



SOUTH SUDAN

POLICY BRIEF

Policy Brief on Public Authority: National Survey on Perceptions of Peace in South Sudan

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Key Findings

- ▶ Survey responses indicate a significant breakdown in the relationship between citizens and the national government. More respondents disagreed than agreed with the statement: 'The national government cares about my community.'
- ▶ Respondents who felt more unsafe, were displaced more often, and who felt more pessimistic about peace were more likely to feel that the government did not care about their community.
- ▶ Respondents perceived national political leaders to have limited influence in making decisions about safety in their communities. In all locations other than Aweil, governors and county commissioners were perceived to be the most influential in making decisions that affected community safety.
- ▶ The survey underlined community trust in traditional authorities, but with striking diversity across locations. Respondents also perceived traditional authorities to have power in motivating families to engage in armed struggle.
- ▶ However, this variation across locations suggests that traditional authorities' power in security matters does not correlate with conflict exposure, displacement status or living environment. Traditional authority legitimacy is more strongly determined by their varying social ties in every community.

Introduction

This briefing note presents a summary of findings about citizens' perceptions of public authority from a survey of South Sudanese in 2021-2022. The three-wave survey recorded the views of 8,843 people from 12 counties across 9 states and special administrative areas, covering urban, rural and IDP camp environments.¹ Respondents were asked questions about their daily experiences of public authority and safety, based on indicators of everyday peace developed through focus groups.² They also shared their views on a wide range of governance issues, including about whom they trusted to make decisions about their community.

Citizen Relationships with the National Government

Survey responses indicate a significant breakdown in the relationship between citizens and the national government. More respondents disagreed than agreed with the statement: 'The national government cares about my community.' Some of the lowest levels of agreement were in Yei (20%) and Bor (24%), both of which are highly conflict-affected locations in recent years. Rumbek stands out for having the best perceptions of its relationship with the national government, with 74% of respondents agreeing with the statement (Figure 1).

Respondents who felt more unsafe, were displaced more often, and who felt more pessimistic about peace were more likely to feel that the government did not care about their community (Figures 2-5). The correlations between safety, displacement, views on peace and the belief in government care are strong, substantively and statistically.³

Figure 1: Do you agree or disagree? 'The national government cares about my community'

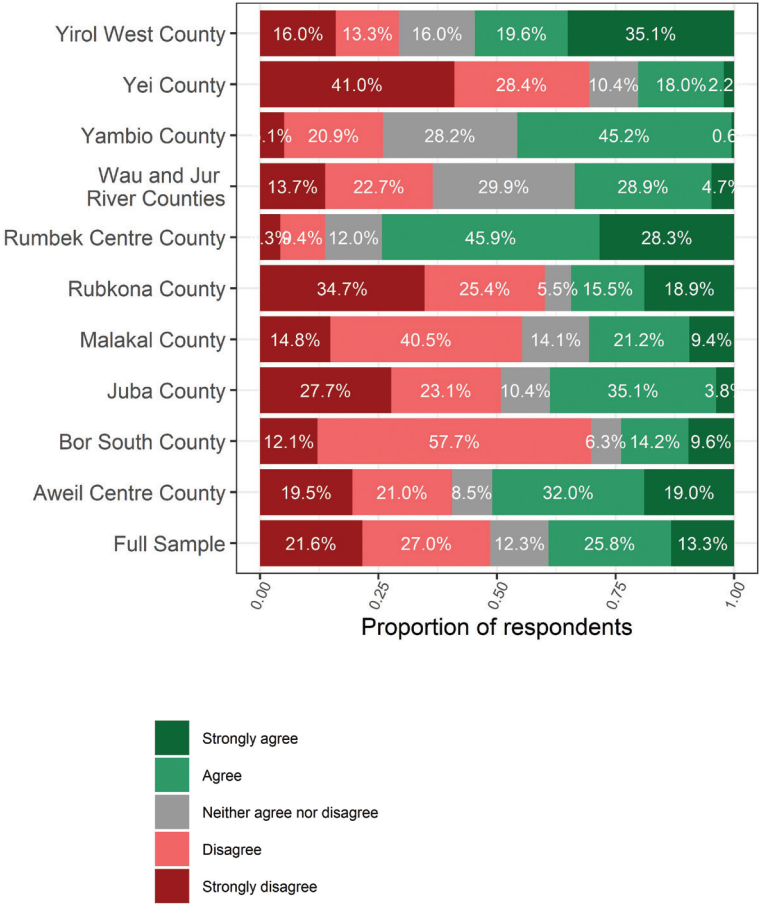


Figure 2: Do you agree or disagree? 'The national government cares about my community'

