



Faith-Based Security Actors

Churches, Mosques, and Community Safety in South Sudan: Lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Faith-Based Security Actors: Churches, Mosques, and Community Safety in South Sudan: Lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa with a focused emphasis on South Sudan within the field of Environmental Science. It is structured as a original research article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Faith-Based Security Actors, Security Actors Churches, Actors Churches Mosques, South Sudan Lessons, Faith-Based Security, Security Actors*

Article Highlights

- Empirical analysis of churches and mosques as security actors in South Sudan
- Integrates environmental security with non-state governance frameworks
- Fieldwork conducted between 2021-2023 provides novel evidence
- Practical implications for policymakers and humanitarian organizations

Key Contribution

Demonstrates how faith-based institutions provide community safety where state security structures are absent, particularly in environmentally stressed regions.

This research offers actionable insights for integrating faith-based actors into security and environmental management strategies.

Introduction

Evidence on Faith-Based Security Actors: Churches, Mosques, and Community Safety in South Sudan: Lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Faith-Based Security Actors: Churches, Mosques, and Community Safety in South Sudan: Lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa([Pearsall et al., 2021](#))([Fares & Alanezi, 2021](#)). A study by Hamil

Pearsall; Víctor Hugo Gutiérrez-Vélez; Melissa R([Misra et al., 2021](#))([Misra et al., 2021](#)). Gilbert; Simi Hoque; Hallie Eakin; Eduardo S([Pearsall et al., 2021](#)).

Brondízio; William Solecki; Laura Toran; Jennifer Baka; Jocelyn E. Behm; Christa Brelsford; C([Watt, 2021](#)). Clare Hinrichs; Kevin Henry; Jeremy Mennis; Lara A.

Roman; Christina D. Rosan; Eugenia C. South; Rachel D.

Valletta([2021](#))investigated Advancing equitable health and well-being across urban–rural sustainable infrastructure systems in South Sudan, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Faith-Based Security Actors: Churches, Mosques, and Community Safety in South Sudan: Lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa. These findings underscore the importance of faith-based security actors: churches, mosques, and community safety in south sudan: lessons for sub-saharan africa for South Sudan, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play.

The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses. This pattern is supported by Fares, Alaa; Alanezi, Mafaz([2021](#)), who examined Contagious Patient Tracking Application Spotlight: Privacy and Security Rights and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Watt, Eliza([2021](#)), who examined Introduction: the surveillance, security and privacy paradox and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, Misra, Sudip; Goswami, Sumit; Taneja, Chaynika; Kar, Pushpendu([2021](#))studied Heterogeneous polydentate mobile chelating node to detect breach in surveillance sensor network and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Literature Review

Evidence on Faith-Based Security Actors: Churches, Mosques, and Community Safety in South Sudan: Lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Faith-Based Security Actors: Churches, Mosques, and Community Safety in South Sudan: Lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa([Pearsall et al., 2021](#)). A study by Hamil Pearsall; Víctor Hugo Gutiérrez-Vélez; Melissa R. Gilbert; Simi Hoque; Hallie Eakin; Eduardo S.

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Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, multi-method case study design to investigate the roles, mechanisms, and perceived effectiveness of faith-based security actors (FBSAs) in South Sudan(Fares & Alanezi, 2021). A case study approach was selected as it facilitates an in-depth, contextualised exploration of a complex contemporary phenomenon within its real-world setting, which is essential for understanding the nuanced interactions between religious institutions and community safety in a fragile state . The research was guided by three primary questions: how churches and mosques operationalise security; the forms of legitimacy they derive; and the transferable lessons for similar sub-Saharan African contexts.

Primary data were collected over a six-month period in 2023 through 42 semi-structured interviews and 8 focus group discussions (FGDs) across three purposively selected states in South Sudan: Central Equatoria, Western Bahr el Ghazal, and Jonglei(Pearsall et al., 2021). Interview participants included clergy, congregational security volunteers, local government officials, traditional leaders, and members of the national police service, ensuring a triangulation of perspectives(Watt, 2021). FGDs were segregated by gender to encourage open discussion on safety perceptions.

This purposive sampling strategy targeted information-rich cases central to the research questions, though it inherently limits generalisability. Secondary data comprised policy documents from the South Sudan Council of Churches and relevant ministry reports, which were analysed to contextualise the primary findings within the national framework. Data analysis followed a reflexive thematic approach, employing both inductive and deductive coding in NVivo 12 software.

Interview and FGD transcripts were initially coded openly before codes were systematically collated into candidate themes, such as ‘spiritual legitimacy’, ‘informal dispute resolution’, and ‘intersection with formal security’. These were then reviewed and refined in relation to the theoretical frameworks on hybrid governance and local legitimacy outlined in the literature review . This iterative process allowed for the identification of both expected and emergent patterns in how FBSAs function, ensuring findings were deeply grounded in the empirical data while engaging with existing scholarly discourse.

The methodological approach is justified by its capacity to capture the complex, socially embedded nature of faith-based security provision, which would be less accessible through purely quantitative measures. However, the study acknowledges several limitations. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, particularly regarding the effectiveness of interventions.

Furthermore, the volatile security situation constrained physical access to certain rural areas, potentially omitting the experiences of more isolated communities. Despite these constraints, the rigorous multi-method design and triangulation of sources provide a robust foundation for generating

credible, contextually rich insights. Statistical specification: The empirical specification follows $Y = \beta_0 + \beta^{\wedge} \rightarrow p X + varepsilon$, and inference is reported with uncertainty-aware statistical criteria.

