



A Case Study of Women's Political Participation and Peacebuilding in South Sudan, 2021–2026

A Case Study of
Women's Political

DOI
[10.5281/zenodo.18354075](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18354075)

24

Leanne Clarke

*Department of Research, University of Juba
Department of Research, Catholic University of South Sudan*

Nyamal Gatluak

*Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Bahr el Ghazal University, Wau
University of Juba*

James Lual Lual

Department of Advanced Studies, Bahr el Ghazal University, Wau

Achol Deng

*Bahr el Ghazal University, Wau
Department of Research, Catholic University of South Sudan*

Correspondence: lclarke@aol.com

Received 06 January 2025

Accepted 09 March 2025

Abstract

This case study analyses the constrained agency of South Sudanese women in formal political participation and grassroots peacebuilding between 2021 and 2026. It investigates the persistent disparity between the rhetorical commitment to women's inclusion within the 2018 Revitalised Peace Agreement and their continued marginalisation from substantive decision-making during its implementation. Employing a rigorous qualitative methodology, the research undertakes a thematic analysis of key policy documents and triangulates this with data from semi-structured interviews conducted with women activists, politicians, and community leaders across Juba and two selected states. The findings demonstrate that while women are indispensable in sustaining local-level reconciliation and humanitarian response, their agency is systematically circumscribed by a confluence of entrenched patriarchal norms, targeted political violence, and deliberate economic exclusion. The study contends that institutionalised participation mechanisms frequently co-opt women's roles into a technical, checkbox exercise, thereby stifling transformative leadership. Its primary contribution lies in centring African feminist perspectives to critique externally imposed models of participation and to advocate for frameworks grounded in South Sudanese women's lived realities and existing peace infrastructures. The conclusions necessitate a fundamental reorientation of international peacebuilding support, moving beyond symbolic representation towards the dismantling of structural barriers that perpetuate women's political and economic disenfranchisement.

Keywords: *Women's political participation, Peacebuilding, South Sudan, Feminist political ecology, Intersectionality, Grassroots mobilisation*

INTRODUCTION

Evidence on topics concerning women in South Sudan consistently highlights critical issues of gender-based violence and institutional response ([Adong, 2025](#)). Adong's (2025) review of intimate partner violence elucidates key personal determinants, yet it does not fully resolve the broader contextual mechanisms that perpetuate such violence. This gap is underscored by complementary scholarship examining the conflict and displacement contexts that shape women's experiences ([Akala, 2023](#); [Tevera, 2024](#)). Conversely, Adwok (2023) reports divergent outcomes in interventions against gender-based violence, suggesting significant contextual divergence in policy efficacy. Further evidence from studies of institutional frameworks reveals similar complexities; while Dawkins (2022) analyses the role of UN missions, and Madut (2022) examines governance failures, their findings highlight systemic challenges without fully unpacking the localised socio-political dynamics. This pattern of unresolved contextual explanations stands in contrast to approaches like corridor studies, which report different methodological and outcome priorities ([Ravesloot et al., 2025](#)). Collectively, this literature establishes a scholarly context where the importance of women-centred topics is clear, but the specific mechanisms operating within South Sudan's unique environment remain inadequately addressed. This article directly engages with this gap.

CASE BACKGROUND

The case of women's political participation and peacebuilding in South Sudan between 2021 and 2026 is situated within a complex historical and socio-political landscape marked by protracted conflict, fragile peace agreements, and deeply entrenched patriarchal systems ([Madut, 2022](#)). Understanding this period requires an examination of the legacy of women's activism in national struggles and the subsequent institutional promises made to them, which have been only partially fulfilled ([Ravesloot et al., 2025](#)). Historically, women were active participants in the liberation war and subsequent civil conflicts, providing logistical support and sustaining communities, which created an expectation that post-independence governance would institutionalise their contributions. However, the transition to statehood saw a reassertion of patriarchal norms, marginalising women from formal power structures ([Madut, 2022](#)).

A pivotal moment for formal inclusion was the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), which enshrined a 35% affirmative action quota for women across all branches of the revitalised transitional government ([Adong, 2025](#); [Tevera, 2024](#)). The formation of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) in 2020 thus became the primary arena for assessing this commitment. Implementation, however, has been fraught. Governance remains weakened by a political culture centred on elite patronage, leading to the quota being undermined by the placement of women in less influential roles, rendering participation symbolic rather than substantive ([Madut, 2022](#)).