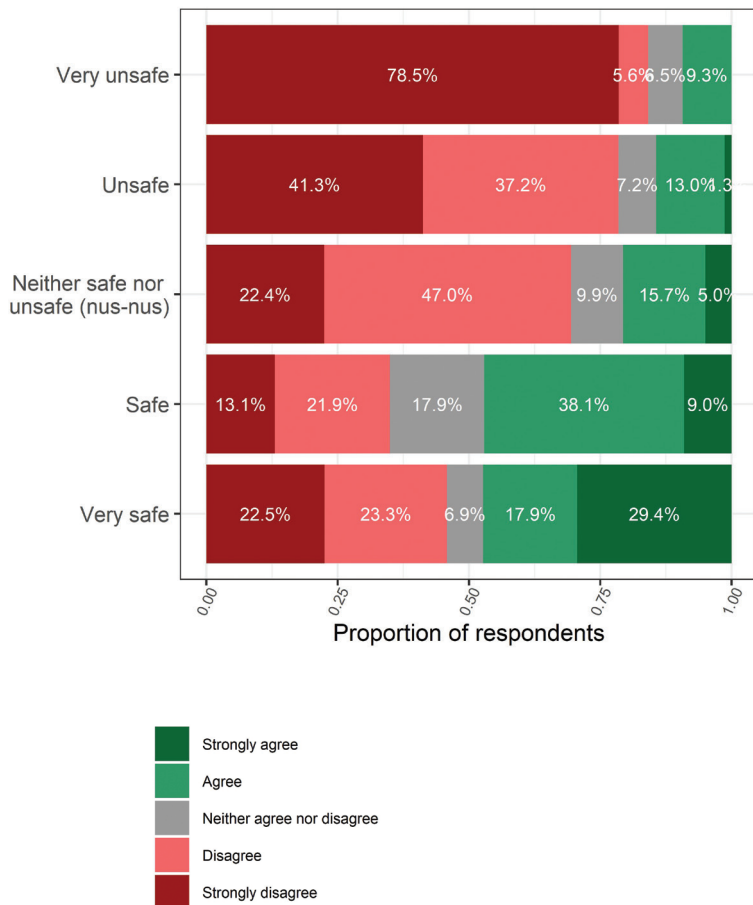


Figure 3: Do you agree or disagree? 'The national government cares about my community'