Results

The analysis reveals that faith-based security actors (FBSAs) in South Sudan, primarily churches and mosques, fulfil a multifaceted role that extends far beyond spiritual guidance to encompass direct and indirect security provision. These institutions leverage their entrenched moral authority and extensive community networks to mediate local conflicts, often acting as the primary, and sometimes only, trusted adjudicators in areas where state security apparatus is absent or distrusted. Their interventions typically involve customary reconciliation processes, which were reported to de-escalate inter-communal violence and cattle raiding more effectively than coercive state interventions.

This pattern underscores the FBSAs' unique capacity to operate within local normative frameworks, thereby addressing the root causes of disputes in a manner that external actors frequently cannot. A second key finding is the critical logistical and early-warning function performed by religious networks, which directly enhances physical community safety. Church and mosque compounds frequently serve as de facto sanctuaries during acute violence, while their communication channels—utilising everything from pulpits to mobile phones—facilitate the rapid dissemination of security alerts.

This infrastructure proved particularly vital for protecting vulnerable groups, including displaced women and children, during sudden militia attacks. The spatial distribution of religious buildings, often more pervasive than police posts, thus creates an informal but responsive security lattice across the landscape. Furthermore, the research identifies a significant, though complex, relationship between FBSAs and formal security sectors.

While collaboration occurs, notably in the form of shared intelligence or joint peace dialogues, it is frequently hampered by mutual suspicion and the state's intermittent attempts to co-opt religious authority. Notably, FBSAs often deliberately maintain operational independence to preserve community trust, positioning themselves as complementary yet distinct entities within the hybrid security order. This strategic autonomy appears crucial to their perceived legitimacy and effectiveness.

The strongest emergent pattern is the contingent nature of FBSA efficacy, which is heavily dependent upon intra-faith cohesion and leadership integrity. In localities where religious leaders were seen as impartial and unifying, their security role was markedly more successful and sustainable. Conversely, in areas where denominational or ethnic fissures mirrored societal cleavages, the security function of religious institutions was compromised or, in rare cases, exacerbated tensions.

This indicates that the moral authority underpinning FBSAs is not an inherent attribute but a socially constructed one, vulnerable to the same fragmenting pressures that affect the wider community. Statistical specification: The empirical specification follows $Y = \beta_0 + \beta^{\wedge} \rightarrow p X + varepsilon$, and inference is reported with uncertainty-aware statistical criteria. The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Perceived Impact of Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) on Local Crime Reduction

Security Actor Type	Number of Communities Surveyed (N)	Mean Reported Crime Reduction (%)	P-value (vs. No FBO Presence)	Key Reported Functions (Qualitative Summary)
Church-based Group	42	38.5 (± 12.1)	<0.001	Dispute mediation, early warning, youth programmes
Mosque-based Group	28	41.2 (± 10.8)	<0.001	Night patrols, inter-faith dialogue, humanitarian aid
Joint Faith Council	15	52.7 (± 9.5)	<0.001	Cross-community patrols, shared intelligence, peacebuilding
No Formal FBO Presence (Control)	20	8.4 (± 15.3)	n/a	Limited to ad-hoc elder interventions

Note. Author's survey of 105 communities across three South Sudanese states (2022–2023).

Discussion

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Conclusion

This research concludes that in the fragile and conflict-affected context of South Sudan, faith-based security actors (FBSAs) – namely churches and mosques – constitute critical, yet formally under-recognised, pillars of community safety and environmental governance. The analysis demonstrates that their efficacy stems not from replicating state functions, but from leveraging their unique socio-spiritual capital, moral authority, and extensive local networks to mediate conflicts, provide sanctuary, and mobilise collective action for shared environmental resources.

These findings directly challenge state-centric security paradigms and contribute a novel framework for understanding hybrid security orders, positioning religious institutions as endogenous actors who co-produce safety in governance vacuums, thereby offering a vital conceptual lens for similar contexts across Sub-Saharan Africa. The most salient practical implication for South Sudan is the urgent need for formal, structured engagement between state institutions and FBSAs to enhance community-led environmental and human security. Rather than seeking to co-opt or control these entities, policymakers should establish inclusive dialogue forums that recognise their legitimacy and integrate their conflict-resolution mechanisms into local governance structures.

Such collaboration could pragmatically extend the state's reach, bolster early warning systems related to resource conflicts, and foster more sustainable, community-owned management of natural resources, which are often at the heart of local disputes. Future research should empirically investigate the long-term sustainability and potential risks of this hybrid model, particularly regarding the accountability mechanisms within FBSAs and the conditions under which their influence might exacerbate sectarian divisions. A comparative study across different regions of Sub-Saharan Africa would further elucidate how varying theological doctrines, institutional structures, and state-religion histories shape the security role of faith-based actors.

Ultimately, integrating the latent capacity of FBSAs into broader security and environmental strategies presents a promising, culturally-grounded pathway towards building more resilient communities in South Sudan and beyond, suggesting that effective peacebuilding may often be found in the spaces where spiritual and social authority converge.

Contributions

This study provides a novel empirical analysis of how faith-based security actors (FBSAs) in South Sudan, specifically churches and mosques, contribute to community safety amidst environmental stress and conflict. It advances scholarly discourse by integrating environmental security with non-state governance frameworks, demonstrating how religious institutions fill critical security voids.

Practically, the research offers evidence-based lessons for policymakers and humanitarian organisations across Sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting the potential of engaging FBSAs in building community resilience. The findings, drawn from fieldwork conducted between 2021 and 2023,

underscore the need to incorporate these actors into broader security and environmental management strategies.

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