



National Survey on Perceptions of Peace in South Sudan

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Acronyms

ARCSS	Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
ASPR	Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AUCISS	African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan
CHRSS	Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan
CIESIN	Center for International Earth Science Information Network
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSRF	Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility
ECRP	South Sudan Enhancing Community Resilience and Local Governance Project
EPI	Everyday Peace Indicator
ESRI	Environmental Systems Research Institute
GRID3	Geo-Referenced Infrastructure and Demographic Data for Development
HLRF	High-Level Revitalization Forum
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority for Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRB	Institutional Review Board
JMEC	Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission
OPP	Other Political Parties
POC	Protection of Civilians Site
UN	United Nations
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
RSRTF	South Sudan Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
SPLM-FDs	Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Former Detainees
SPLM-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SSCSF	South Sudan Civil Society Forum
UN	United Nations
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

Introduction

Perceptions matter. People's experiences with everyday peace and security shape how they perceive peace processes. These perceptions have real world consequences. More optimistic views on prospects for peace among a population can give people a stake in their political future and help to generate political momentum for transitional processes. Positive perceptions of peace can reduce the attraction of armed groups, increase engagement with peace initiatives, and improve compliance with a transitional framework, both nationally and at a local level. The importance of public trust is sometimes lost in the South Sudanese context, where the transitional process has tended to focus on political accommodation and elite interests. Decades of humanitarian assistance have also perpetuated a notion of South Sudanese as passive recipients of international interventions with limited voice and participation.

A strategic shift is required to salvage the situation. As this briefing argues based on empirical evidence from a survey on public perceptions of peace and the peace process in South Sudan, for the transitional process to be credible, it must go hand in hand with tangible improvements to security conditions in people's everyday lives. Positive views can enable peace and security to grow from the bottom up, as people engage with the transitional process in a meaningful manner. When it comes to securing public trust in the transition in South Sudan, interventions that help communities to establish and protect security at a local level are more important than the 'deadline diplomacy' and implementation checklists that have characterized the transitional process thus far.

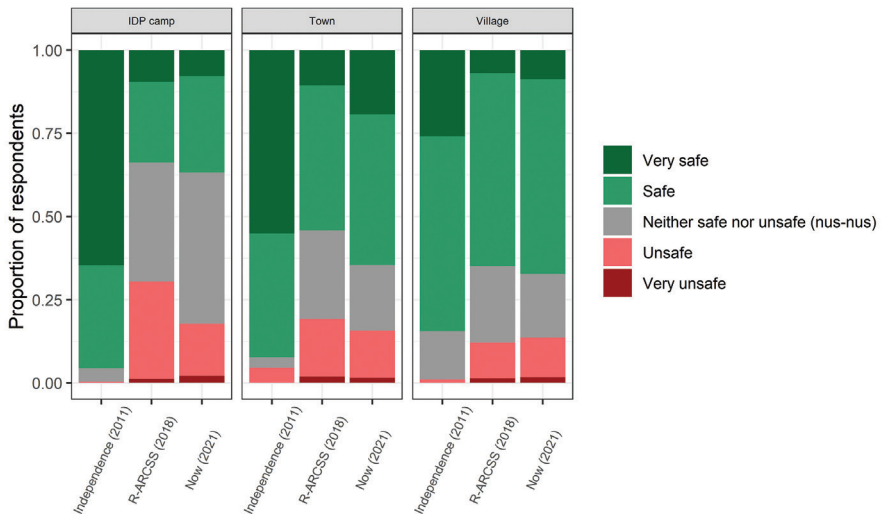
This briefing summarizes key findings from the survey. The sample was comprised of 2,276 respondents across 8 primary locations – Aweil, Bentiu, Bor, Juba, Malakal, Pibor, Wau, and Yei – and 25 secondary locations (including IDP settlements and villages outside of these towns), and data was collected in August and September 2021. The survey documented how people conceive of peace in their everyday lives and how their experiences shape their views on the peace process and on peace and security broadly.

Everyday Peace Indicators

The survey incorporated the Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) approach developed by Pamina Firchow and Roger Mac Ginty to capture people's everyday experiences in their local settings and translate these into contextual indicators of conflict and peace. The questions about everyday peace reflected common expressions of how people observe peace and security across diverse rural and urban populations in South Sudan. To explore the development of these indicators over time, the EPI questions were combined with two 'anchoring events' – South Sudan's independence in 2011 and the signing of Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018 – providing an additional longitudinal component to the research.

