, *Report of the Field Mission of the Peace and Security Council to the Republic of South Sudan*, Conducted from 23 to 26 June 2024 (PSC/PR/ FIELD MISSION/REPT.1219) (June 28, 2024), [https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/1219-Report-of-the-PSC-Field-Mission-to-South-Sudan-EN.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/1219-Report-of-the-PSC-Field-Mission-to-South-Sudan-EN.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

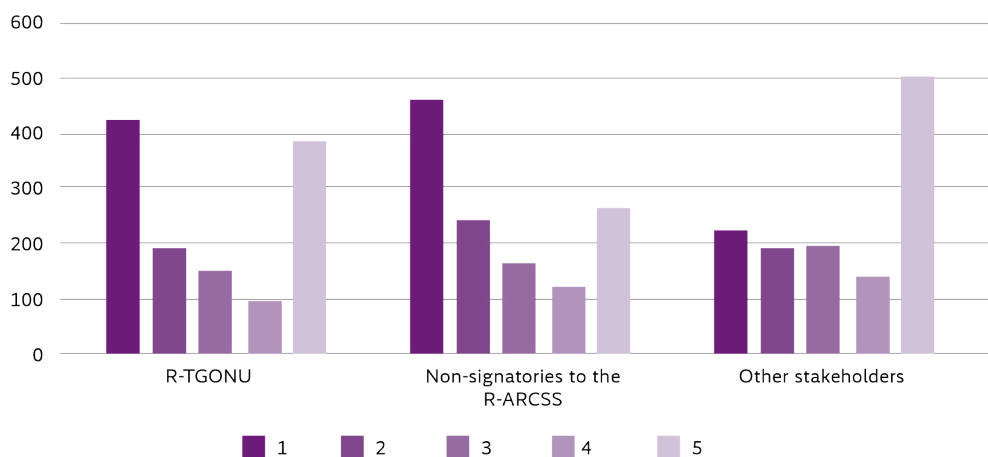
6 Jan Pospisil and Ibrahim Magara, ‘Overloaded? Hope and Scepticism around the Tumaini Peace Initiative for South Sudan’, *African Arguments*, 27 May 2024, <https://africanarguments.org/2024/05/overloaded-hope-and-scepticism-around-the-tumaini-peace-initiative-for-south-sudan/>.

7 Emmanuel J. Akile, *SSOMA Says Tumaini Peace Initiative at Deadlock*, *Eye Radio* (Dec. 15, 2024), <https://www.eyeradio.org/ssoma-says-tumaini-peace-initiative-at-deadlock/>; Deng Machol, *South Sudan Peace Talks Resume After 4 Months and the Sacking of a Government Delegation*, *AP News* (Mar. 27, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/south-sudan-peace-talks-9999a1be3dcc48950b5a831c99aeea1b>.

8 Emmanuel J. Akile, *Kuol Manyang Declares KenyaLead Peace Talks Dead*, *Eye Radio* (July 30, 2025), <https://www.eyeradio.org/kuol-manyang-declares-kenyan-lead-peace-talks-dead/>.

Figure. 7

How much do you trust the following actors involved with the Tumaini process? (Scale 1-5) (2025) (N = 1,311)



Respondents also appeared ambivalent about the prospects for success of the Tumaini process. Most respondents (48%) said they were ‘somehow confident’ that the process would succeed in restoring implementation of the R-ARCSS (see Figure 8). Scepticism was highest among male respondents, one-third of whom said they were ‘not confident at all’ that the process would succeed. Perhaps

the most important indicator of the success of a peace initiative is the extent to which it helps to contain the violence among the warring parties. Here, the data shows somewhat mixed results. Overall, 35 percent of respondents say the security situation in their area has improved since May 2024, 37 percent say there has been no change, and 26 percent say it has changed for the worse (see Figure 9).

Figure. 8

How confident are you that the Tumaini process will succeed in restoring implementation of the revitalized peace agreement? x Gender (2025) (N = 1,311)

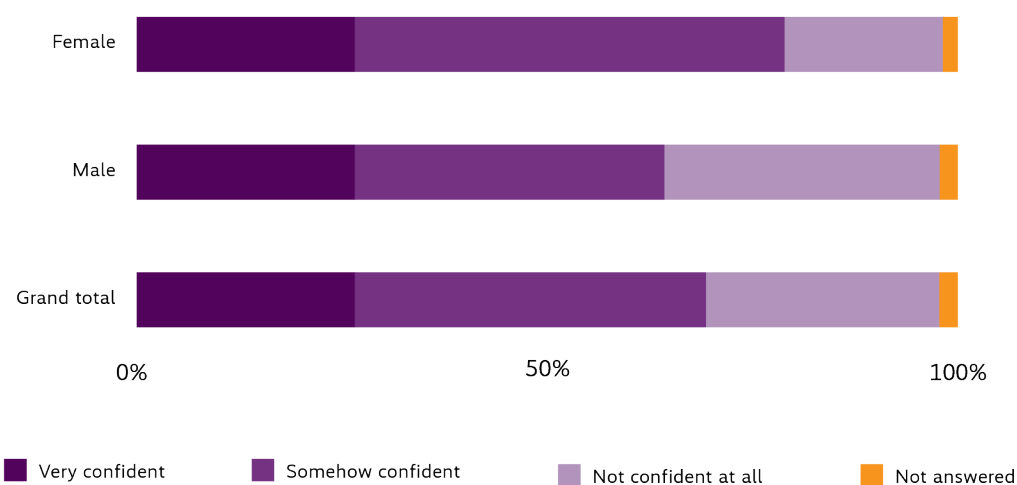
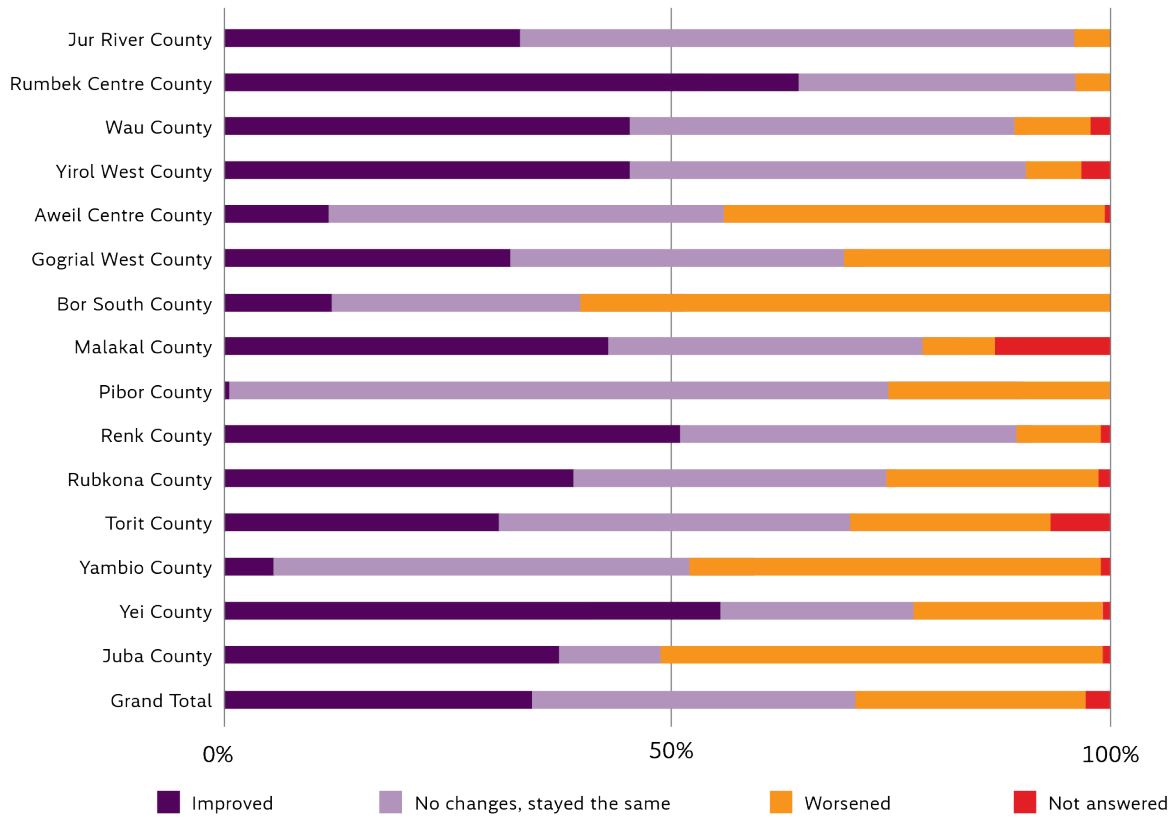