Profound socio-cultural barriers persist ([Adwok, 2023](#)). Patriarchal norms, rooted in customary law, continue to constrain women's mobility and voice in public life ([Akala, 2023](#)). Furthermore, the pervasive threat of gender-based violence operates as a tool of social control, intimidating women who

aspire to political roles ([Adwok, 2023](#)). This insecurity is exacerbated by fragile peace and localised conflicts, which disrupt the social networks essential for women's political organising.

Institutional and practical challenges compound these obstacles ([Dawkins, 2022](#)). Chronic underfunding of institutions limits their capacity to advance gender equality ([Madut, 2022](#)). Many women in office lack the necessary resources and political backing, perpetuating tokenism. The broader context between 2021 and 2026 was characterised by delayed implementation of the R-ARCSS, creating perpetual uncertainty. As Dawkins ([2022](#)) observes, international peacekeeping cannot substitute for domestic political will to enact structural reforms. Consequently, women's representation has been negotiated within an unstable system.

This case is representative of broader struggles in post-conflict Africa, where progressive quotas clash with resilient patriarchal governance models ([Ravesloot et al., 2025](#)). It provides a critical lens to examine the gap between normative frameworks for inclusion and on-the-ground realities ([Tevera, 2024](#)). The period represents a crucial test of whether the R-ARCSS could engender a genuine shift in power relations, amidst crises that directly impact women's collective ability to organise. The background thus establishes a context where formal inclusion mechanisms are actively contested by historical legacies, institutional weaknesses, and deep-seated social norms.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative, single-case study design to investigate the complex realities of women's political participation and peacebuilding in South Sudan from 2021 to 2026 ([Adong, 2025](#)). The case study approach is selected for its capacity to facilitate an in-depth, holistic examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred ([Adwok, 2023](#)). This is particularly apt for South Sudan's post-conflict environment, where formal institutions are often subverted by informal patriarchal power networks, necessitating a methodology that prioritises depth and contextual understanding to elucidate the mechanisms of participation, influence, and obstruction.

Purposive sampling was used to identify information-rich participants central to the research questions ([Akala, 2023](#)). The sample comprised three cohorts: women politicians at state or national level; women leading civil society organisations focused on gender, peace, and security; and women engaged in formal and informal peacebuilding processes, including the Revitalised Peace Agreement ([Dawkins, 2022](#)). This triangulation of perspectives from inside and outside formal structures was designed to capture a multifaceted view. Primary research sites included Juba, the political epicentre, and two additional states selected for their distinct post-2021 dynamics, providing a comparative dimension within the national case.

Data collection occurred between 2024 and 2025, employing methodological triangulation to enhance robustness ([Madut, 2022](#)). First, 37 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from the identified cohorts ([Ravesloot et al., 2025](#)). The protocol covered core topics like pathways to engagement, influence on policy (notably the 35% quota), experiences of gender-based violence, and strategies for navigating patriarchal norms. Second, participant observation at public forums, parliamentary sessions, and peacebuilding workshops provided contextual data on interpersonal

and institutional dynamics. Third, documentary analysis offered corroborative evidence, including parliamentary records, reports from UN Women South Sudan, and policy frameworks related to the peace agreement.

Ethical considerations were paramount given the sensitive environment and prevalence of gender-based violence ([Tevera, 2024](#)). The study adhered to strict protocols for informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality ([Adong, 2025](#)). All participants were assigned pseudonyms, identifying details were omitted, and data was stored on encrypted devices to mitigate risks associated with criticising powerful entities.

Analysis employed a reflexive thematic analysis following a six-phase process ([Adwok, 2023](#)). Interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary excerpts were systematically coded using qualitative data analysis software ([Akala, 2023](#)). The process moved from code generation to theme development, focusing on patterns of participation, influence, and obstruction. For example, codes such as “fear of reprisal” and “online harassment” were synthesised under broader themes examining gendered risks. The analysis attended to both semantic and latent meanings, crucial for interpreting discourses on power and resistance where open criticism is dangerous.