Overall, the indicators show a substantial decrease in people's perception of everyday peace since independence. The biggest change was apparent with respect to the perceived safety of moving between towns and in rural areas. While the indicators show a slight improvement in the overall perception of everyday peace since the signing of the R-ARCSS, the perceived danger of moving in the countryside actually increased since the signing of the R-ARCSS, which points to proliferating conflict at the subnational level and the difficulties of translating developments in the national peace process into conflict settings at a local level.

Average response to EPI questions - by environment



Conflict Trends

Conflict dynamics in South Sudan do not easily lend themselves to generalizations. National conflict may at times be driven by political interests at the state or local level, and grassroots conflict may involve acts of violence that disrupt livelihoods across large parts of the country. Policymakers must make sense of this complex and layered conflict landscape both in how they define the problem that they are seeking to resolve as well as how they respond to changes in conflict dynamics over time. Any generalizations of the conflict situation in South Sudan as a whole should be met with considerable skepticism.

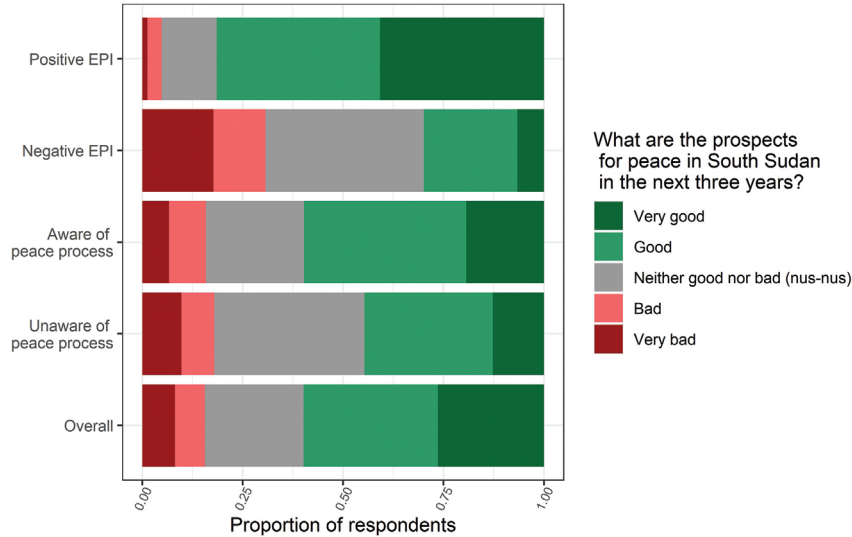
At a macro level, the survey data shows the broad trends of the conflict, with violent episodes peaking in 2013 and 2016. However, the continuities with preexisting conflicts at the subnational level were also apparent. Sixty-two percent of respondents said that their community experienced challenging periods of conflict between independence and the outbreak of violence in Juba in December 2013. The continuity of conflict even during times of relative peace suggests that policymakers should avoid looking at peace as something that arises at a given moment in time and disappears during times of war and instead recognize the gradations of peace and conflict that coexist and interact in an ongoing manner.

Perceptions of Peace

Three-and-a-half years after the signing of the R-ARCSS, South Sudanese remain deeply uncertain about peace in the country. When asked whether South Sudan is at peace, nearly half (47%) of respondents responded, 'no'. Pessimism is especially stark for some groups: More than half of women, IDP camp residents and rural respondents said that South Sudan was not currently at peace. These statistics illustrate the shaky ground upon which the peace agreement is being implemented. Nonetheless, many people remain optimistic that the war will end, with 59 percent saying that the prospects for peace in the next three years are 'good' (33%) or 'very good' (26%).

Respondent perceptions of everyday peace were by far the most significant factor in evaluating prospects for broader peace in the next three years. While 87 percent of respondents with positive perceptions of everyday peace assess the prospects for broader peace as 'good' or 'very good', only 42 percent of those with negative perceptions of everyday peace have similarly optimistic views on the prospects for broader peace. This finding points towards the crucial importance of improving everyday security and investing in local peacemaking. Public trust in a process can help to shift the logics of armed actors from conflict towards non-armed strategies. Such a shift in thinking is indispensable when it comes to the implementation of core provisions of the peace agreement. For example, it is unlikely that the unification of the armed forces will generate trust in and of itself. Instead, increased mutual trust among the parties should be seen as a necessary precondition for the unification of forces to happen in the first instance.

What are the prospects for peace in South Sudan in the next three years?

