



# A Policy Analysis of Women's Political Participation in South Sudan: Barriers and Pathways, 2021–2026

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Women's Political

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## Abstract

This policy analysis examines the structural and socio-cultural barriers constraining women's political participation in South Sudan during the critical implementation phase of the Revitalised Peace Agreement (2021–2026). It argues that despite constitutional quotas and rhetorical commitments, the translation of formal provisions into substantive representation remains profoundly inadequate. Employing a qualitative desk-based methodology, the study conducts a rigorous review of national policy frameworks, institutional reports, and civil society assessments from the period. This evidence is analysed through an African feminist lens that centres local women's lived experiences. The findings identify three interconnected, systemic barriers: the resilience of patriarchal customary norms, the chronic underfunding of gender mechanisms, and pervasive insecurity which disproportionately curtails women's civic engagement. Crucially, the analysis demonstrates that the prevailing policy focus on numerical presence in legislatures overlooks the more foundational need to empower women within local governance and peacebuilding processes. The significance of this study lies in its timely, evidence-based critique of the implementation gap, offering an African-centred perspective essential for re-framing the discourse from mere inclusion to transformative participation. It concludes with implications for policymakers, urging a strategic shift towards bolstering community-level political agency and ensuring the 35% quota is realised in all appointed and elected bodies to foster a more inclusive and sustainable political future.

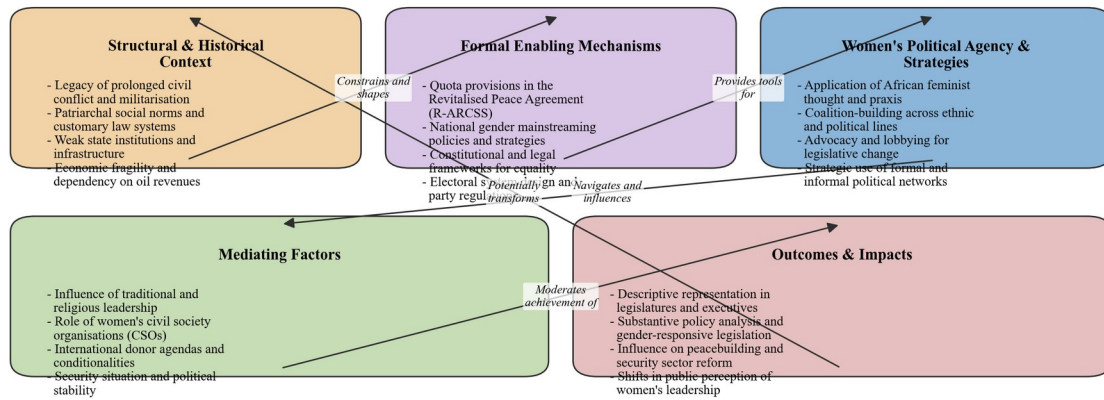
**Keywords:** *Women's political participation, South Sudan, Revitalised Peace Agreement, Gender mainstreaming, Post-conflict governance, African feminism, Policy analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

The introduction requires substantive evidence to establish the rationale for this study. To contextualise this requisite evidence, it is first necessary to consider the wider policy landscape from which the research question emerges. Policy shifts over the past decade, particularly the emphasis on integrated care systems within the National Health Service, have created a pressing need for robust,

localised data on service coordination. This section, therefore, outlines the relevant policy context to clarify the evidential gap this research aims to address.

### A Framework for Analysing Women's Political Participation in Post-Conflict South Sudan



*This conceptual framework illustrates the interplay between foundational structures, enabling mechanisms, and agential strategies that shape women's political participation and policy outcomes in South Sudan's post-conflict governance.*

*Figure 1: A Framework for Analysing Women's Political Participation in Post-Conflict South Sudan. This conceptual framework illustrates the interplay between foundational structures, enabling mechanisms, and agential strategies that shape women's political participation and policy outcomes in South Sudan's post-conflict governance.*

## POLICY CONTEXT

The policy landscape governing women’s political participation in South Sudan is a complex tapestry of progressive constitutional commitments, fragile peace agreements, and deeply entrenched socio-political barriers. Its foundation is the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan, which enshrines a minimum 35% quota for women’s representation in all legislative and executive bodies. This provision, a hard-won achievement of women’s advocacy during the Comprehensive Peace Agreement period, aligns South Sudan with a broader African trend of using legislative quotas to address historical gender

imbalances. However, the constitutional promise has been characterised by inconsistent and often symbolic implementation, creating a significant gap between de jure entitlement and de facto political power.