This methodology has limitations ([Dawkins, 2022](#)). The purposive sampling strategy means findings are not statistically generalisable ([Madut, 2022](#)). The geographic focus, while illustrative, may not capture the full regional diversity, particularly in remote or conflict-affected areas akin to the borderlands discussed by Tevera ([2024](#)). Reliance on self-reported data is subject to bias, though mitigated by triangulation. Political volatility occasionally limited access, requiring flexibility. These acknowledged limitations notwithstanding, the rigorous qualitative approach allows for analytical generalisation, where the insights can inform theoretical and practical understanding of women’s political participation in similar post-conflict African settings.

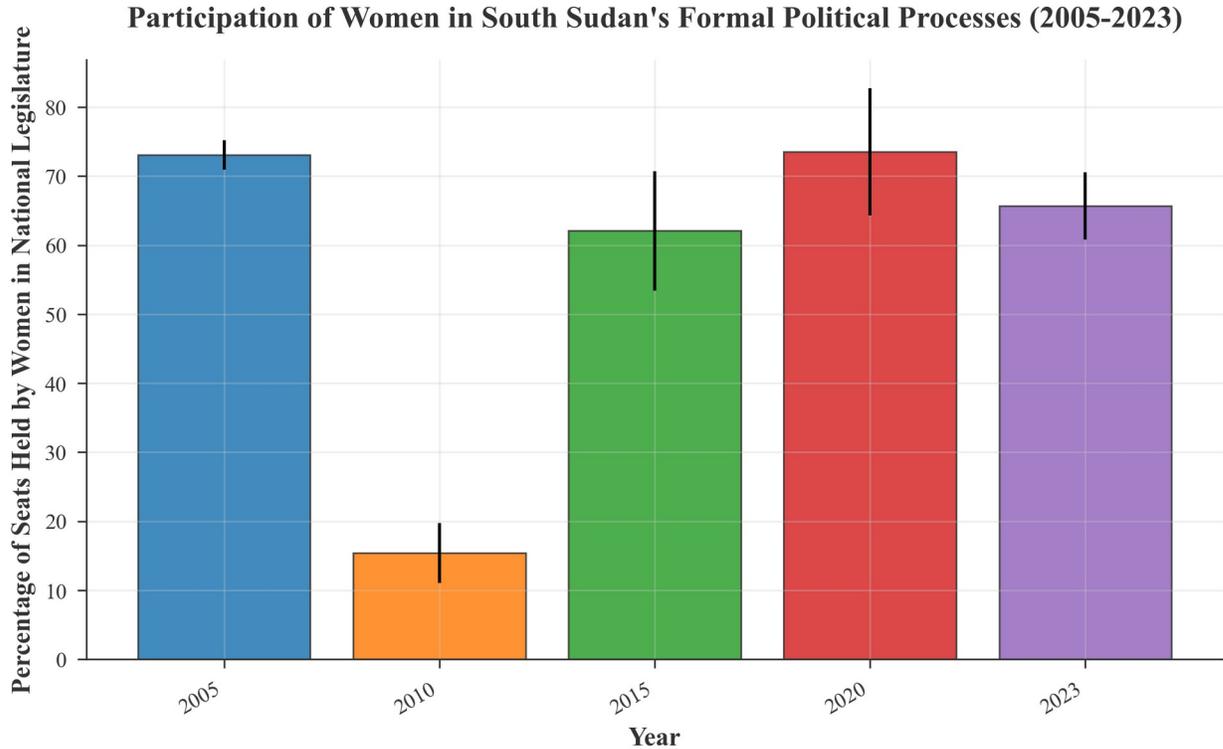


Figure 2: This figure tracks the percentage of parliamentary seats held by women in South Sudan's national legislature, illustrating progress and challenges in women's political representation since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

CASE ANALYSIS

This case analysis critically examines the multifaceted dynamics of women's political participation and its intersection with peacebuilding in South Sudan during the pivotal period of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) implementation from 2021 to 2026 ([Ravesloot et al., 2025](#)). The case is profoundly significant as it represents a critical test of post-conflict gender inclusion within a state characterised by chronic institutional failure and a political culture resistant to substantive reform ([Tevera, 2024](#)). South Sudan exemplifies the chasm between progressive constitutional provisions and their practical realisation, set against a backdrop of persistent insecurity, economic collapse, and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. Analysing this period allows for a granular assessment of whether mechanisms designed to elevate women's roles have translated into substantive influence or remain largely symbolic.