Figure. 9

Since May 2024, have you noticed any changes in your community's safety or stability? x County (2024) (N = 4,582)



While it is difficult to draw causal linkages, the presence of a peace process is often associated with improving and worsening security conditions in response to changing political incentives and disincentives. In Yei, for example, one of the areas with the greatest concentrations of forces associated with the armed opposition group, NAS, a majority of respondents said the security situation had improved since the Tumaini process started in May 2024. Rather than

a direct consequence of the Tumaini process, the improving security situation may be more directly related to a government counterinsurgency campaign that was rolled out alongside Tumaini. While the Tumaini may have provided a more favorable context for such political deals, it also resulted in a fragmented opposition that is incapable of making firm commitments in the context of a peace process.

# 5. Readiness and Timing of Elections

National elections have been postponed or cancelled in South Sudan five times since the country's independence in 2011. The Transitional Constitution (2011) stipulated that elections would be held in 2015, but these plans were derailed by the outbreak of civil war in December 2013. In April 2015, before the signing of the ARCSS, parliament voted to extend the term of the executive and legislature by three years to July 2018. In July 2018, after the signing of a cessation of hostilities agreement in December 2017 and permanent ceasefire in June 2018, but before the signing of the R-ARCSS, parliament again extended the president's term to 2021.

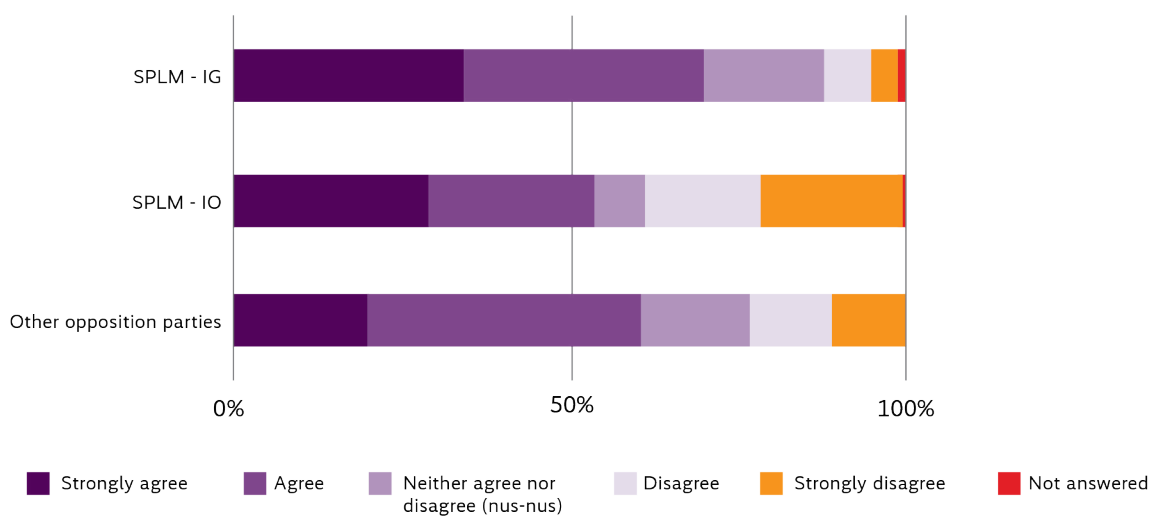
With the signing of the R-ARCSS in September 2018 and the establishment of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGONU) in February 2020, elections were scheduled for 2023. In 2022, however, the parties pushed them to 2024 due to delays in implementing key provisions of the peace agreement. Finally, in September

2024, elections were once again postponed to December 2026 to allow time for key processes to take place, including a population census, development of the permanent constitution, registration of political parties, and other electoral prerequisites. In the 14 years that South Sudan has existed as an independent state, it has not managed to organize a single national election.

South Sudanese perceptions of elections should be understood against this historical backdrop. On the one hand, most people feel prepared to vote (86%), think that South Sudan is ready for elections (65%, down from 76% in 2024) (see Figure 10), and want elections to be held on time in December 2026 (63%) (see Figure 11). SPLM supporters (74%) are much more adamant that elections should be held on time than supporters of the SPLM-IO (51%) or other opposition groups (50%), which may not be surprising considering the political and military advantages that the SPLM currently holds over other parties.

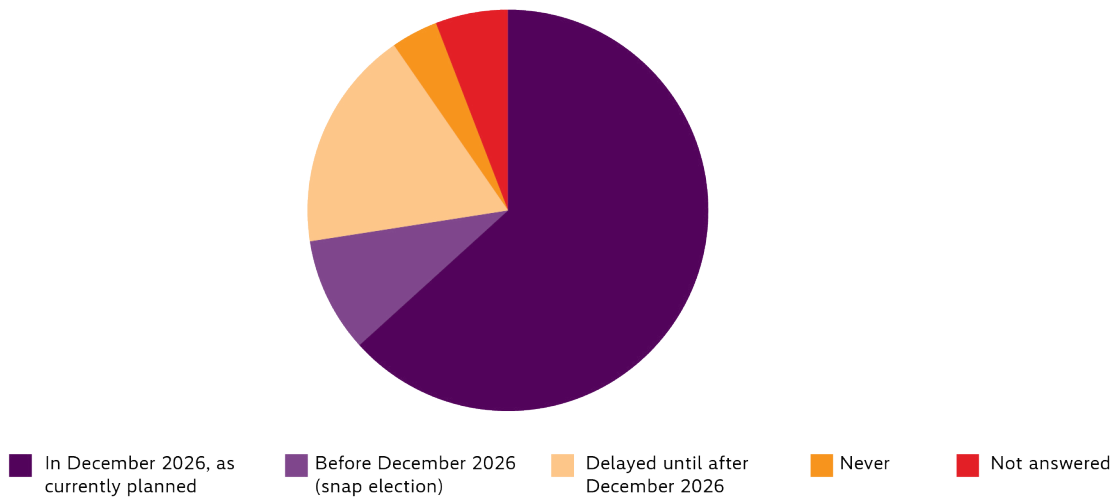
Agree/Disagree - 'South Sudan is ready for elections.' x Preferred Party (2025) (N = 4,582)

Figure. 10



When should elections be held? (2025) (N = 4,582)

