

SOUTH SUDAN



Perceptions of Peace in South Sudan

Patterns in Perceptions of Safety since the 2018 R-ARCSS

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Contents

Acronyms	01
List of Figures	02
Summary	03
About the Survey	04
Safety Trends	06
Gender and Environment	07
Gender, Age and Marital Status	14
Variations across Communities and Locations	18
Conclusions	21

Acronyms

AF/SSS	African Affairs Bureau, Office of Sudan and South Sudan of the US Department of State
EPI	Everyday Peace Indicator
GRID3	Geo-Referenced Infrastructure and Demographic Data for Development
IDP	Internally Displaced People
PoCs	Protection of Civilian sites
PeaceRep	Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
USIP	United States Institute for Peace
WFP	World Food Programme

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Respondents, 2021-2023
- Figure 2: Perceptions of everyday safety – mean score by location [n = 13,323]
- Figure 3: Perceptions of everyday safety – mean score by gender and environment [n = 13,323]
- Figure 4: IDP camps respondents
- Figure 5: Rural respondents
- Figure 6: Perceptions of everyday safety in IDP camps [n = 3,176]
- Figure 7: Perceptions of everyday safety in rural areas [n = 4,913]
- Figure 8: Perceptions of everyday safety – mean score by age and gender [n = 13,323]
- Figure 9: Perceptions of everyday safety – mean score for respondents 36+ years old [n = 6,247]
- Figure 10: Perceptions of everyday safety – mean score by marital status and gender [n = 13,323]
- Figure 11: Perceptions of everyday safety – mean score by marital status and age category [n = 13,323]
- Figure 12: Perceptions of everyday safety – mean score by ethnolinguistic group [n = 13,323]
- Figure 13: Perceptions of everyday safety – mean score by ethnolinguistic group and location [n = 13,323]

Summary

From 2018-2023 South Sudanese, on average, have experienced a steady improvement in their perceptions of everyday safety. This positive trend overlays contrasts between genders, age groups, locations and marital statuses:

- ▶ Women in IDP camps have experienced a worrying regression in their safety from 2022-2023. Movement outside the home has become riskier.
- ▶ Respondents in the Equatorias and Pibor feel acutely unsafe and have not experienced the improvements seen elsewhere in South Sudan. Unlike other locations, men feel more unsafe than women in Yei and Pibor.
- ▶ Women feel safer than men between the ages of 18-35 years. This pattern flips for respondents over 35 years of age, when women feel less safe.
- ▶ The divorced, separated or widowed feel much less safe compared to the married or never married, though the never married older than 35 years feel similarly unsafe.
- ▶ Conflict histories and prior exposure to violent events does not entirely account for the correlation between experiences of safety and marital status. This suggests that family units play a role in sustaining individual safety.

About the Survey

This note presents patterns in perceptions of safety over time from a survey conducted in South Sudan at four points from 2021-2023. In total across the waves, the survey team recorded the experiences of 13,325 South Sudanese in 15 locations, covering urban areas, rural areas and IDP camps (Figure 1).

Each participant responded to five questions about their perceptions of safety at that moment in time, and as they recalled it in September 2018 (the signing of the Revitalized Agreement to Resolve the Conflict in South Sudan). The research team identified these indicators of 'everyday peace' through focus group discussions in five locations across South Sudan in 2020.

The questions are:

- ▶ How safe do you feel using the main roads between towns?
- ▶ How safe do you feel moving in the countryside?
- ▶ How safe would you feel leaving your house at night to tend to a neighbor who needs something urgently?
- ▶ How safe do you feel going to buy goods in the market?
- ▶ How safe do you feel participating in cultural activities, such as dances or other celebrations?

Respondents could answer: 'very safe', 'safe', 'neither safe nor unsafe (nus-nus)', 'unsafe', or 'very unsafe'. In this note, the responses appear as numeric scores ranging from 5 = very safe, to 1 = very unsafe. For each respondent, the mean score across the five questions represents an aggregate safety score.