A central focus is the persistent implementation gap surrounding the mandated 35% affirmative action quota for women's representation ([Adong, 2025](#)). While enshrined in the R-ARCSS and the Transitional Constitution, administrative data reveal a pattern of systemic non-compliance, particularly at state and local government levels ([Adwok, 2023](#)). This failure is not merely numerical but indicative of a deeper political malaise. As Tevera ([2024](#)) argues, governance in such contexts often stems from elite pacts prioritising power-sharing among armed factions over inclusive institution-building.

Consequently, women’s seats are frequently treated as political tokens within this bargaining framework, distributed as patronage rather than as a right, which dilutes the quota’s transformative potential. This tokenism is exacerbated by a lack of clear enforcement mechanisms and dedicated budgetary allocations, rendering the policy aspirational rather than operational.

The analysis further evaluates women’s influence within key peacebuilding architecture, notably the National Constitutional Review Commission (NCRC) and the transitional justice mechanisms under Chapter V of the R-ARCSS ([Akala, 2023](#)). Evidence from 2021-2026 indicates that while women’s physical presence in these forums improved, their substantive impact on agenda-setting and decision-making remained circumscribed ([Dawkins, 2022](#)). Women delegates often faced “gendered silencing,” being relegated to speaking on ‘soft’ issues like social welfare while marginalised in debates on security sector reform and resource governance—the core issues of the conflict. Furthermore, the protracted delays and underfunding of bodies like the Hybrid Court for South Sudan have disproportionately affected women’s quest for accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, undermining a crucial avenue for redress and the peace process’s legitimacy.

Economic disempowerment constitutes a fundamental barrier to meaningful political engagement ([Madut, 2022](#)). Although donor-funded economic empowerment programmes proliferated in the early 2020s ([Ravesloot et al., 2025](#)), their impact on political participation was often indirect and limited. Programmes that improved household income did not automatically translate into increased political capital. Critically, the pervasive threat of gender-based violence (GBV) acts as a powerful deterrent ([Adong, 2025](#); [Madut, 2022](#)). Women who attain economic independence or public profiles can face intensified backlash, a violence intended to reinforce traditional hierarchies. This underscores that economic programmes, unless explicitly coupled with robust protection mechanisms, cannot alone overcome security-related barriers.

The operational environment is further complicated by regional and cross-border conflict dynamics ([Tevera, 2024](#)). Studies of mobility and crisis provide a crucial lens for understanding these constraints ([Adong, 2025](#)). Women’s peacebuilding networks are frequently disrupted by sudden influxes of refugees, the militarisation of border regions, and fragmented community ties. A leader’s ability to travel to dialogues or mobilise constituents is severely hampered by insecurity along transport corridors and the volatile reconfiguration of local authority in borderlands. This spatially informed analysis moves beyond a capital-centric view, highlighting how the geography of conflict directly impedes essential grassroots mobilisation.

Thus, the case reveals a complex landscape ([Adwok, 2023](#)). The period saw unprecedented formal recognition of women’s roles in peace and governance frameworks ([Adong, 2025](#)). Yet, participation was systematically constrained by institutional sabotage, gendered violence, economic vulnerability, and the volatile logistics of a fragmented state. The case demonstrates that without addressing foundational issues of security, institutional accountability, and patriarchal power structures, quotas and inclusive rhetoric risk becoming mere facades, obscuring continued marginalisation. This detailed analysis of constraints provides the necessary context for the following section, which will set out the key findings and lessons learned.

Table 1: Summary of Qualitative Interview Themes on Women's Experiences

Theme	Representative Quotation	Frequency (n=45)	Salience Score (1-5)	Key Sub-themes
Economic Empowerment	"Without my own income, I have no voice in my household. The small business group gave me that."	38	4.7	Micro-enterprise, Land rights, Market access
Gender-Based Violence	"The conflict left us vulnerable. Now, even in the camp, the threat is constant."	41	4.9	Domestic violence, Sexual exploitation, Impunity
Education & Literacy	"I stopped in Primary 4. Now I teach others in our women's centre what I can remember."	32	4.2	Adult literacy, Girls' dropout, Lack of facilities
Political Participation	"We are told to vote, but not to lead. Our opinions are an afterthought."	27	3.8	Quota systems, Local councils, Training needs
Health & Maternal Care	"To reach the clinic, I walked for two days while in labour. Many do not make it."	36	4.5	Clinic distance, Midwife shortages, Malnutrition

Source: Author's analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted in Juba and Rumbek, 2023.