Figure. 11

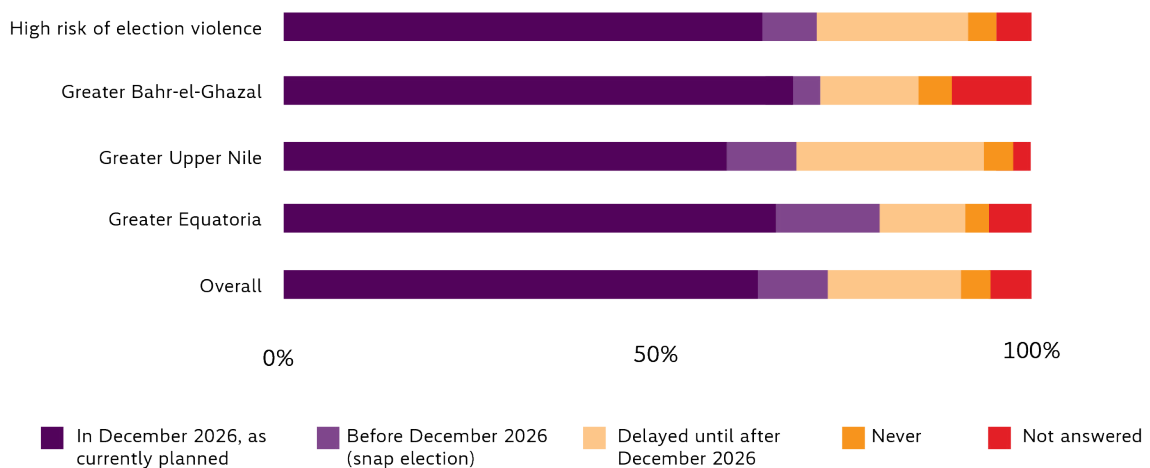


Perhaps more surprising is the finding that perceived risk of electoral violence does not have a significant impact on people’s preference for elections to be held on time (see Figure 12), which confirms previous survey results on the same question. Nor do regional differences, which are quite pronounced with regard to other indicators, show much di-

vergence of opinion on the timing of elections. A majority of respondents across all three regions want elections to be held on time, though respondents in Greater Upper Nile were somewhat more likely to support a delay and respondents in Greater Equatoria were more likely to favour snap elections (i.e., elections held before December 2026).

When should elections be held? x Risk of electoral violence x Region (2025) (N = 4,582)

Figure. 12

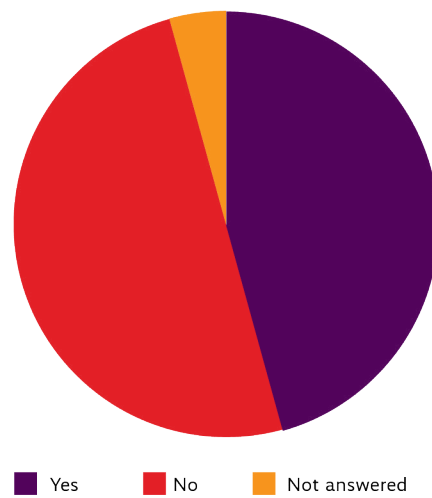


Half (50%) of respondents said they would not support a delay in the elections even if the necessary conditions were not in place in December 2026 (see Figure 13), further underscoring people's appetite for elections. Of those who said they would accept a delay if the necessary conditions were not in place, when asked if an enumerated list of tasks would warrant a delay, respondents cited the return of IDPs and refugees (51%), conduct of a population census (49%), adoption of a permanent constitution (49%) and deployment of the necessary unified force (46%) (see Figure 14).<sup>9</sup>

Thirty-eight percent of respondents said that none of the enumerated tasks would warrant a delay in elections. Just 19 percent of those who said they would accept a delay said that a failure to conclude the Tumaini process would warrant the postponement of elections, which may be unsurprising considering the low levels of awareness about the process. In response to a direct question about whether the permanent constitution should be enacted before or after elections, most respondents (72%) said that it should be enacted before elections.

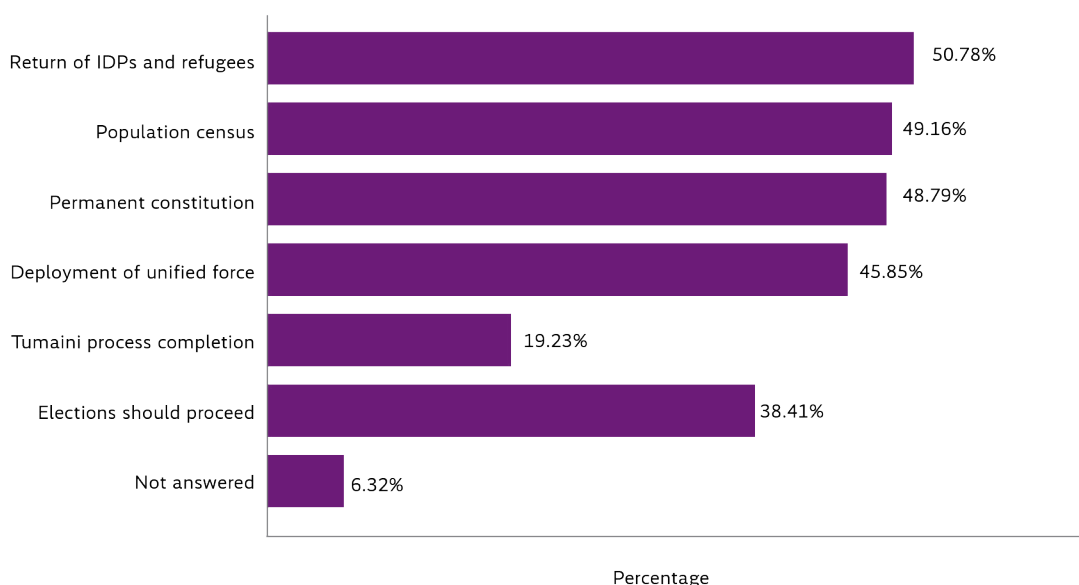
*Would you support a delay in elections if the necessary conditions are not in place in December 2026? (2025) (N = 4,582)*

**Figure. 13**



*Which, if any, of the following tasks, if not completed by December 2026, would warrant a delay in elections? (2025) (N = 4,582)*

**Figure. 14**



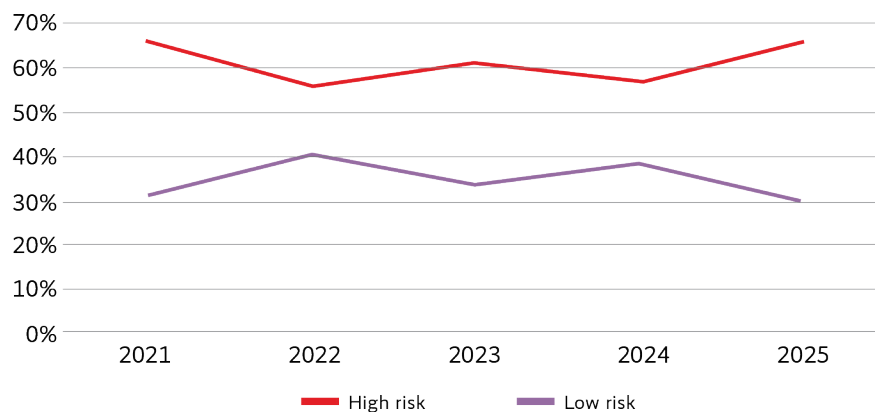
<sup>9</sup> When asked how long of a delay they would accept, most respondents said either 1-6 months (32%) or 1-2 years (26%).