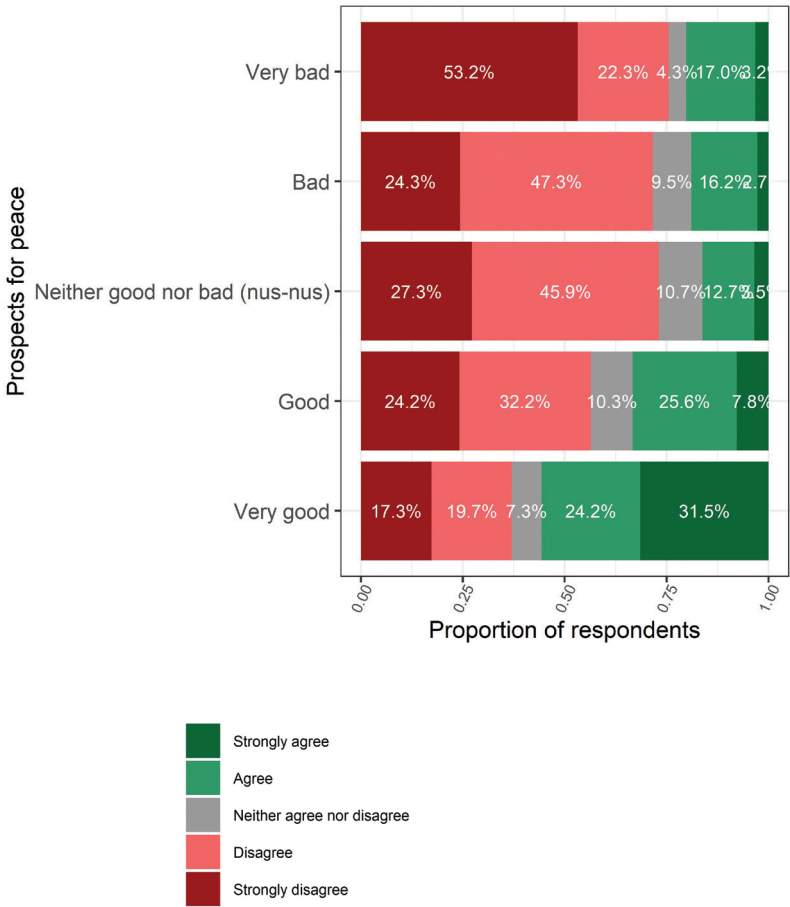


Figure 4: Do you agree or disagree? 'The national government cares