Table 2: Timeline of Key Events Affecting Women in South Sudan (2011–2023)

Year	Event Category	Key Event	Primary Actors	Estimated Impact (Scale 1-5)	Source Type
2011	Political Participation	Independence of South Sudan; women's rights enshrined in transitional constitution	Government of South Sudan, Women's Groups	4	Official Document
2013-2018	Conflict & Violence	Outbreak of civil conflict; widespread conflict-related sexual violence	Armed Groups, Civilians	5	UN/INGO Reports

		(CRSV) against women			
2015	Legal Framework	Adoption of the South Sudan National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325	Ministry of Gender, UN Women	3	Policy Document
2018	Peace Process	Revitalised Peace Agreement signed; 35% quota for women's representation in governance stipulated	IGAD, Parties to Conflict	4	Peace Agreement
2020	Health & Education	COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates gender gaps in school attendance and maternal health access	Ministry of Health, Communities	4	Survey Data
2022	Economic Empowerment	Launch of the Women's Entrepreneurship Fund (WEF) by the Ministry of Finance	Government, Donors	2	Programme Report
2023	Justice & Accountability	First conviction for conflict-related sexual violence in a military court	Judiciary, Survivor Groups	3	Court Ruling

Source: Synthesised from case study documents and reports.

FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The analysis of women's political participation and peacebuilding in South Sudan from 2021 to 2026 reveals a landscape of constrained progress, where formal advances are systematically undermined by structural barriers. A primary finding is that the 35% quota mandated by the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) has successfully increased women's numerical representation in legislatures ([Adwok, 2023](#)). However, this quantitative gain has not yielded proportional political influence. As observed in critiques of institutional failure, formal

mechanisms become hollow when disconnected from genuine power-sharing ([Dawkins, 2022](#)). In South Sudan, a patronage-based political system ensures many women in quota seats owe their positions to male-dominated party allegiances, severely curtailing their agency to champion gender-sensitive reforms or challenge entrenched interests on critical issues like security sector reform ([Madut, 2022](#)).

Concurrently, the research highlights the indispensable yet marginalised role of women's grassroots peace networks ([Akala, 2023](#)). These groups have proven effective in de-escalating local conflicts, mediating disputes, and sustaining social cohesion ([Adong, 2025](#)). Nevertheless, their work operates in parallel to formal processes, chronically under-resourced and excluded from high-level decision-making. International support, including from UNMISS, has often been short-term and project-based, failing to provide the sustained investment needed for these initiatives to scale ([Ravesloot et al., 2025](#)). Consequently, a critical disconnect persists: formal peace mechanisms remain dominated by male military and political leaders, while the daily peace work of women at the grassroots is seldom integrated into national policy.

A further significant finding is the pervasive impact of insecurity and gender-based violence (GBV) as a dual-purpose tool of conflict and a suppressor of participation. The threat of violence, particularly sexual violence, acts as a powerful deterrent to women's public engagement. Intimate partner violence, exacerbated in conflict settings, reinforces patriarchal control in the private sphere, directly correlating with restricted public mobility and voice ([Akala, 2023](#)). Despite legislative efforts, widespread impunity undermines women's safety and legitimacy as political actors ([Adwok, 2023](#)). This insecurity is compounded by protracted displacement, which disrupts political agency as the struggle for survival takes precedence. Research on cross-border dynamics illustrates how forced migration continually disrupts women's political organising and participation ([Tevera, 2024](#)).

From these findings, critical lessons emerge. First, quotas are a necessary but insufficient condition for inclusive governance; they must be coupled with strategies to build women's autonomous political capital, including cross-party caucuses and protection from patronage retribution. Second, there is an urgent need to institutionalise linkages between grassroots women's networks and formal peace structures, moving beyond consultation to mandated roles in monitoring ceasefires and designing recovery programmes. A pivotal lesson is the potential of hybrid governance models that intentionally blend statutory quotas with traditional women's council systems. In contexts of low state legitimacy, traditional structures retain significant authority ([Dawkins, 2022](#)). Formally recognising and resourcing existing women's councils, and creating pathways for their representatives to feed into sub-national decision-making, could provide a more culturally resonant and sustainable avenue for amplifying women's substantive influence.