## 6. Risk of Electoral Violence

Over the years, respondents have consistently voiced major fears of electoral violence, though the figure has fluctuated within a 10 percent margin from year to year. This year, two-thirds of respondents assessed the risk of electoral violence as ‘very high’ or ‘somehow high’, which rivals the highest number on record from 2021 (see Figure 15). Interestingly, the highest levels of concern in 2025 were found in the President’s home county of Gogrial West, where 97 percent of respondents said the risk was ‘very high’ or ‘somehow high’.

*How would you assess the risk of violence in relation to the elections? x Year (2021-25) (N = 22,621)*

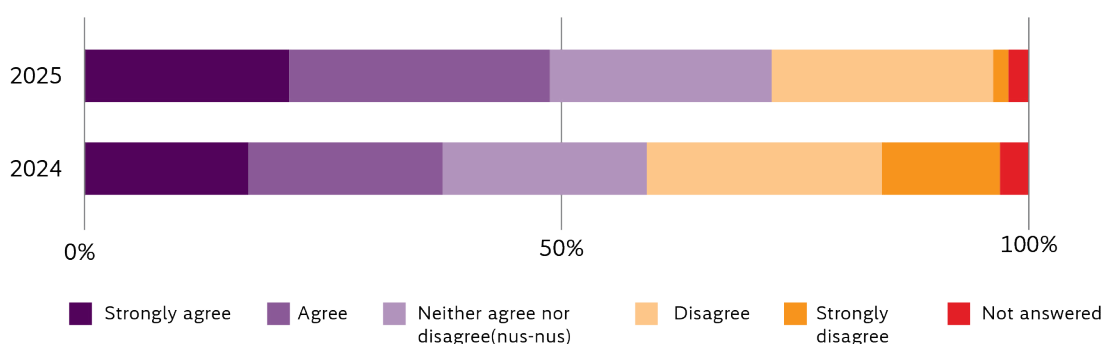
Figure. 15



Forty-nine percent of respondents ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that if elections are held as planned in December 2026, it is likely to cause a return to full-scale civil war (Figure 16). This is up from 38 percent who agreed with the statement in 2024. The risk of electoral violence does not only pose a direct threat to voters; it also creates a stifling environment for political campaigning and voter mobilization in the run-up to elections, threatening the integrity of the electoral process itself. These risks are particularly concerning considering the trust deficits between civilians and security organs and the history of ethnopolitical violence and atrocities in South Sudan. Nonetheless, as noted in the preceding section, respondent perceptions of risk do not significantly affect their views on whether elections should be held on time, suggesting that the perceived benefits of elections outweigh the perceived risks for most respondents, even if those risks include a return to full-scale war.

*Agree/Disagree – ‘If the elections are held as planned in December 2026, it is likely to cause a return to full-scale civil war in South Sudan.’ (2024-25) (N = 9,351)*

Figure. 16



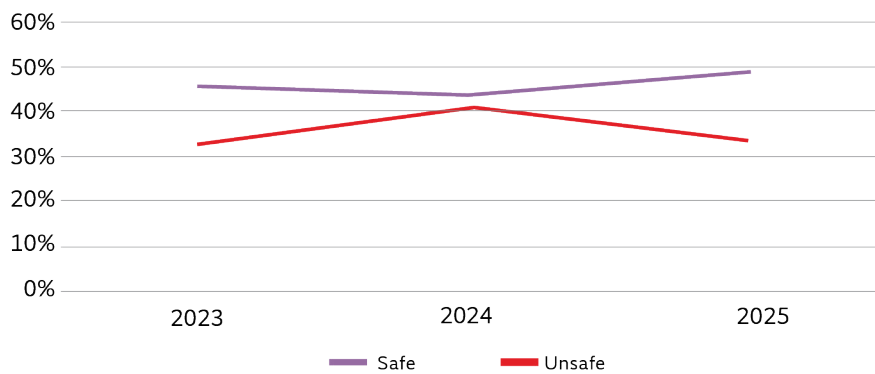
# 7. Civic and Political Space

The survey data show major shortcomings in civic and political space in South Sudan. Between 2024 and 2025, the number of people who say they feel 'safe' or 'very safe' speaking publicly on politically sensitive issues dropped by 7.5 percentage points and the number of people who say they feel 'unsafe' or 'very unsafe' increased by nearly six percentage points (see Figure 17). Overall, nearly half (49%) of respondents said they feel unsafe and just one-third say they feel safe speaking publicly on politically sensitive issues in 2025 (see Figure 18).

Perceived limitations on civic space are most pronounced in Greater Equatoria, where 64 percent of respondents feel unsafe as compared to 44 percent of respondents in Greater Upper Nile and 41 percent of respondents in Greater Bahr-el-Ghazal. Men were also more sensitive to restrictions on civic space than women, with 56 percent of men saying they feel unsafe speaking publicly on politically sensitive issues as compared to just 43 percent of women (see Figure 19).

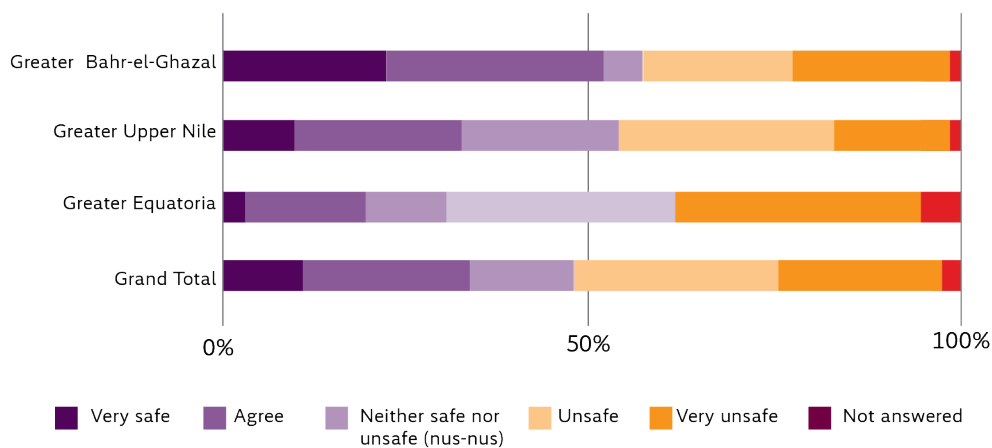
*How safe do you feel speaking publicly on politically sensitive issues? (2023-25) (N = 13,597)*

Figure. 17



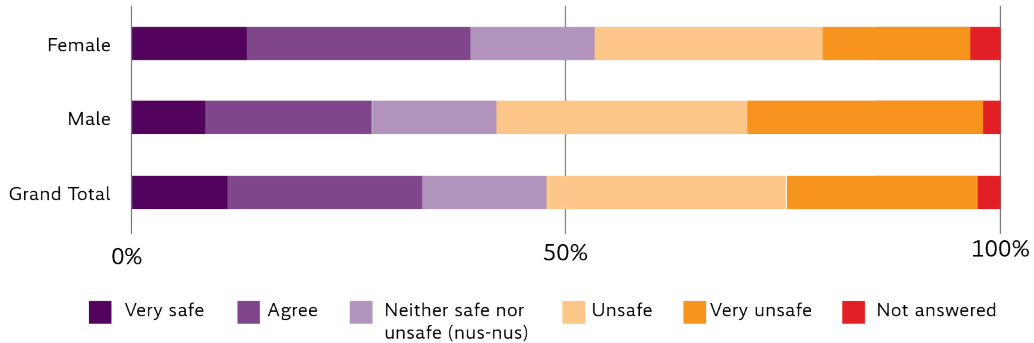
*How safe do you feel speaking publicly on politically sensitive issues? (2023-25) (N = 13,597)*