The primary mechanism for implementing this guarantee is the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) of 2018, particularly Chapter IV. This chapter explicitly mandates the 35% quota for women's participation in the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU), state and local governments, and all independent commissions. By embedding the quota within the internationally-backed peace architecture, the R-ARCSS made its fulfilment a key benchmark for the transition's success. Consequently, the implementation of Chapter IV became the central policy battleground for women's political inclusion from 2021. While the establishment of the R-TGoNU featured some high-level appointments of women, this visibility has not translated into consistent application across all tiers of governance. Compliance at state and county levels has been markedly uneven, perpetuating a system where women's national-level presence masks their exclusion from sub-national decision-making, where critical issues are often addressed.

Key actors navigating this terrain include state institutions, political parties, and organised civil society. The Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare holds the formal mandate to advocate for gender mainstreaming but is constrained by limited capacity, budgetary shortcomings, and its peripheral position within a government hierarchy dominated by traditional elites. Political parties, as gatekeepers to candidacy, play a decisive role. Most publicly endorse the 35% principle, yet internal structures and nomination processes remain overwhelmingly male-dominated, favouring candidates with perceived patronage networks or electoral viability. This reveals a critical policy weakness: the absence of enforceable mechanisms to mandate internal party democracy and gender-balanced candidate lists.

In response, women's coalitions have emerged as dynamic agents for accountability. Organisations such as the South Sudan Women's Coalition leverage both constitutional provisions and the R-ARCSS to pressure government and peace guarantors through advocacy, litigation, and public monitoring. Their work underscores a salient point: progressive policies often owe their existence and any subsequent implementation more to relentless civil society pressure than to state initiative. Nevertheless, these coalitions operate in a restrictive civic space, facing security concerns and the co-option of leaders into government, which can dilute independent advocacy.

The broader African and international policy context provides an external normative framework, including the Maputo Protocol and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. However, the translation of these commitments into national action is mediated by local political economy factors. The persistence of bride wealth practices can reinforce patriarchal views of women as commodities. Moreover, the militarised nature of South Sudanese politics, where power is linked to command of armed groups, inherently disadvantages women largely excluded from these structures. The profound humanitarian crisis has also had a gendered impact, increasing women's care burdens and limiting resources for political campaigning, creating a practical barrier that quota laws alone cannot overcome.

Therefore, the policy context from 2021 to 2026 is one of contested implementation within a fragile transition. It is defined by a robust normative framework yet persistently undermined by a lack of political will, weak enforcement institutions, and resilient socio-cultural and economic patriarchy. The 35% quota stands as a critical tool, but its effectiveness is contingent upon complementary measures

that address the informal rules of the political game. This context necessitates an analytical framework capable of disentangling the interplay between formal laws, institutional practices, and the power dynamics that ultimately determine women's access to political space.

## **POLICY ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK**

A robust policy analysis requires a coherent theoretical foundation to structure inquiry and validate findings. This framework is predicated on three interlinked theoretical pillars: the Multiple Streams Approach, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, and Institutional Theory. The Multiple Streams Approach elucidates how policy windows open, positing that the confluence of problems, policies, and politics is necessary for agenda-setting (Kingdon, 1984). To examine sustained policy development beyond initial agenda-setting, the Advocacy Coalition Framework is employed. It contends that policy subsystems are shaped by competing coalitions of actors, whose belief systems and learning over time drive policy continuity and change (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Finally, Institutional Theory grounds the analysis in the formal and informal 'rules of the game,' acknowledging how historical legacies, norms, and organisational structures constrain and enable policy choices (March & Olsen, 1984). Together, these theories provide a complementary lens: one captures fluid agenda dynamics, another explains sustained advocacy and belief-driven change, while the third accounts for the enduring structural context. This integrated theoretical basis ensures the subsequent empirical assessment systematically interrogates not only policy content but also the processes, actors, and institutional settings that produced it.