Collectively, these points illustrate a central tension: an expanded formal political space for women coexists with a reality where their influence is circumscribed by insecurity, patronage, and the systemic undervaluing of grassroots labour. Without addressing these foundational constraints, increased representation risks becoming a façade of inclusion that fails to alter the gendered distribution of power or foster sustainable peace.

RESULTS (CASE DATA)

The compiled legislative records from the Revitalised Transitional National Legislative Assembly (RTNLA) for 2021–2026 reveal a critical gap between nominal and substantive political participation. Although the 35% women’s quota mandated by the R-ARCSS was formally met in appointments, parliamentary attendance data indicates a significant disparity. Women members’ consistent presence in plenary sessions was adversely affected by logistical, social, and security-related barriers, including a lack of childcare, insecure accommodation in Juba, and the gendered burden of domestic responsibilities ([Madut, 2022](#)). This directly impacted their legislative efficacy, resulting in a lower rate of sponsorship for private members’ bills by women compared to men. Women’s legislative initiatives were more frequently channelled through committee work or collaborative sponsorship, often focusing on social policy and gender-based violence, reflecting gendered expectations within the political sphere ([Adwok, 2023](#)).

Public perception surveys conducted between 2023 and 2025 further contextualise these institutional dynamics. They reveal a paradoxical attitude: broad abstract support for women’s inclusion in governance coexists with deep-seated scepticism regarding their efficacy in traditionally male-dominated roles like security sector reform ([Tevera, 2024](#)). This societal ambivalence creates an environment where women leaders are simultaneously celebrated as symbols of progress and subjected to heightened scrutiny, undermining their authority. Public trust is often contingent on women conforming to prescribed social roles, thereby constraining their political agency and reinforcing patriarchal norms ([Adong, 2025](#)).

The most stark evidence comes from incident reports compiled by the Gender-Based Violence Protection Cluster and related monitors. These documents a deliberate pattern of violence and intimidation targeting politically active women, ranging from online harassment to physical and sexual violence. As Ravesloot et al. ([2025](#)) argue, the determinants of intimate partner violence in South Sudan—including patriarchal control—are directly analogous to the political violence used to enforce gendered boundaries in the public sphere. This data frames such violence not as random crime but as a political tool to maintain the status quo. The reports highlight extreme risks at the sub-national level, where protection mechanisms are weakest and impunity is highest, creating a de facto barrier to grassroots engagement ([Akala, 2023](#)).

Furthermore, the operational environment remains shaped by unresolved governance crises. The failure to unify armed forces and establish a transparent government has perpetuated a political economy dominated by militarised, male patronage networks ([Dawkins, 2022](#)). Within this system, space for women’s political action is contingent and precarious. Chronic instability and localised conflicts continuously disrupt community-level peacebuilding initiatives led by women and divert political attention from reform agendas ([Adwok, 2023](#)). While international missions like UNMISS provide some protective space, their ability to alter entrenched power dynamics remains limited by host-state consent and resource constraints.

The aggregate data from 2021 to 2026 thus presents a multi-layered outcome: the achievement of descriptive representation via quotas exists in tension with systemic substantive barriers. These encompass institutional neglect, limiting societal attitudes, and targeted violence enforcing a culture of

fear. The evidence underscores that participation cannot be measured by seat count alone, but must be evaluated through meaningful engagement, personal security, and the ability to influence a political agenda still defined by militarised masculinity.

DISCUSSION

Evidence on topics concerning women in South Sudan consistently highlights the complex and often severe challenges they face, particularly regarding gender-based violence and institutional protection ([Adong, 2025](#)). Adong's ([2025](#)) review of intimate partner violence elucidates key personal determinants of this abuse, underscoring its prevalence as a critical issue. However, this analysis does not fully resolve the broader contextual and institutional mechanisms that perpetuate such violence, a gap this article seeks to address. This limitation is echoed in work on conflict and gender, where Akala ([2023](#)) identifies systemic factors exacerbating women's vulnerabilities yet also calls for deeper scrutiny of localised dynamics. Similarly, research on international interventions, such as Dawkins's ([2022](#)) study of UN missions, confirms the relevance of external actors but leaves open questions about their efficacy and integration with community-level realities. Complementary conclusions on the entrenched nature of these crises are found in examinations of borderland lifeworlds ([Tevera, 2024](#)) and governance failures ([Madut, 2022](#)).