Figure. 18



How safe do you feel speaking publicly on politically sensitive issues? x Gender (2025) (N = 4,582)

Figure. 19

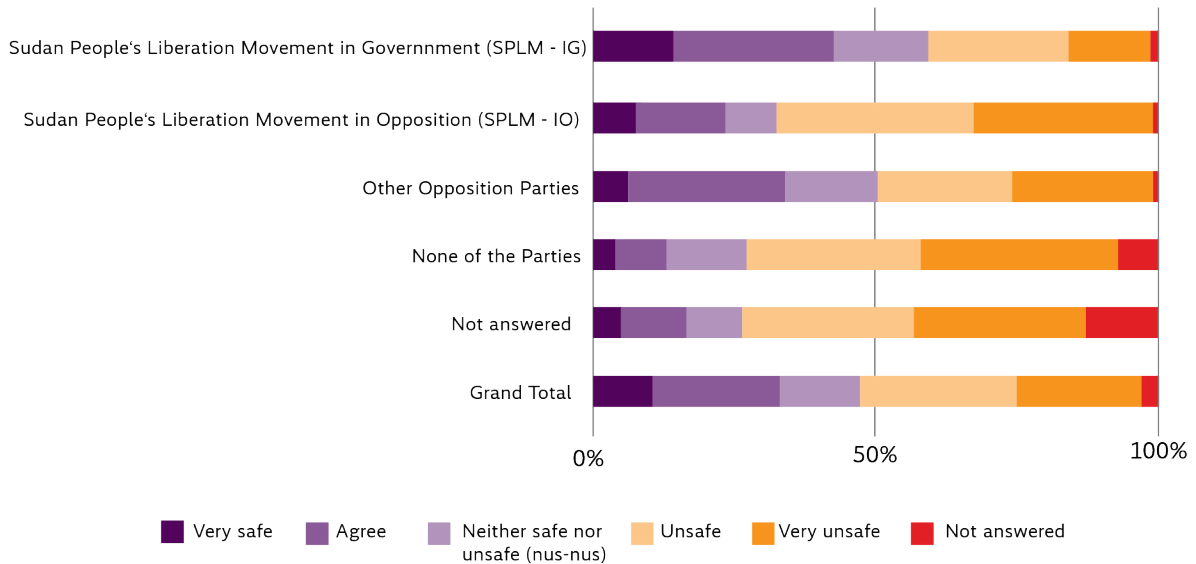


Disaggregating responses by party preference provides additional insights. While none of the groups has a majority that feels safe speaking publicly on politically sensitive issues, more supporters of the SPLM-IG feel safe (43%) than of the SPLM-IO (24%) or other opposition parties (34%). The highest levels of perceived restriction on civic space are apparent among respondents who say that none of the

parties has a good vision for South Sudan. Just 13 percent of these respondents said they feel safe speaking publicly on politically sensitive issues. These findings underscore the politically polarised environment in South Sudan and the pressures that many people feel to choose one side or the other.

How safe do you feel speaking publicly on politically sensitive issues? x Party Preference (2025) (N = 4,582)

Figure. 20

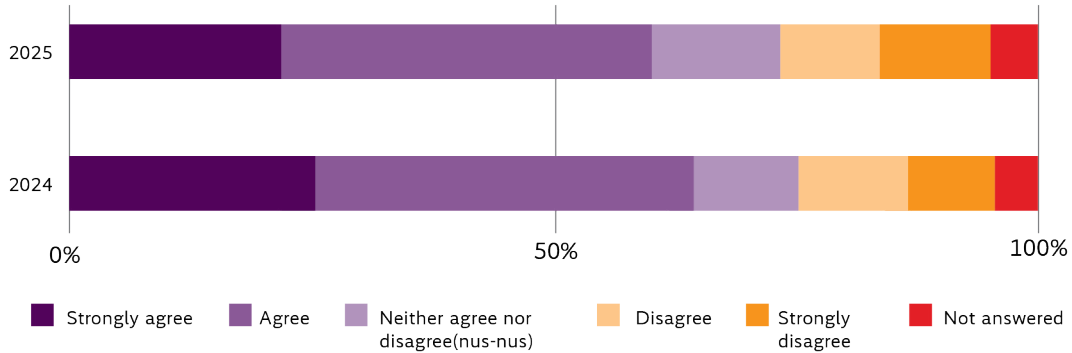


Overall, respondents were more favourable about political space than civic space. Sixty percent of respondents said that political parties were able to campaign freely in South Sudan (see Figure 21). Interestingly, these figures did not change much between 2024 and 2025, despite the political tensions that arose right before data was collected for this round of the survey. However, notable differences were ap-

parent regionally and by party preference. As with civic space, populations in Greater Equatoria were less likely to think that all political parties were able to campaign freely than respondents in the other regions (see Figure 22), as were supporters of the SPLM-IO and those who do not support any political party (see Figure 23).

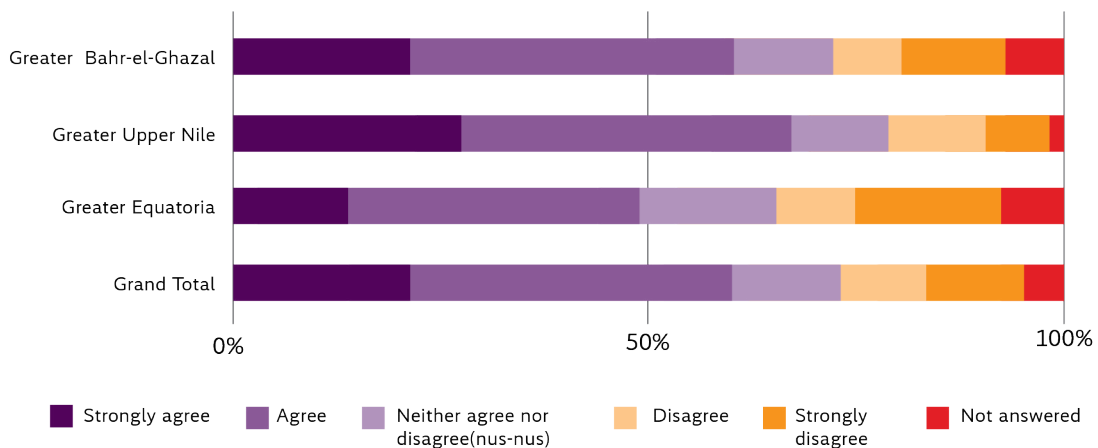
*Agree/Disagree: 'All political parties are able to campaign freely in South Sudan.' (2024-25) (N = 9,351)*