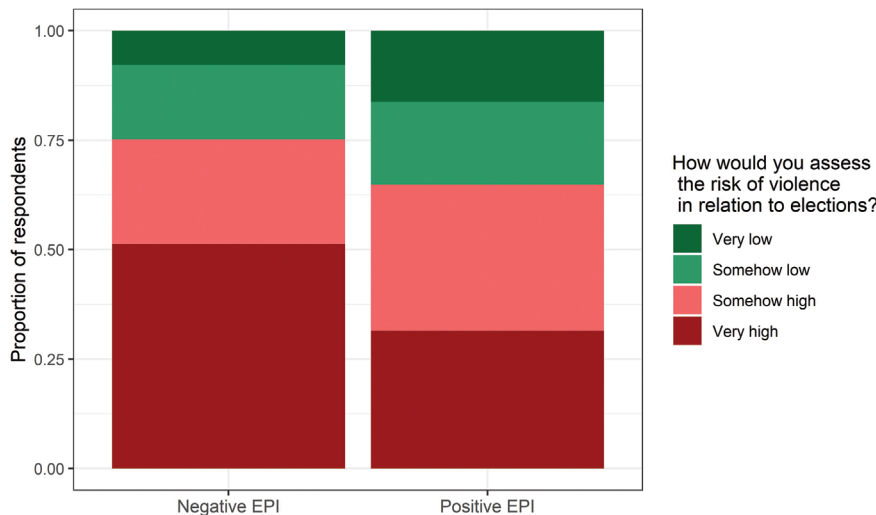


Elections

The R-ARCSS calls for elections to be held 60 days before the three-year transitional period ends in February 2023. National leaders have sent mixed signals about their intentions in this regard, with the President and his allies suggesting that elections should proceed as scheduled and the First Vice-President and his allies suggesting that key provisions of the peace agreement must be completed before elections may be held. Survey data shows some divided opinion among respondents, though most (50%) thought that elections should be delayed and just a third maintained that they should happen on time. Unsurprisingly, respondents who said they heard gunshots every night over the past month were also the most likely (69%) to say that elections should be delayed, presumably for fear of political instability.

Respondents were less equivocal when it came to the risk of violence in relation to elections. Two-thirds of respondents viewed the risk of violence as 'very high' (38%) or 'somehow high' (28%). Respondents in towns (69%) and IDP camps (63%) were more likely to assess the risk as high as compared to those residing in villages (55%). Wide disparities were also apparent by gender and location. These findings raise the question as to whether the minimum security conditions are in place in much of the country to hold elections, and whether residents in these areas would participate were the elections to be held on time.

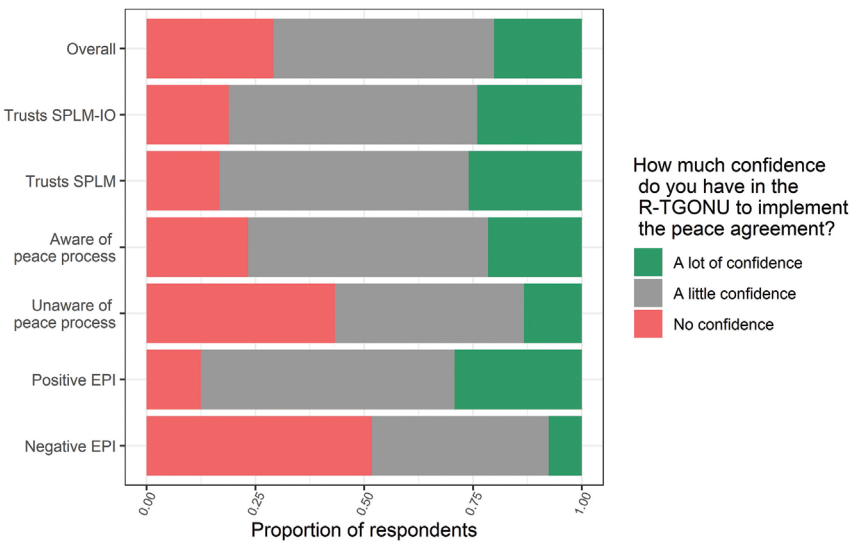
Views on the risk of violence according to people's overall perceptions of everyday peace



Confidence in the Peace Process and Government Priorities

With just one year left in the transitional period, the lack of progress that the parties have made in implementing the peace agreement is a common source of frustration in South Sudan. This was evident in responses to a question about government priorities. Most (43%) survey respondents thought the implementation of the R-ARCSS should be the top priority for the transitional government. Yet, 79 percent of respondents had little (50%) or no (29%) confidence in the ability of the R-TGONU to implement the agreement. Again, the experiences with everyday peace were the strongest factor influencing respondent perceptions of peace implementation. More than one third (35%) of respondents with a negative experience of everyday peace had no confidence in the R-TGONU's ability to implement the peace agreement. This finding shows how the perceived inability of the R-TGONU to establish peace at the everyday level reflects on people's assessment of their ability to implement peace at the national level. As noted above, this lack of confidence in the peace process can have real world consequences in terms of disincentivizing citizen participation and increasing the attraction of recruitment to armed opposition groups.