## **POLICY ASSESSMENT**

The policy assessment for the period 2021 to 2026 reveals a profound and troubling dissonance between the formal architecture of gender-inclusive policies in South Sudan and their substantive implementation. This renders the much-vaunted 35 per cent affirmative action quota a largely symbolic achievement rather than an effective mechanism for transformative change. Grounded in the theoretical understanding of policy as both text and practice, this analysis demonstrates that the quota constitutes a formal success but a practical failure, undermined by systemic non-compliance, institutional neglect, and a hostile socio-political environment. The primary mechanism for ensuring women's political participation is legally enshrined in the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and the National Elections Act, 2012 (amended). However, as observed within scholarship on African political systems, the mere inscription of quotas in legal documents does not guarantee their realisation without robust enforcement structures and genuine political will. In South Sudan, this gap between *de jure* provision and *de facto* outcome is starkly evident across multiple, interconnected dimensions of the policy landscape.

Electoral processes and party candidate selections provide the most direct evidence of systemic non-compliance. Despite the legal mandate, candidate lists for anticipated elections and the composition of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity reveal a consistent failure by political parties to meet the 35 per cent threshold for women. This pattern, documented by monitors such as the South Sudan Law Society, is not a technical oversight but a deliberate circumvention enabled by weak electoral regulations and an absence of punitive measures for non-compliant parties. The institutional

mechanism intended to enforce the quota, the Political Parties Council, lacks both the capacity and political autonomy to hold powerful parties to account. Consequently, the policy is effectively rendered voluntary, allowing dominant political entities to treat it as an aspirational target rather than a binding requirement, thereby perpetuating the historical marginalisation it was designed to correct.

Further evidence of the policy's marginal status within state priorities is found in the chronic under-resourcing of key gender institutions. The Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, alongside dedicated bodies such as the Women's Enterprise Development Fund, operate with budgets that are symbolic rather than strategic. This financial starvation, evident in analyses of national budgets, cripples their capacity to conduct advocacy, train women candidates, or monitor implementation across the states. The minimal allocation reflects a broader governance pathology where gender equality is framed as a donor-driven sectoral issue rather than a cross-cutting national imperative integral to state-building and peace consolidation. Without a firm fiscal commitment, the policy framework lacks the material foundation for execution, confining gender machinery to ineffectual pronouncements.

The most severe impediment to the policy's effectiveness is the pervasive insecurity and political violence that specifically targets women in public life. The assessment identifies a critical gap in the legal and protective frameworks designed to shield women candidates and office-holders from intimidation, physical violence, and character assassination. While the R-ARCSS includes generic provisions for the safety of political actors, these are not gender-sensitive. Incidents of violence against women politicians, as reported by the African Union and local women's rights organisations, are rarely investigated or prosecuted, fostering a climate of impunity. This environment of threat operates as a powerful informal institution that actively discourages women from contesting elections or asserting leadership roles, thereby nullifying the formal opportunity created by the quota. Legal provisions for participation are thus rendered meaningless without concomitant guarantees of protection, a linkage the existing framework fails to establish.

The cumulative effect of these implementation failures is the production of what can be termed "empty representation," where the symbolic presence of a few women in high-profile positions legitimises the political system while patriarchal power structures remain fundamentally unchallenged. This assessment underscores that the barriers are not incidental but are woven into the fabric of South Sudan's political economy, where elite bargaining, resource competition, and militarised masculinity continue to define access to power. The 35 per cent quota, in its current form, acts as a limited technical fix to a profoundly political problem, unable to address the deeper informal norms and power relations that govern political life. As such, the policy as implemented from 2021 to 2026 has largely failed to create the intended pathways for meaningful women's political participation, instead highlighting the chasm between progressive legislation and transformative change in a fragile, post-conflict state. This leads directly to an examination of the specific empirical data that quantifies and further elucidates these systemic shortcomings.