Figure. 21

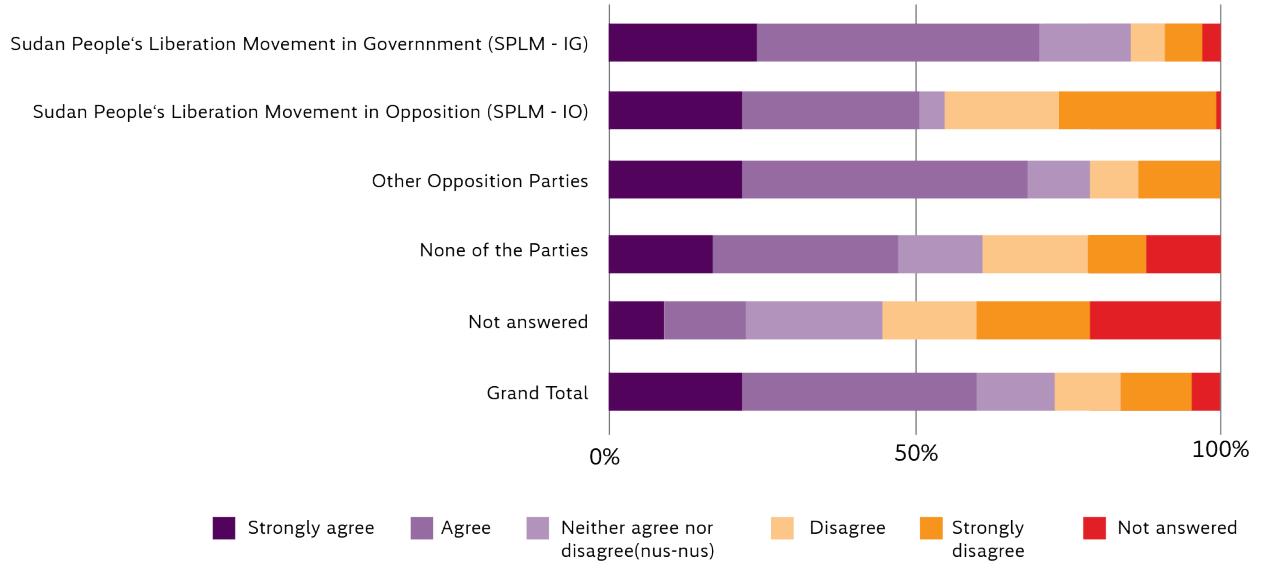


*Agree/Disagree: 'All political parties are able to campaign freely in South Sudan.' x Region (2025) (N = 4,582)*

Figure. 22



Agree/Disagree: All political parties are able to campaign freely in South Sudan. x Party Preference (2025) (N = 4,582)



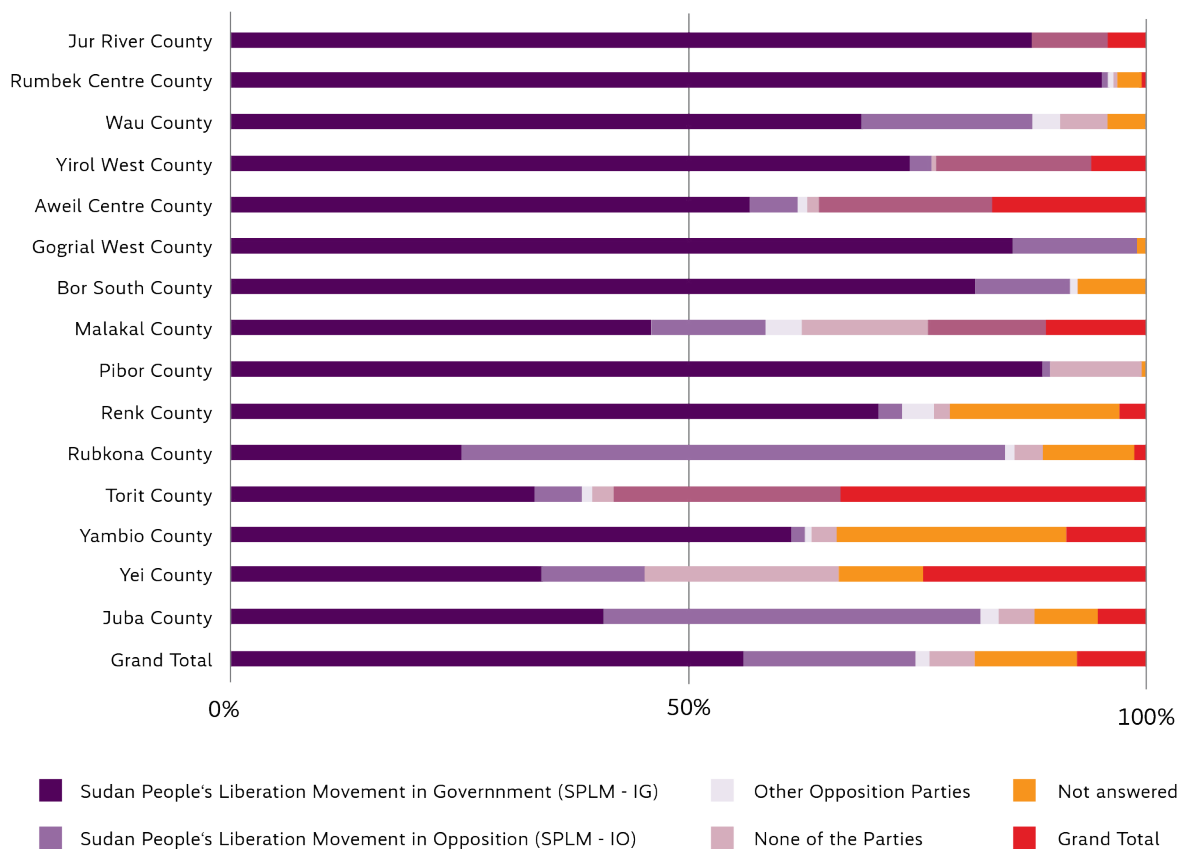
## 8. Party and Candidate Preferences

As with previous surveys, the SPLM-IG enjoys a considerable political advantage over other opposition groups. When asked what political party has the best vision for South Sudan, 56 percent of respondents said SPLM-IG, 19 percent said SPLM-IO and just one percent said SSOA. Eleven percent of respondents said that no party had a good vision for the country. The support for SPLM-IG has increased for a second year in a row from 45 percent in 2023 and 52 percent in 2024, while SPLM-IO's popularity has gone up and

down from 17 percent in 2023 and 21 percent in 2024. None of the other parties have managed to pass the four percent national threshold that is required for proportional representation seats in parliament. To the extent that this trend continues to hold and there is an increase in political campaigning in the run-up to elections, the country may experience a polarization of viewpoints as people move from the 'none of the above' category into supporters of one of the two main parties.

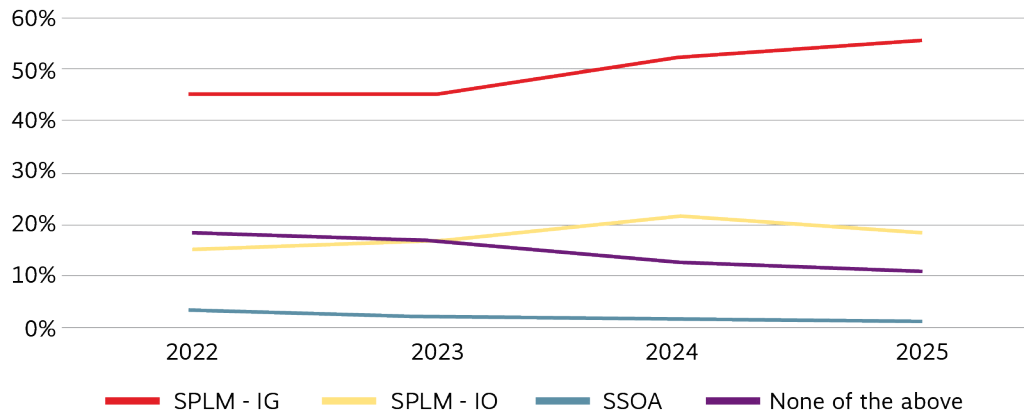
*Which political party do you think has the best vision for South Sudan? x Location (2025) (N = 4,582)*

Figure. 24



Which political party do you think has the best vision for South Sudan? (2022-25) (N = 16,186)