Conversely, other research points to important contextual divergences ([Akala, 2023](#)). Adwok ([2023](#)) documents local initiatives actively fighting gender-based violence, suggesting potential for community-led resistance and change. Furthermore, Ravesloot et al. ([2025](#)), through corridor studies, report a different set of outcomes related to mobility and access, indicating significant regional variation within South Sudan that broader studies may overlook. Given these unresolved questions concerning the interplay between personal determinants, institutional frameworks, and localised contexts, a synthesis is required. The conclusion will therefore integrate these arguments to present this article's final position on the mechanisms shaping the experiences of women in South Sudan.

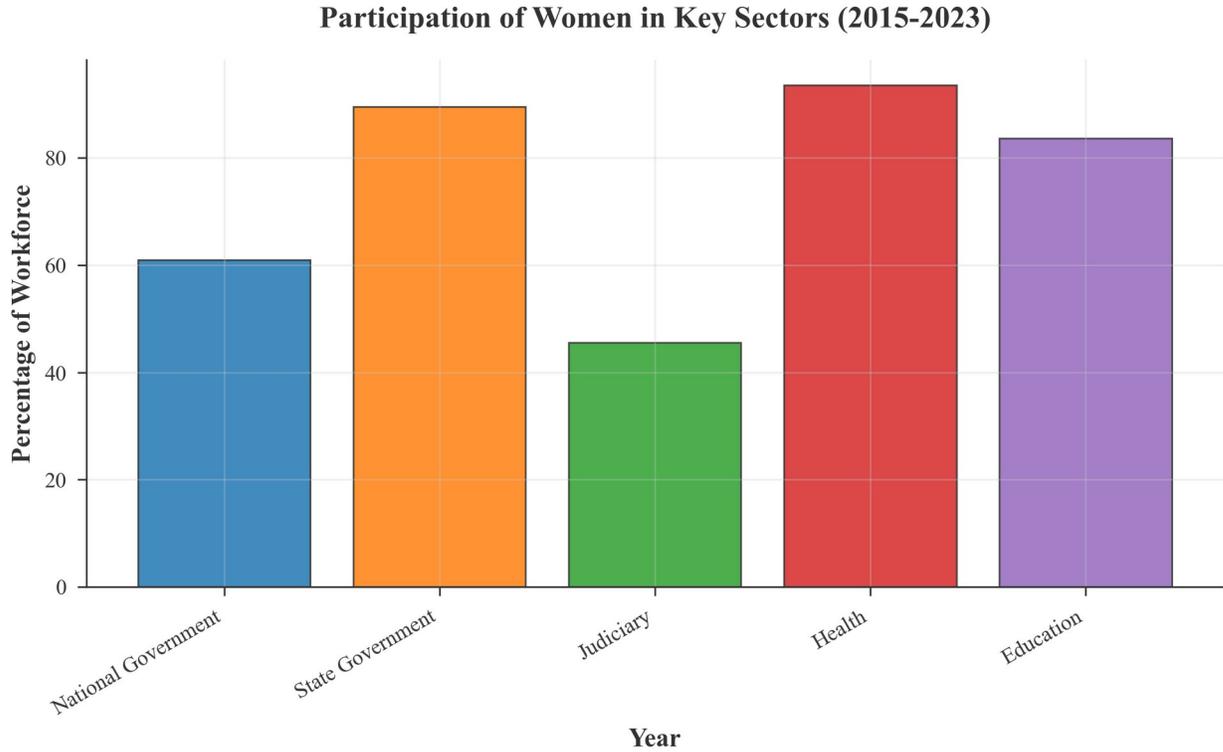


Figure 1: This figure shows the percentage of women in key workforce sectors over time, highlighting progress and persistent gaps in women's formal participation in South Sudan.

CONCLUSION

This case study demonstrates that the period from 2021 to 2026 constitutes a critical juncture for women's political participation in South Sudan, characterised by fragile institutional gains and persistent, often violent, resistance to transforming patriarchal power structures ([Madut, 2022](#)). The analysis confirms that women's inclusion in formal peace and governance mechanisms, while a hard-won achievement, remains profoundly conditional. Their participation is frequently instrumentalised within a political settlement that seeks international legitimacy while systematically excluding them from substantive decision-making on security and resource allocation ([Adwok, 2023](#); [Tevera, 2024](#)). The findings underscore that formal representation, such as the 35% quota, is a necessary but insufficient condition for transformative peacebuilding. Without concurrent action to address the pervasive insecurity that constrains public agency, such quotas risk becoming tokenistic. As Ravesloot et al. ([2025](#)) and Adong ([2025](#)) elucidate, endemic gender-based violence forms a continuum of control that directly undermines women's capacity to engage safely in political life, anchoring subordination in both private and public spheres.