Trust in the R-TGONU according to various types of perception



Next to peace implementation, respondents (26%) viewed security to be the next most important priority for the R-TGONU. All other issues ranked far below peace implementation and security in terms of respondent priorities. Nonetheless, public goods and services in the form of physical infrastructure (4%), health (4%) and education (4%) emerged as second tier priorities, alongside government efforts to fix the economy. Surprisingly, respondents were far less likely to prioritize the return of refugees (2%) and food aid (3%), perhaps reflecting a view of these areas as the domain of international actors and not commonly associated with visible government action.

Recommendations

Public perceptions of the peace process and people's experience of everyday peace both contribute to the trajectory of a transitional process. How people experience everyday peace is a decisive factor in determining their trust in the peace process. As the survey data suggests, people who feel less safe, who have negative perceptions of everyday peace, tend to be more pessimistic about the peace process. This is troubling on several levels. First, it provides further evidence of the psychological impact that insecurity has at both the individual and societal levels. This demands action at the very least from a social justice perspective, not to mention the implications for political stability and economic recovery. People trapped in such situations may also find themselves in a vicious loop of conflict and exploitation, in which insecurity causes a loss of voice and agency, leading to institutional mistrust and poor development outcomes that make them more susceptible to manipulation by political and military actors. Three main recommendations flow from these findings:

First, any support to the peace process should include initiatives designed to support communities to improve everyday security at the local level, and not just focus on the national level, to sustain public trust in the process. Enhancing road security and the ability of people to move freely, both in urban and rural areas, could provide an important entry point. In addition, the gendered aspects of security, including issues of everyday peace, need to be accounted for in programming. For example, male respondents consider the movement elements as more risky than female respondents, while female respondents perceive more insecurity in household related tasks (such as leaving the house at night and buying goods at the market). Men and women also face different types of risk in the context of armed violence. Lastly, there may be scope for humanitarian actors to more actively contribute to efforts to promote peace and security at the local level. Through their programming on protection, resilience, and negotiations to access conflict-affected populations, humanitarians are well-positioned to contribute to everyday peace.

Second, interventions of peace support should target the critical hotspots of violence.

Improving the conditions in areas with very low levels of perceived everyday security promise considerable results towards the public buy-in into the peace process. The high level of differentiation between contexts advises against broad geographical approaches and support an area-based approach to programming that focuses on challenging areas in a contextually specific manner. This could be complemented by cross-area or regional programming that targets areas with shared security threats. For example, conflict mitigation efforts could adopt common strategies to address cattle-raiding in the tri-state corridor between Warrap, Lakes, and Unity States, child abduction among communities in the GPAA and Jonglei, the impact of cattle migrations from Jonglei and Lakes States into the Equatorias, or contestation over state administrations among ethnolinguistic communities in Wau and Malakal. Aid programming in these situations must also be carefully sequenced. While interventions at the humanitarian, peacebuilding and development nexus can provide important space for people in less secure settings to begin engaging with issues beyond their immediate needs, they must also be carefully designed to avoid being instrumentalized by more powerful actors.

Third, policymakers should focus their efforts on sustaining the transitional process rather than achieving check lists within rigid timeframes. Even though not directly asked as such, findings point towards the public measuring the success of the peace process less in achievements along the defined transitional program and more in the concrete improvement of security in their immediate surroundings. While this finding gives rise to huge challenges given the difficult and highly violent situation in various parts of the country, it may also help to relieve growing pressure caused by timelines for R-ARCSS implementation. Investments in everyday security appear as a more promising entry point for peace support in South Sudan compared with deadline diplomacy, an approach that has already failed to deliver meaningful results. Any such engagement should be firmly grounded in a conflict sensitive approach that takes into account the potential for unintended consequences, understands how people experience peace and safety, and supports the local institutions that are able to service those needs.

About Us

Detcro, LLC is a US-based research and advisory company with international expertise. Our senior management team has more than 50 years of combined experience serving as intermediaries between communities and international development partners across Africa.

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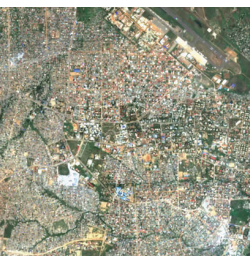
PeaceRep is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

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