Figure. 25

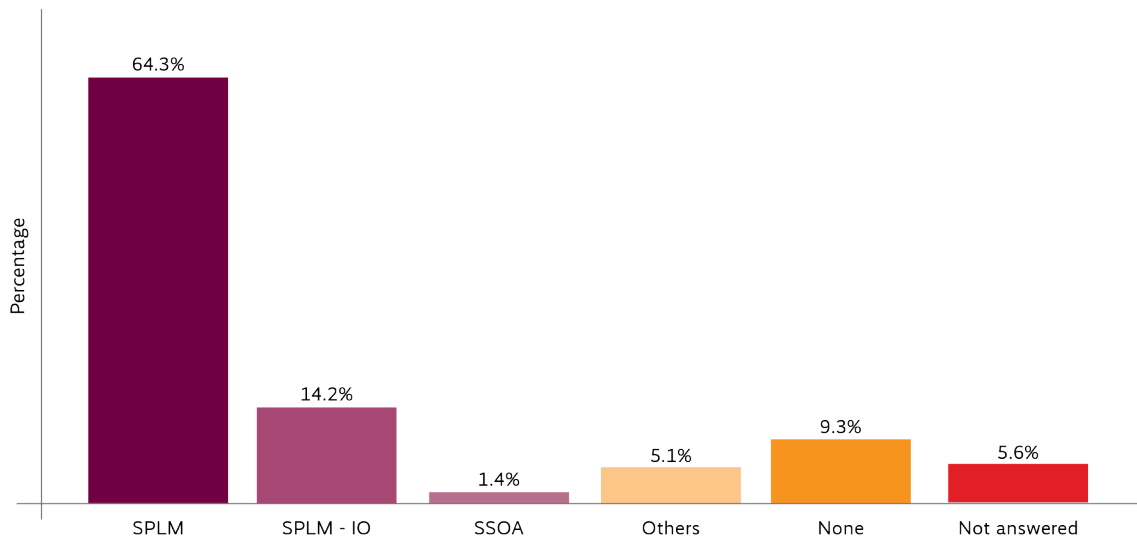


To a certain extent, the above presentation of the data skews responses in favour of the opposition, since our approach oversampled populations in the IDP sites that tend to favour the SPLM-IO. The figures below weight the datasets to approximate a more representative sample of the

target counties (see Figure 26 and Figure 27). This reveals an even larger lead for the SPLM-IG in the targeted counties, with 64 percent of respondents preferring the ruling party and just 14 percent preferring the SPLM-IO.

Which political party do you think has the best vision for South Sudan? (Weighted Results) (2025) (N = 4,582)

Figure. 26



The survey also added a question in 2025 to gauge respondent views on whether the President and First Vice President should contest in elections in 2026. Overall, support for the two leaders was muted with just 37 percent of respondents saying that either of them should contest (see Figures 27 and 28). Respondents were divided between whether the SPLM and SPLM-IO should nominate new candidates or if the candidates should be identified

through party primaries. The notion of the President and First Vice President hand selecting their successors was far less popular. Regionally, support for the President was highest in Greater Bahr-el-Ghazal (51%) and support for the First Vice-President was highest in Greater Upper Nile (42%), reflecting the geographic spread of their political constituencies (see Figure 29).

Figure. 27

Do you think the current President/First Vice President should contest in the elections, or would you prefer for a new candidate to run as the SPLM-IG/SPLM-IO candidate? (2025) (N = 4,582)

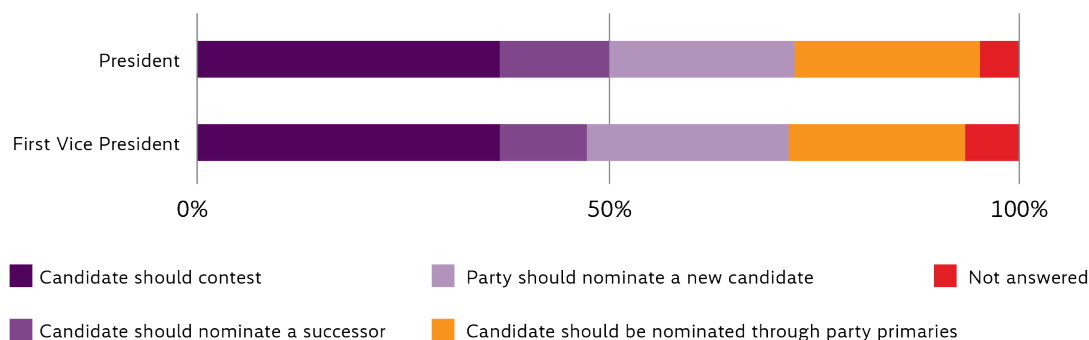
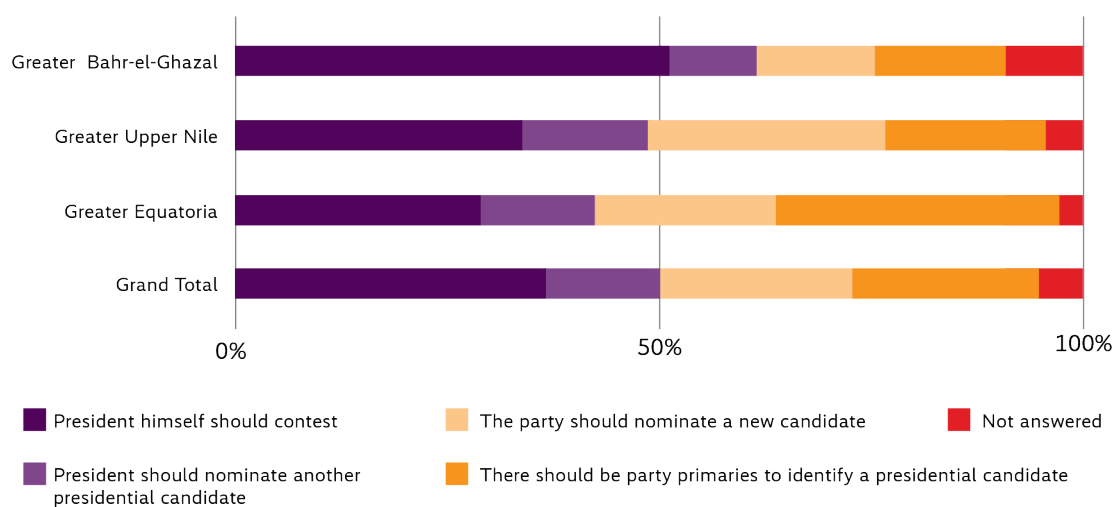


Figure. 28

Do you think the current President should contest in the elections, or would you prefer for a new candidate to run as the SPLM candidate? x Region (2025) (N = 4,582)



Lastly, respondents were asked which of an enumerated list of issues would most affect their choice of candidate. The responses emphasised security (40%), corruption (19%), and economic conditions (17%) (see Figure 30). The county-specific data offers important insights; security appears as the major issue in Yambio (over 70%) and in the

Juba IDP camp (over 80%), demonstrating the dire safety situation in these locations. In Rubkona County, environmental issues are the most important factor, which reflects the difficult situation in terms of flooding and perhaps the environmental hazard in the region caused by oil exploration.