about my community'

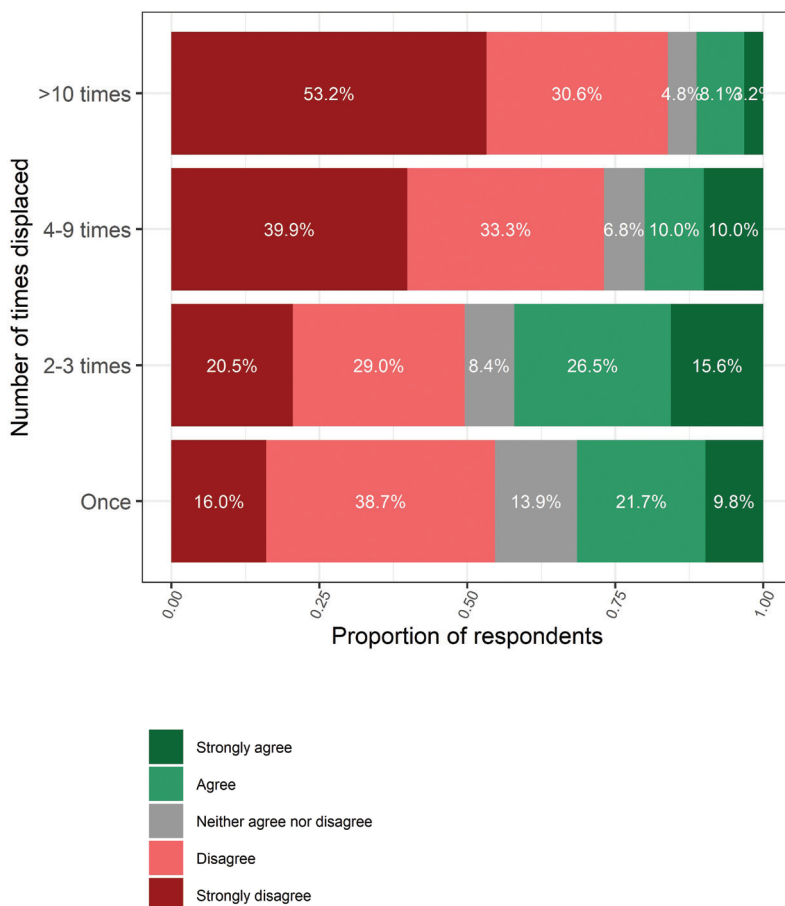
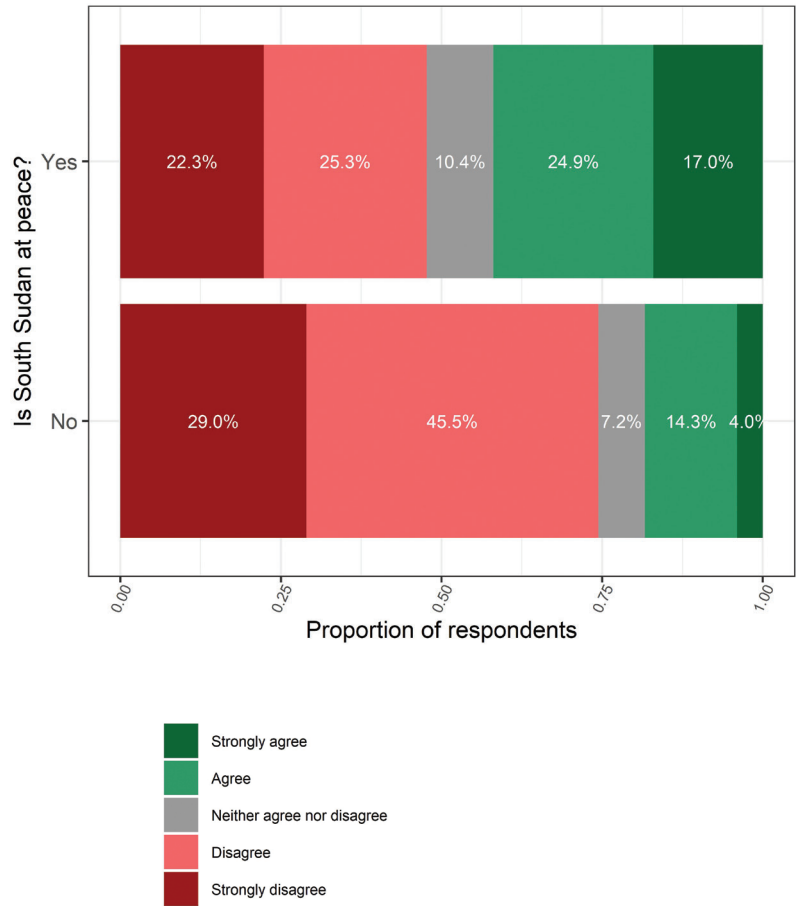