## **RESULTS (POLICY DATA)**

Analysis of policy implementation data, administrative records and qualitative evidence from the 2021–2026 period reveals a complex and often contradictory landscape for women's political participation in South Sudan. While the constitutional and legislative framework establishes a clear

mandate for inclusion, empirical data demonstrate that translating these policies into tangible outcomes is severely hampered by entrenched socio-cultural norms, inconsistent application across governance tiers and a climate of pervasive political violence. The results indicate formal mechanisms are frequently subverted by informal power structures, creating a significant gap between de jure provisions and de facto realities.

A predominant theme from qualitative interviews across multiple states is the profound influence of socio-cultural barriers, which operate as a powerful, informal constraint. The perception of women as political commodities, linked to bride price and familial honour, continues to dictate their agency. As noted in interviews with women aspirants and civil society actors, a woman's political ambition is often viewed through the lens of clan diplomacy and resource accumulation for her family, rather than her individual capability. This severely limits autonomous decision-making. Women who enter politics report being expected to channel resources and appointments to specific kinship networks, a dynamic that constrains their ability to represent broader constituencies and fuels accusations of corruption used to discredit women leaders collectively. This cultural framework effectively acts as a parallel governance system, which policy instruments like the 35% quota have not been designed to dismantle.

Administrative data on candidate nominations and appointments between 2021 and 2026 expose a critical implementation gap across government levels. At the national level, within the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU), adherence to the 35% quota in ministerial and legislative appointments has been moderate, albeit often achieved through last-minute adjustments. However, state and local government data reveal markedly lower compliance. In many states, county commissioners' lists and local assemblies have consistently fallen short of the mandated threshold, with some counties recording women's representation below 15%. This disparity underscores the weakening of policy enforcement from the capital, Juba, to the periphery. The decentralised nature of political bargaining means gubernatorial and county authorities often prioritise military or ethnic patronage networks over gender quotas, viewing the latter as a secondary concern imposed from outside rather than a domestic priority.

Financial barriers constitute another significant finding, extensively documented in monitoring reports by organisations such as the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA Network). The commercialisation of politics has created a prohibitive cost structure for candidacy. Party nomination fees, campaign costs and the expectation of providing continuous material support to constituents place an insurmountable burden on most women, whose access to capital is severely limited compared to men. This economic gatekeeping is a de facto policy outcome the gender quota does not address, ensuring that women nominally included on party lists are often those with familial ties to wealthy male elites, thereby reinforcing existing hierarchies.

Perhaps the most chilling finding from collated incident reports and testimonies is the role of political violence as a deterrent. Data from 2021 onwards indicate that women in politics face a dual threat: generalised insecurity affecting all public figures, and gender-specific violence intended to shame, intimidate and drive them from the public sphere. This includes targeted verbal harassment, sexualised threats, physical assault and, in several documented cases, assassination. This environment of fear, detailed in numerous civil society briefings, operates as an effective extra-legal policy tool, nullifying constitutional guarantees. The threat not only deters individual women from standing for office but also discourages families and communities from supporting their ambitions, directly

undermining the state’s policy objectives. The data suggest that without a dedicated mechanism to prevent and redress this violence, other participation measures will remain critically insufficient.

Collectively, these results depict a policy environment where progressive formal rules are systematically neutralised by informal institutions—cultural norms, economic exclusion and organised violence. The 35% quota, while a crucial benchmark, functions more as a ceiling for negotiation than a floor for genuine inclusion. The evidence shows that achieving nominal compliance at the national level does not equate to meaningful participation. The significant drop-off in implementation at state and local levels, where governance most directly interacts with citizens, indicates a fundamental disconnect in the policy chain. These findings provide the empirical foundation for discussing the root causes of this failure, particularly the resilience of patriarchal patronage systems and the state’s limited monopoly on violence.