Figure. 29

Do you think the current First Vice President should contest in the elections, or would you prefer for a new candidate to run as the SPLM-IO candidate? x Region (2025) (N = 4,582)

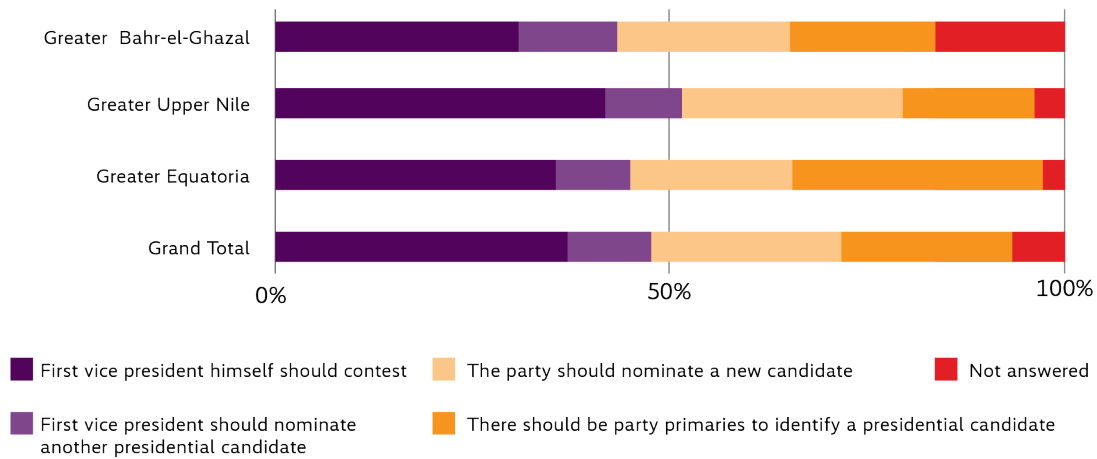
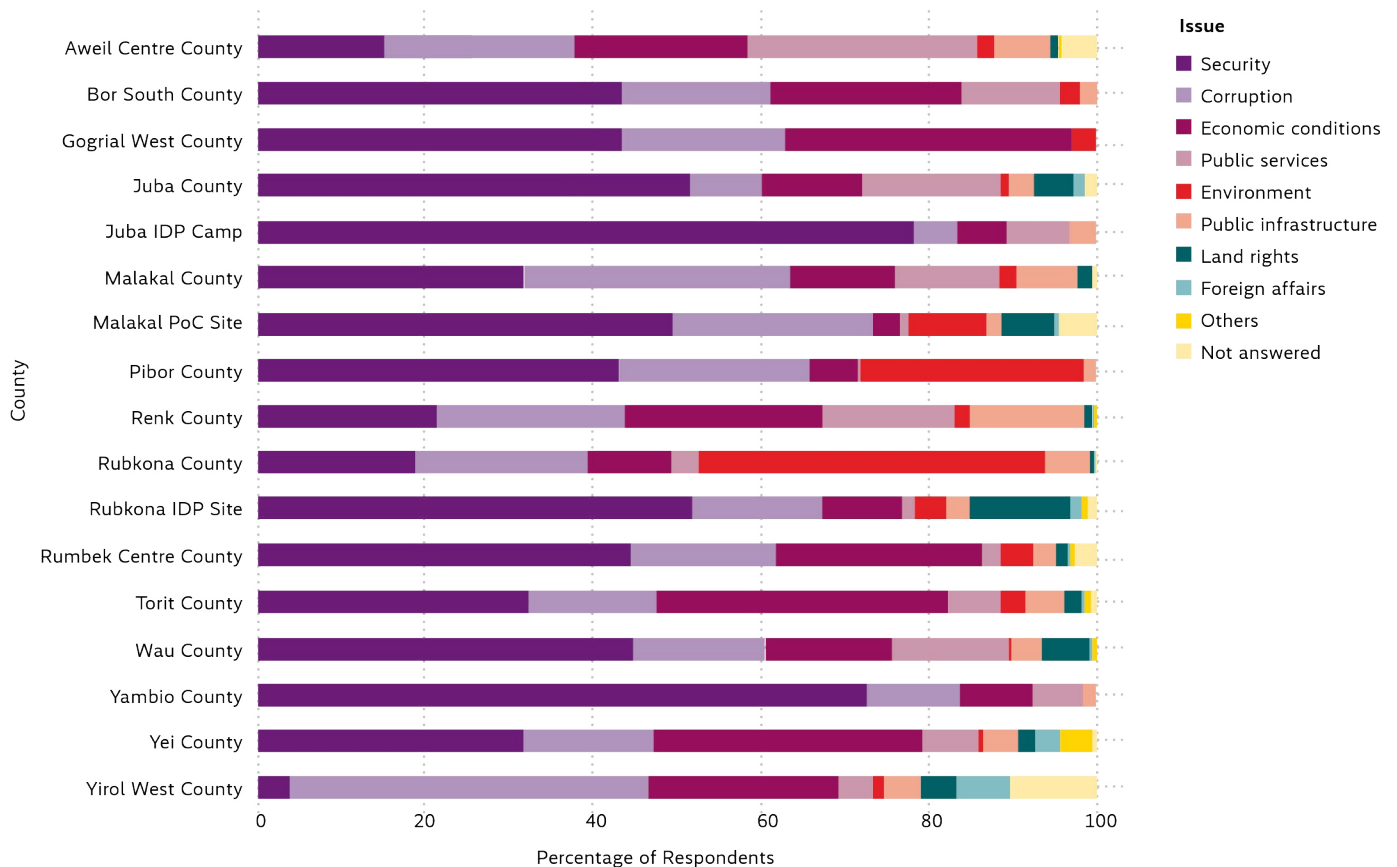


Figure. 30

Which of the following issues is the most important factor affecting your choice of candidate to vote for in the elections? x County (2025) (N = 4,582)



## 9. Concluding Remarks

The data presented in this report offer a sobering view of the civic and political landscape in South Sudan as the country approaches the December 2026 elections. Public sentiment reflects a deep desire for change through democratic means, with a large majority expressing support for elections to proceed on time, despite serious concerns about insecurity, civic restrictions, and the potential for electoral violence. The findings suggest that, for many South Sudanese, the risks of indefinite transition outweigh the risks of a flawed electoral process. At the same time, the analysis underscores the fragility of the current moment. Trust in the Tumaini process is limited, civic space continues to contract, and perceptions of safety have deteriorated significantly over the past year. These factors cast doubt on the ability of the government to deliver a credible and inclusive electoral process without concerted effort and meaningful concessions from political elites.

Going forward, South Sudan's international partners must carefully navigate how to support the country's transition.

Technical assistance alone will not be sufficient. Instead, there is a need for sustained diplomatic engagement to align political incentives behind a peaceful and participatory electoral process. This includes safeguarding civic space, ensuring the independence and effectiveness of electoral institutions, and promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups – especially women, youth, and displaced populations.

Civil society has an essential role to play in helping to mitigate tensions, monitor the electoral process, and amplify the voices of ordinary South Sudanese. However, for civil society to fulfil this role, it must be protected and empowered. Donors and international organizations should consider increasing support for domestic observation, civic education, and community-level peacebuilding efforts in the lead-up to elections. The next 16 months will be critical in determining whether South Sudan can break the cycle of political stagnation or fall further into instability.

# Trends in Civic Space and Elections in South Sudan: Findings from the 2025 Public Perceptions of Peace Survey

This report presents findings from the sixth round of the Public Perceptions of Peace Survey conducted between March and June 2025 by Detcro, the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep), and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Raising Civil Voices program. The survey collected views from 4,582 respondents across 15 locations in all 10 states and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), bringing the total dataset since 2021 to 22,621 individuals. It examines trends in public opinion related to peace and safety, national elections, civic and political space, and trust in political institutions.

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