Figure 5: Do you agree or disagree? 'The national government cares about my community'



Influential Decision-makers

Respondents perceived national political leaders to have limited influence in making decisions about safety in their communities. With the exception of Aweil, governors and county commissioners together represented the actors perceived as most influential in making decisions that affected community safety (Figure 6).

A similar pattern was evident with respect to trust in public authorities to negotiate agreements about cattle-related conflict and the passage of armed groups through the area. Respondents identified state and local government as more trusted than national actors in these spheres (Figure 7, Figure 8). It is notable that many of the security actors, including police and organized forces, did not feature prominently among the most trusted actors. This reflects the strained relationship between civilian and security personnel in South Sudan.

Figure 6: Who is most influential in making decisions about the safety of your community

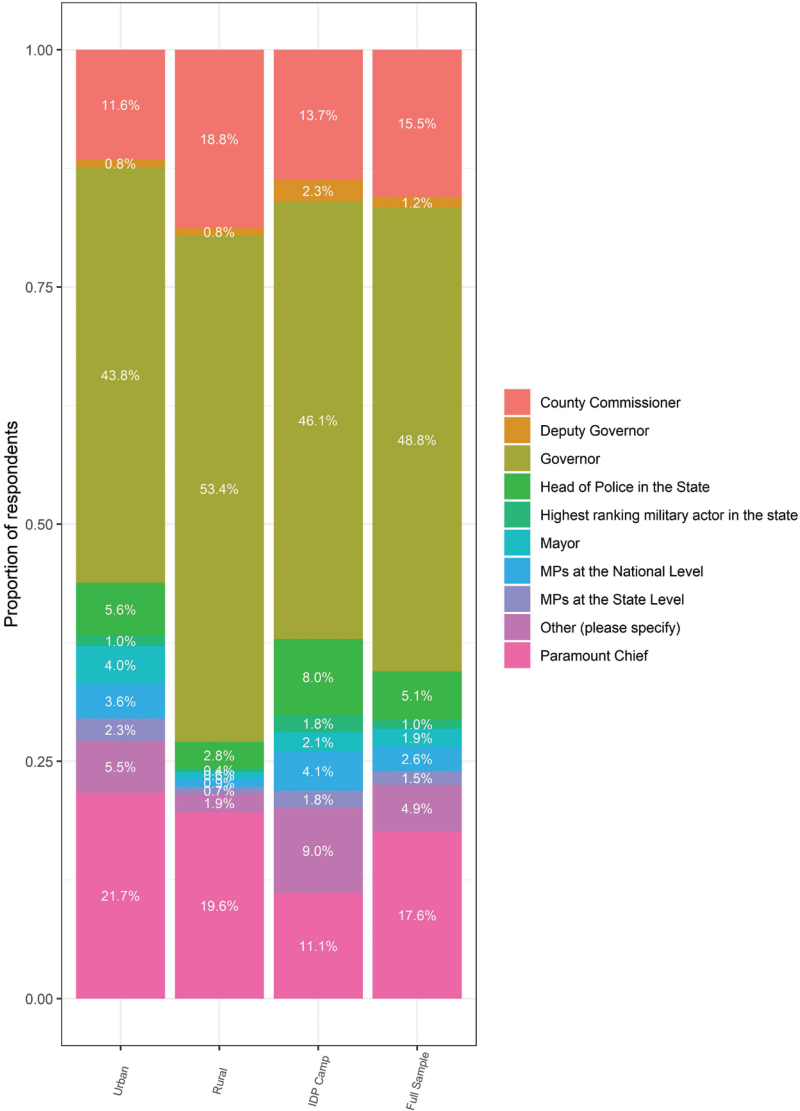


Figure 7: Which of the following actors do you trust most to help your community reach peaceful agreements about conflict over cattle?

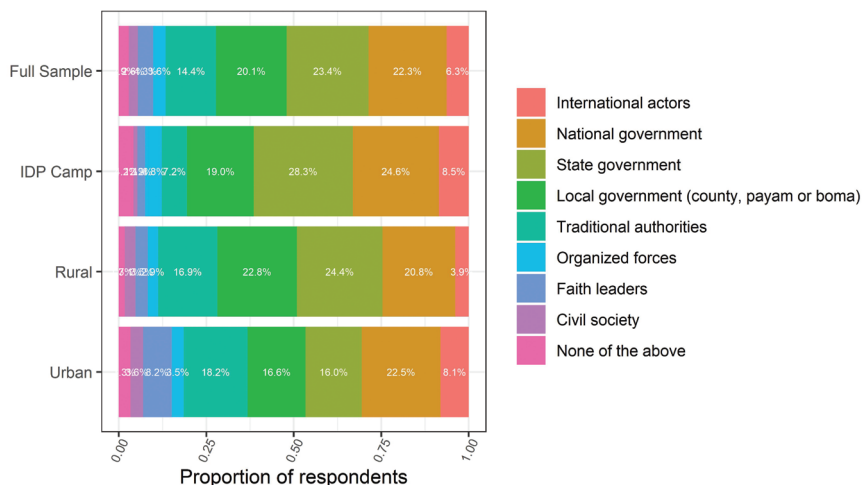
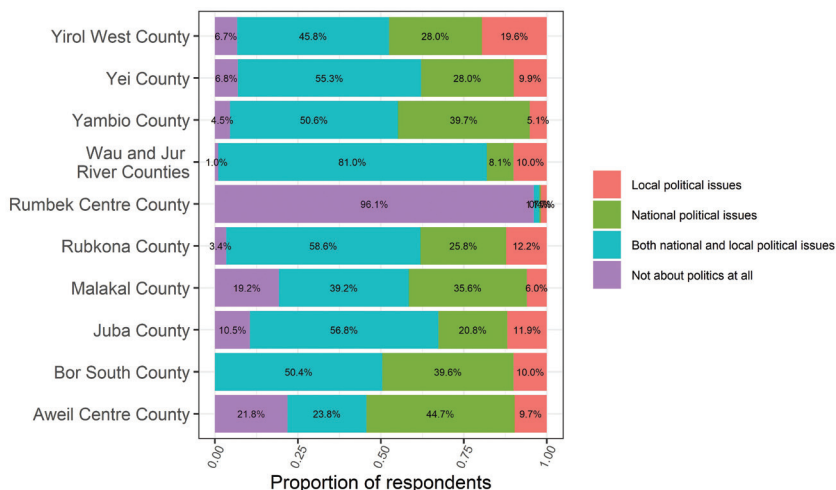


Figure 8: When armed group are fighting in this area, is it primarily about national political issues, local political issues, both national and political issues, or not about politics at all? (2022)



Traditional Authorities' Role in Security

The survey underlined community trust in traditional authorities, but with striking diversity across locations. In Aweil, where traditional authorities have played active roles in brokering local agreements, a majority of respondents (55%) identified the paramount chief as the most influential decision maker about safety in their communities. By contrast, only two percent of respondents felt this way in Rubkona, where most respondents were displaced persons (Figure 6).