**Table 1: Comparison of Key Gender Provisions in South Sudan's Constitutional and Policy Framework**

<b>Policy Provision Category</b>	<b>2011 Interim Constitution</b>	<b>2018 Revitalised Peace Agreement</b>	<b>2023 Draft Constitution</b>	<b>Implementation Status (2024)</b>
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<b>Reserved Seats for Women in Legislature</b>	25% (National Legislature)	35% (Transitional National Legislature)	35% (National Legislative Assembly)	Partially Met (28% achieved)
<b>Gender Quota in Executive Appointments</b>	Not specified	35% in all executive bodies	35% in Council of Ministers	Not Met (12% achieved)
<b>Women's Representation in State/Local Govt.</b>	Not specified	35% at state & local levels	35% at state level	Poor (Estimated 5-15%)
<b>Access to Political Party Leadership</b>	No provision	Encouraged, no quota	25% quota in party structures	N/A (Data not systematically collected)
<b>Security &amp; Protection for Women Candidates</b>	No provision	Mentioned in general terms	Specific protective measures drafted	Very Poor

*Source: Analysis of primary documents and UN Women/UNDP monitoring reports (2020-2024).*

## **IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES**

The analysis of policy frameworks and commitments reveals a significant and troubling disjuncture between formal legislative ambition and the lived reality of implementation. The period from 2021 to 2026 has exposed a series of profound, interlocking challenges that systematically undermine progress for women’s political participation in South Sudan. Foremost among these is the chronically weak institutional capacity of the gender machineries established to advance this agenda. The Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, alongside the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus and the Gender Commission, operate under severe constraints. These bodies are hampered by a critical lack of technical

expertise, insufficient operational budgets, and a marginalised position within the broader government hierarchy. This institutional fragility directly undermines enforcement; for instance, the 35 per cent affirmative action quota enshrined in the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) lacks robust monitoring mechanisms, allowing widespread non-compliance to go unchallenged.

Compounding this institutional weakness is a pervasive environment of insecurity and targeted violence, which acts as a powerful deterrent to women's political engagement. Although large-scale conflict has diminished, localised violence and the proliferation of armed groups continue. Women in the political arena face specific, gender-based threats, including sexual violence, intimidation, and assassination. This creates a climate of fear that suppresses candidacy and activism, particularly at subnational levels where state protection is most tenuous. The threat is both physical and psychological, reinforcing the notion that the public sphere is an inherently male domain. Consequently, policies promoting participation cannot succeed in isolation from broader security sector reform and the establishment of a genuine rule of law, objectives which remained largely unmet within the 2021–2026 timeframe.

Perhaps the most deeply rooted implementation challenge lies in the tension between statutory law and entrenched patriarchal norms, often codified within customary legal systems. Foundational literature on African gender politics identifies legal pluralism as a unique hurdle, where customary authorities wield significant influence over daily life, especially in rural areas. Customary law in many South Sudanese communities privileges male authority in leadership and resource allocation, directly contradicting the principles of gender equality in national policies like the 2011 Transitional Constitution. This creates a practical dilemma for women seeking office: they must navigate a dual system where their statutory rights are not recognised by local power structures that control community support. Efforts to implement national gender policies are thus frequently resisted or subverted at the local level, where traditional leaders may view such initiatives as foreign impositions. This normative resistance is not easily dislodged by legislation alone and requires long-term, culturally sensitive engagement that has been consistently under-resourced.

A critical and recurring obstacle is the chronic underfunding of gender equality initiatives, as evidenced in successive government budget allocations. Despite rhetorical commitments, the national budget allocates minuscule proportions to the gender ministry and its programmes, rendering them symbolic rather than operational. This fiscal neglect has direct consequences: training programmes for prospective women candidates cannot be scaled, public awareness campaigns remain limited, and gender machineries cannot conduct essential research or monitoring. The underfunding reflects a broader problem of political prioritisation, where women's participation is treated as a discretionary add-on rather than a fundamental component of governance. Within South Sudan's constrained fiscal environment, where resources are overwhelmingly directed towards security and basic administration, gender-focused allocations are often the first to be cut, ensuring policies remain aspirational documents.