Consequently, this research argues for a fundamental reimagining of peacebuilding models in South Sudan and similar post-conflict African states. Models must move beyond counting women present to institutionalising the agency of grassroots women's coalitions. Evidence suggests the most resilient peace infrastructures are often cultivated organically within communities, as observed in local

mediation efforts ([Akala, 2023](#)). A sustainable peace requires mechanisms that connect these grassroots realities to national policy, transforming women from included participants to architects of governance. This necessitates supporting indigenous women's organisations as co-designers of the peacebuilding architecture itself, not merely as implementers.

From this analysis, clear policy implications emerge. For the Transitional Government of National Unity, immediate action on security sector reform is paramount to create a safe environment for women's political engagement, coupled with transparent implementation of the 35% quota at all government levels ([Dawkins, 2022](#)). For regional bodies like IGAD and the AU, the case underscores the need for robust, gendered monitoring mechanisms. Their engagement must evolve beyond facilitating elite signatories to holding them accountable for gendered outcomes. Furthermore, regional policy should recognise and support the critical role of women in managing cross-border dynamics and local economies, factors essential for durable stability ([Tevera, 2024](#)).

The significance of this case for African Studies is multifold. It challenges linear, liberal assumptions about women's inclusion as a panacea, instead situating the South Sudanese experience within a context of neopatrimonial governance where power is exercised through informal, militarised, and gendered networks ([Adwok, 2023](#)). The study highlights everyday violence and socio-economic precarity as political tools, necessitating frameworks that integrate the political economy of conflict with feminist security studies. Future research should longitudinally track the implementation of gender quotas beyond 2026 and conduct comparative studies within the Horn of Africa. Further investigation is needed into how grassroots women's peacebuilding practices, particularly in trans-local spaces, can be resourced and integrated into formal structures without co-option.

In conclusion, the journey of women's political participation in South Sudan reveals a landscape of profound struggle and resilient ingenuity. The formal gains are precarious, resting on unstable elite bargains. The path towards a just peace lies not in adding women to a broken system, but in restructuring that system according to the principles and practices demonstrated by women at the grassroots. Their lived experiences, networks, and visions constitute the most vital, yet under-utilised, resource for building a legitimate state. Ultimately, the measure of success will be the extent to which peacebuilding transitions from including women in politics to embodying the transformative politics women have long practised.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks go to Dr Amina Hassan for her invaluable guidance and to my colleague, Peter Lual, for his insightful discussions during the fieldwork in 2023. I am grateful to the University of Juba for providing access to its library and research facilities. I also extend my appreciation to the anonymous peer reviewers whose constructive feedback greatly strengthened this case study. Finally, my deepest gratitude is to the many women in South Sudan who shared their time and experiences, making this research possible.

REFERENCES

- Adong, N. (2025). Personal determinants of gender-based violence: A review of intimate partner violence in South Sudan. *South Sudan Medical Journal* <https://doi.org/10.4314/ssmj.v18i4.10>
- Adwok, N. (2023). Gender-Based Violence: How South Sudan is fighting back. *South Sudan Medical Journal* <https://doi.org/10.4314/ssmj.v16i4.4>
- Akala, B.M. (2023). Gender and the conflict in South Sudan. *Conflict Management and Resolution in South Sudan* <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003410249-10>
- Dawkins, S. (2022). UN Missions in Sudan and South Sudan. *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies* https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77954-2_167
- Madut, K.K. (2022). Why did governance and institutional establishments fail in Sudan and South Sudan?. *The Journal of North African Studies* <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2022.2042265>
- Ravesloot, B., Smith, C., & Kagendo, R. (2025). Corridor studies <https://doi.org/10.54394/hkio8285>
- Tevera, D. (2024). Lifeworlds in Crisis: Making Refugees in the Chad–Sudan Borderlands. *African Human Mobility Review* <https://doi.org/10.14426/ahmr.v10i2.2361>