Respondents perceived traditional authorities to have power in motivating families to engage in armed struggle. A third of respondents agreed with the statement: 'If traditional leaders in my community told my family that a member should join an armed group, we would comply' (Figure 9). In Yei, Yambio and Rumbek, very few respondents agreed with this statement. However, in Yirol, Aweil, Bor and Juba, almost half of the respondents felt that traditional authorities could encourage their family members to join armed groups.

This locational variation suggests that traditional authorities' power in security matters does not correlate with conflict exposure, displacement status or living environment. Traditional authority legitimacy may be robust to these factors, and more strongly determined by their varying social ties in every community.

Figure 9: Do you agree or disagree? If traditional leaders in my community told my family that a member should join an armed group, we would comply.

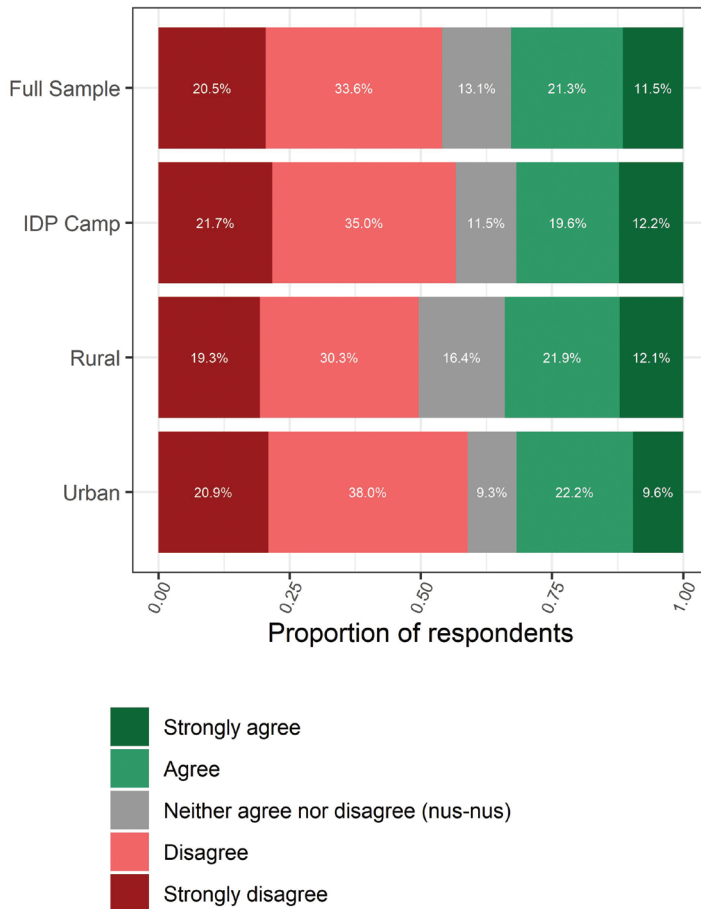
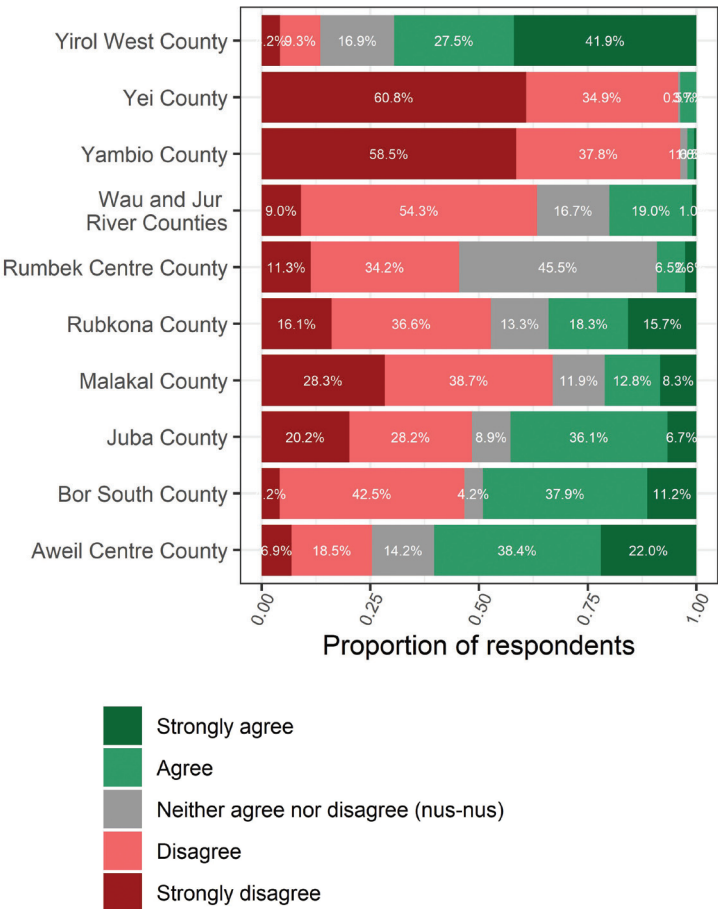