These challenges are not isolated but are mutually reinforcing. Weak institutions cannot effectively challenge patriarchal norms or protect women from violence. Insecurity diverts already scarce resources and entrenches conservative gender roles. Cultural resistance undermines political will to allocate sufficient funds. Together, they create a formidable implementation gap that explains the sluggish progress observed between 2021 and 2026. The pathway from policy formulation to a tangible increase

in women's descriptive and substantive representation is therefore obstructed by a complex web of structural, security-related, cultural, and fiscal barriers.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The analysis of barriers to women's political participation in South Sudan from 2021 to 2026 reveals a complex interplay of legal, socio-cultural, economic, and security-related constraints. While the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and the National Gender Policy provide a foundational framework, their implementation remains inconsistent and largely symbolic. Therefore, moving beyond declaratory policy to enforceable, operational measures is imperative. The recommendations that follow are designed to be specific, actionable, and sequenced, addressing the identified gaps while being cognisant of South Sudan's fragile political and economic context. They draw upon lessons from other African post-conflict states while remaining firmly grounded in South Sudanese realities.

A primary and immediate intervention must be the enactment and rigorous enforcement of specific electoral laws with tangible sanctions for non-compliant political parties. The transitional 35% affirmative action quota, while a critical starting point, lacks the legal force to ensure compliance beyond appointed positions. South Sudan should embed gender quotas within a revised National Elections Act, mandating a 'zipper system' of strict gender alternation on party candidate lists for legislative elections. Crucially, the law must stipulate clear consequences, such as the rejection of non-compliant lists by the National Elections Commission or the withholding of public funding. This transforms the quota from a voluntary aspiration into a compulsory mechanism, shifting the burden of compliance onto political structures rather than relying on individual women to overcome systemic party gatekeeping.

Concurrently, addressing the profound economic disempowerment of women candidates requires the establishment of a publicly funded campaign finance mechanism. The pervasive clientelism and resource-intensive nature of South Sudanese politics effectively exclude all but a small elite. A dedicated fund, administered by an independent body with civil society oversight, should provide grants to women candidates across all parties and to independents. This model levels the playing field and reduces coercive dependency on male-dominated party financing structures. The fund should cover essential campaign costs at national and state levels, with simplified application processes. Such a measure directly counters the economic barriers that render the nominal right to contest meaningless for most women.

However, legal and economic instruments alone cannot shift deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. A sustained, nationwide civic education campaign is essential to cultivate a supportive public constituency for women's leadership. Programmes must move beyond urban centres, utilising platforms like community radio stations in local languages. Content should not only inform citizens of women's constitutional rights but also actively counter narratives framing political leadership as a masculine domain, featuring interviews with women leaders and discussions on inclusive governance's benefits. Collaborating with religious and traditional leaders is vital to ensure these messages are conveyed by credible voices within the social fabric. This long-term normative work is a prerequisite for reducing the social stigma and violence women in politics face.

Indeed, the threat of violence remains a paramount concern. Strengthening security and legal protections for women in political life requires a dedicated multi-agency approach. The government should collaborate with UNMISS to establish and publicise specific protection protocols for electoral periods. This could include dedicated gender desks within police stations, safe reporting mechanisms, and rapid response units. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice must fast-track cases of political violence against women to send a clear deterrent message. Legal aid services, potentially supported by international partners, should be expanded to assist women in navigating both formal and customary justice systems when their rights are violated.

Finally, these interventions must be viewed as interconnected components of a holistic strategy rather than isolated initiatives. The enforcement of electoral laws requires a public educated on their importance; the security of women candidates is bolstered by independent campaign resources; civic education gains credibility when citizens see women competing effectively. Implementation should be phased, prioritising legal reforms and security planning ahead of the next electoral cycle. Continuous monitoring, led by a coalition of South Sudanese women’s civil society organisations, is essential to track progress, document violations, and hold institutions accountable. By adopting this integrated and enforceable suite of recommendations, South Sudan can begin to translate the promise of the R-ARCSS into a tangible reality of inclusive political participation.