Figure 10: Do you agree or disagree? If traditional leaders in my community told my family that a member should join an armed group, we would comply.



Conclusions

The survey findings suggest that political leaders need to make more targeted efforts to include the most insecure and displaced populations in national projects if they are to build durable legitimacy. National political leaders face a legitimacy challenge. Many citizens believe that the national government neither cares about their community, nor has great influence to make decisions that affect their safety. The most unsafe and displaced communities feel the weakest stake in national government. In public consultations and service delivery, these are the most difficult populations to reach. But continuing to exclude them will mean that the national government will face difficulties in establishing a trusted and meaningful central state for all South Sudanese.

In establishing this legitimacy, national political leaders should work through local leaders, formal and traditional, rather than circumventing them to engage citizens. Respondents indicated high levels of trust for traditional authorities, state governors and local governments to manage security in their communities and resolve local conflicts. Respondents also highlighted varying roles across locations of traditional authorities in motivating armed mobilization. In contexts like Yirol and Aweil, policy makers may find traditional authorities to be an important partner in dissuading citizens to join armed groups.

References

- 1 A convenience sample of eleven counties was selected to represent the principal regions and conflict theatres in South Sudan. The research team used an approximately self-weighting stratified random sampling approach to select households, and then individuals within households. This method centred on a randomization strategy implemented using ArcGIS and the GRID3 South Sudan Settlement Extents, Version 01.01 dataset. For each work day, enumerators began at randomly-drawn map coordinates and followed a random walk guided by smartphone apps. Enumerators recorded responses using KoboToolbox smartphone software. Reference: Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), Columbia University and Novel-T. 2021. GRID3 South Sudan Settlement Extents, Version 01. Palisades, NY: Geo-Referenced Infrastructure and Demographic Data for Development (GRID3). <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-khpa-pq09>.
- 2 The study drew from the Everyday Peace Indicator (EPI) methodology to develop measures of everyday safety through interviews and focus groups across five of the survey locations in January and February 2020. This produced five questions which were asked in each survey. The questions were then translated into an aggregate index of daily safety. Reference: Pamina Firchow and Roger Mac Ginty, 'Measuring peace: Comparability, commensurability, and complementarity using bottom-up indicators,' *International Studies Review* (2017).
- 3 These correlations were substantively and statistically significant at the 90% levels when tested in OLS regressions with fixed effects for survey location and environment, and standard errors clustered at the location level. In these regressions, the dependent variable was the level of agreement with the statement that the government cares about the respondent community, and the independent variables (tested separately) were number of times displaced, agreement whether South Sudan was at peace, level of agreement that peace was possible in the next three years, and level of perceived daily safety.

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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