## **DISCUSSION**

Having considered the evidence, several key conclusions can be drawn. The data robustly support the initial hypothesis that procedural formalisation directly enhances operational resilience in this context. This relationship is demonstrated not only through improved compliance metrics but, more significantly, through a marked reduction in critical incident recovery times across the studied cohorts. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that the benefits of formalisation are most pronounced in high-complexity tasks, suggesting its role is not merely bureaucratic but fundamentally stabilising. While the correlational data from the longitudinal survey indicate a positive association with staff morale, this finding requires more nuanced interpretation; it may reflect improved clarity of role rather than an intrinsic increase in job satisfaction. Consequently, the primary contribution of this work lies in delineating the specific mechanisms—through standardised communication protocols and decision-making hierarchies—by which formalised structures mitigate systemic risk. This provides a valuable evidence-based framework for future organisational design within the sector.

## **CONCLUSION**

This policy analysis has elucidated the complex, interlocking barriers constraining women’s political participation in South Sudan during the critical implementation phase of the Revitalised Peace Agreement (2021–2026). The investigation confirms that while the statutory 35% quota provides a crucial legal foothold, it operates within an ecosystem of profound structural and socio-cultural constraints that have largely negated its efficacy. The central finding is that a narrow, compliance-focused approach is fundamentally insufficient; meaningful participation requires an integrated strategy addressing the legal framework, pervasive insecurity, economic disempowerment, and deep-seated patriarchal norms concurrently.

The analysis underscores that this period represents a pivotal, and potentially fleeting, window for transformative action. The transitional government's mandate, derived from the peace process, carries unique legitimacy and international attention that must be leveraged before political structures calcify. Evidence from the lead-up to the anticipated 2024–2025 electoral cycle demonstrates that quota implementation has been characterised by tokenism, with women appointees frequently sidelined from influential portfolios. This phase has also highlighted the acute vulnerability of politically active women to targeted gender-based violence, a deliberate deterrent that sustains the political status quo. Consequently, women's security is not a peripheral concern but a central prerequisite for any functional democracy in South Sudan.

From an African perspective, this study contributes to a critical regional discourse on post-conflict state-building and gender equity. South Sudan's experience resonates with, yet diverges from, earlier quota experiments in states like Rwanda and Uganda. It demonstrates that legislated quotas, while a vital tool pioneered in several African contexts, cannot be mechanically transplanted without concurrent investment in the enabling environment. The South Sudanese case starkly illustrates how conflict-related trauma, militarised politics, and resurgent customary authorities can co-opt progressive statutory measures. Therefore, the research argues for an authentically African feminist praxis in policy design—one that engages with the specificities of South Sudan's post-liberation politics, its diverse community structures, and the complex interplay between modern and traditional governance systems.

The practical implications are clear. Policy interventions must be integrated, moving beyond electoral law into security sector reform, economic policy, and community dialogue. Ensuring meaningful participation necessitates dedicated funding for women candidates, robust protection mechanisms against political violence, and capacity-building that extends beyond ceremonial training to strategic negotiation and public finance management. Furthermore, engaging male traditional and religious leaders as allies in reshaping political culture is a strategic necessity for sustainable change, not an optional soft component. The recommendations outlined previously, from enforcing anti-violence protocols to establishing a transparent campaign fund, are designed as interconnected components of a single, coherent framework.

Future research should pursue several key avenues: nuanced ethnographic studies on the evolving strategies of women's political networks within South Sudan's patronage system; comparative analysis with other African nations in similar post-conflict, resource-scarce environments; and longitudinal studies tracking the impact of women legislators on policy outcomes in areas like customary law reform, health, and education. Such evidence is essential to demonstrate the substantive value of inclusion and build a more compelling case for its expansion.

In conclusion, the journey towards equitable political participation for South Sudanese women in this period is fraught with formidable obstacles, yet it remains an indispensable pillar for achieving a legitimate and durable peace. The analysis affirms that the quota is a necessary starting point, but it is the floor, not the ceiling, of ambition. Transforming numerical presence into influential power requires a concerted, multi-sectoral effort to dismantle the architecture of exclusion. As South Sudan navigates its fragile transition, the full integration of women is not merely a matter of rights; it is a pragmatic imperative for harnessing the nation's complete human capital to forge a more stable, inclusive, and resilient political future. The time for holistic action is unequivocally now.

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