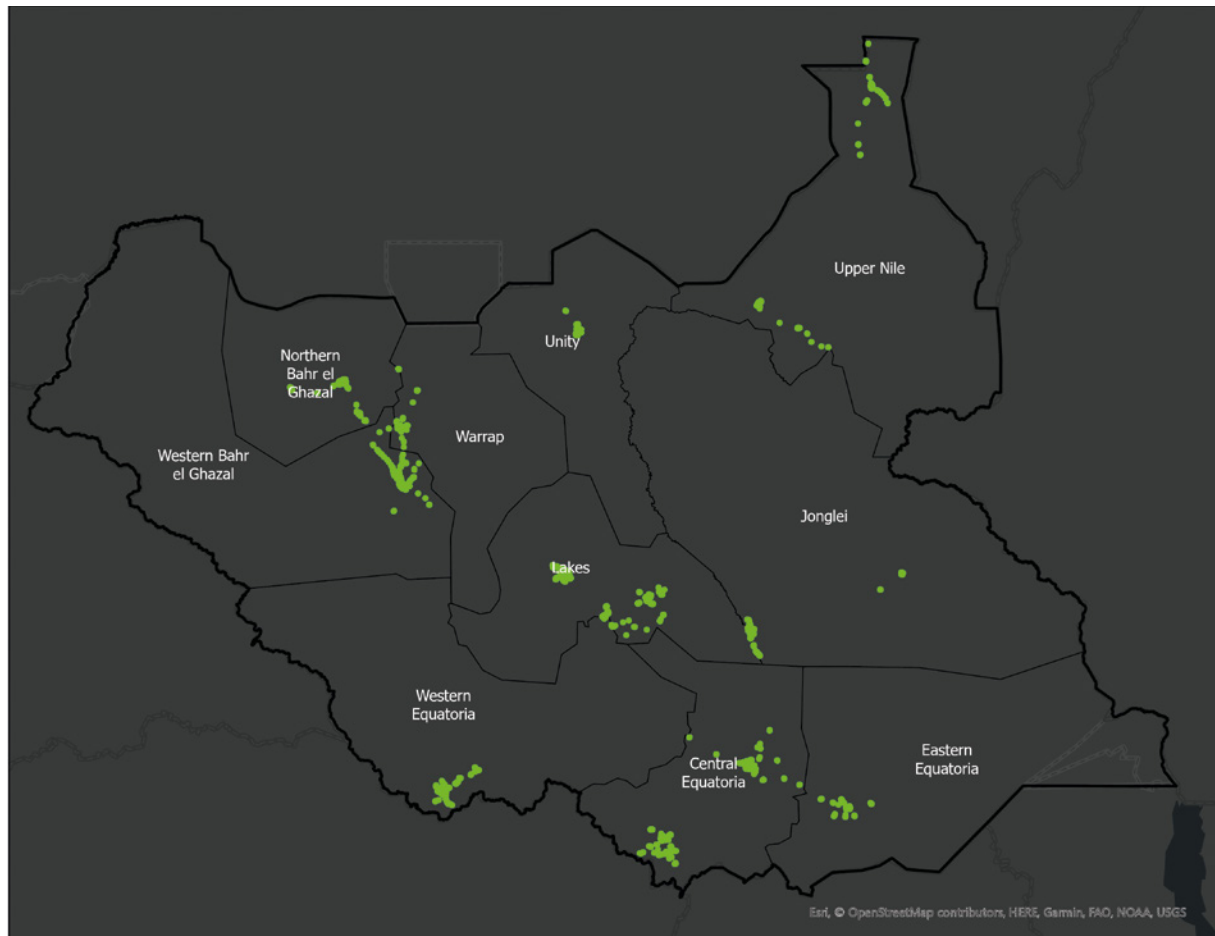


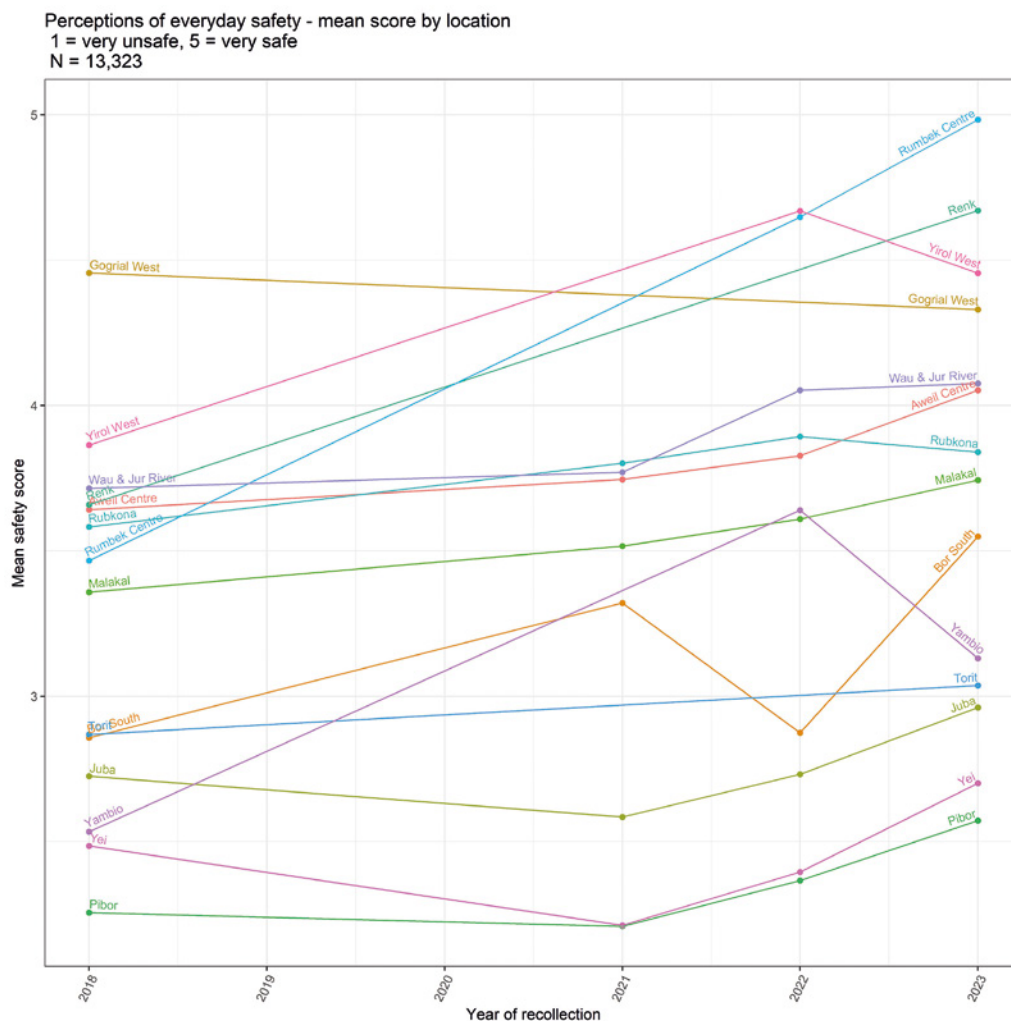
Figure 1: Respondents, 2021-2023

Safety Trends

On average, respondents in 2023 felt much safer than they did in 2018 and moderately safer compared to 2021. However, this finding overlays diverse experiences across locations (Figure 2). The cross-location findings underline the insecurity that persists in the Equatorias and Pibor, while safety elsewhere in South Sudan has incrementally improved.¹

The data also show contrasts in pattern: Respondents in Rumbek experienced a steady improvement while respondents in Bor reported volatility over the survey period.² Variations in gender, age, living environment and marital status shed light on these differences.

Figure 2:

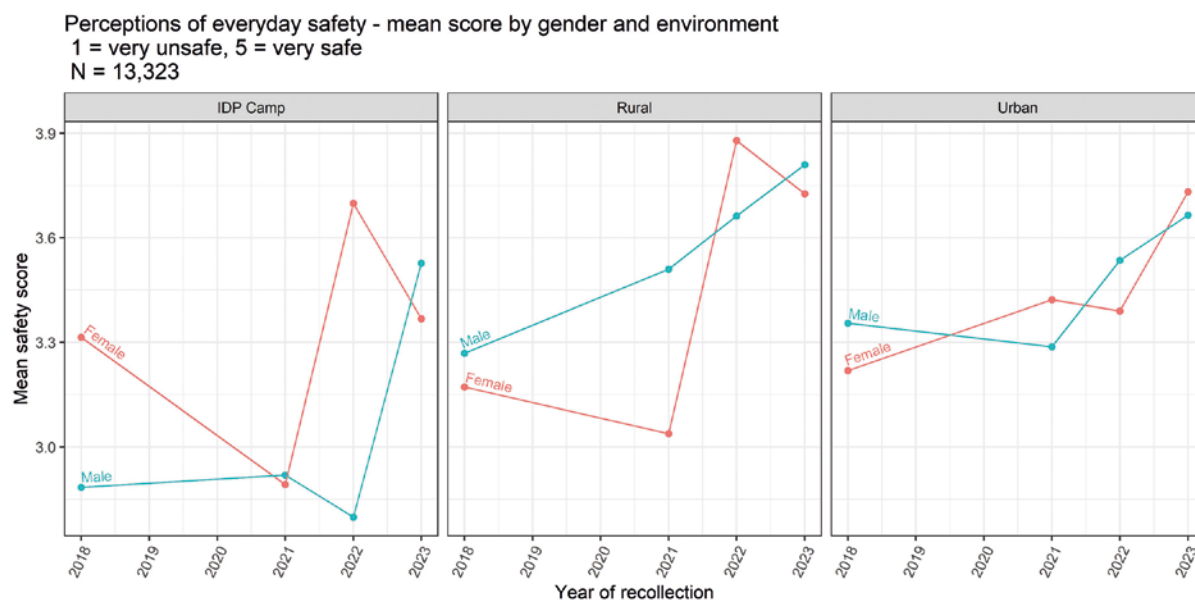


Gender and Environment

While urban women and men had similar experiences of safety from 2018-2023, men and women in rural areas and IDP camps have experienced different safety trajectories during the transition period (Figure 3). In IDP camps, men and women felt similar levels of insecurity in 2021. By 2022, women felt much safer, while men felt less safe. Women's safety in IDP camps then deteriorated in 2023. This deterioration accompanies (though is not necessarily caused by) the transitioning of the PoCs from UN management to jurisdiction of the Government of the Republic of South Sudan. Humanitarian organisations have documented that South Sudanese women face distinct threats compared to men regarding land, housing and property rights during periods of displacement and resettlement.³

In rural areas in 2021, rural women in general felt much less safe than men, while their paths converged by 2023.

Figure 3:

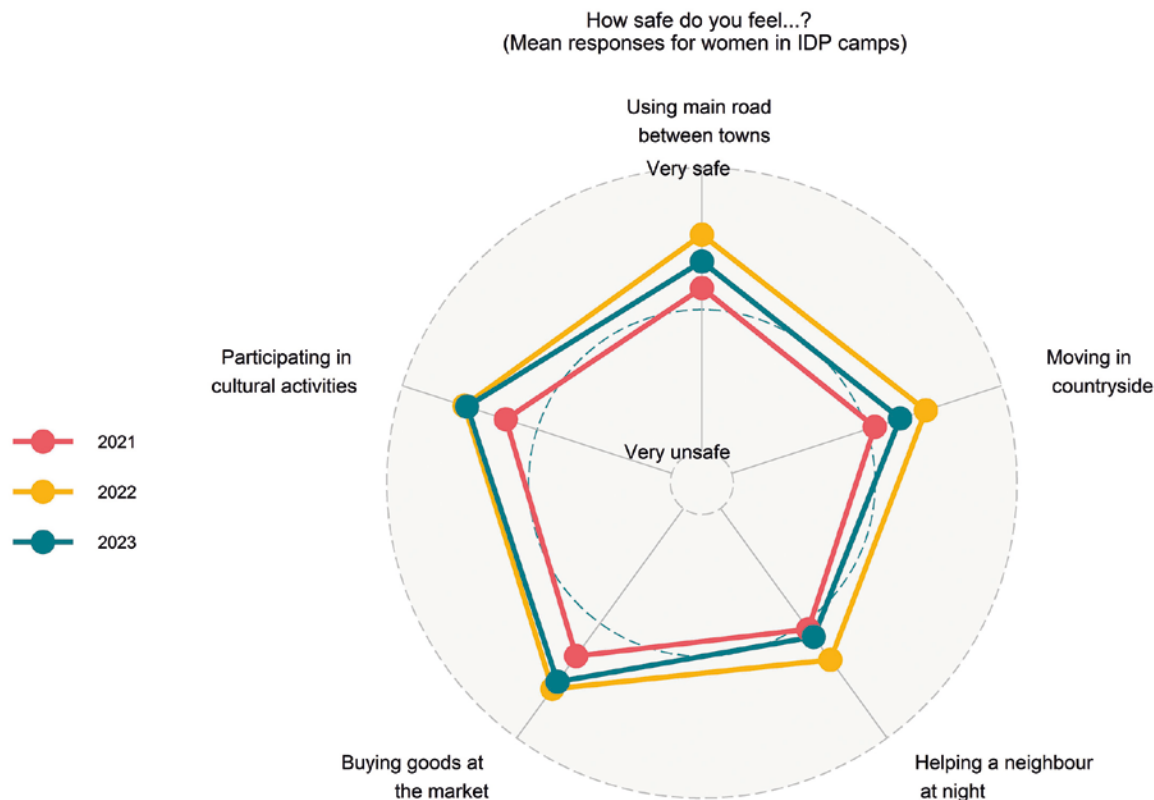


A closer look at women and men's experiences across the five safety indicators reveals how their experiences have varied. Figure 4 and Figure 5 draws from WFP Measuring Safety and Security Program's approach to presenting Everyday Peace Indicators in radar plots.⁴

In IDP camps, men experienced particular improvements from 2021-2023 in their ability to move safely in the countryside. By contrast, from 2022-2023, women in IDP camps experienced a regression in their safety for measures that involved moving by road or in the countryside (Figure 4).

In rural areas, women experienced improvements from 2021-2023 in their ability to move by road between towns, move in the countryside, and help a neighbour at night. The biggest improvement for men was in their ability to move in the countryside (Figure 5).

Figure 4: IDP Camps Respondents



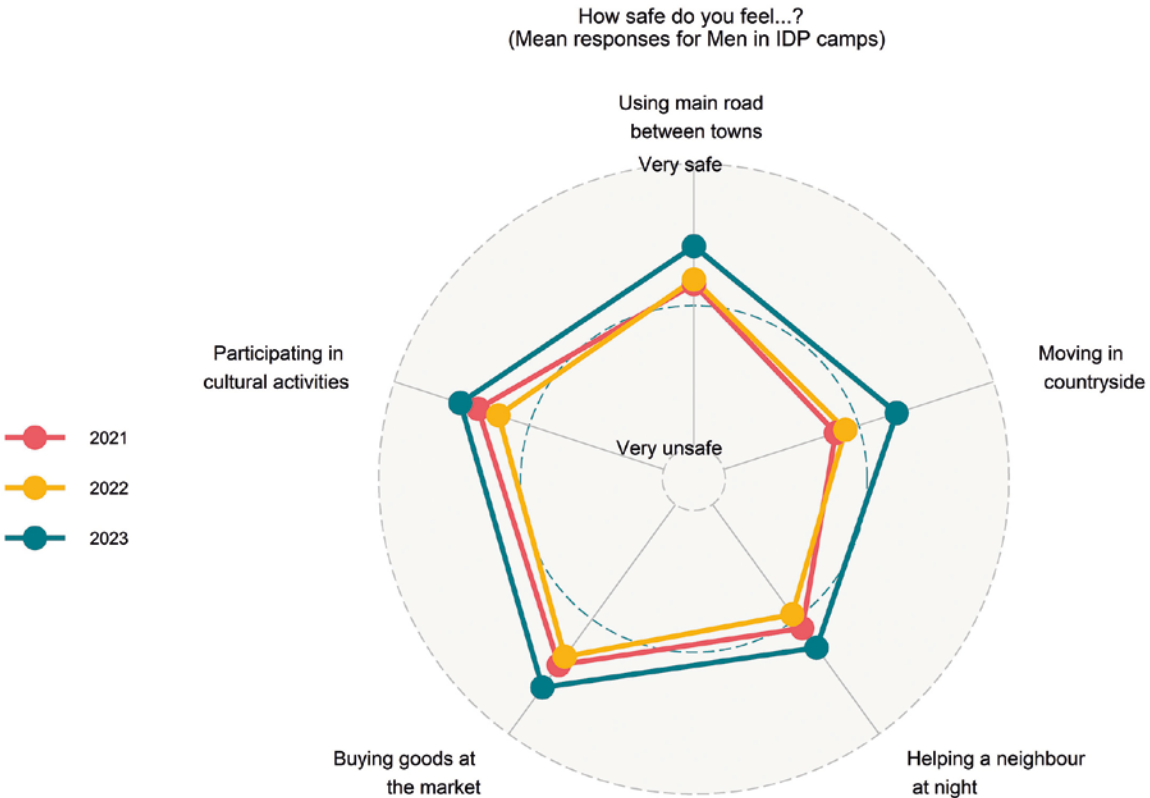
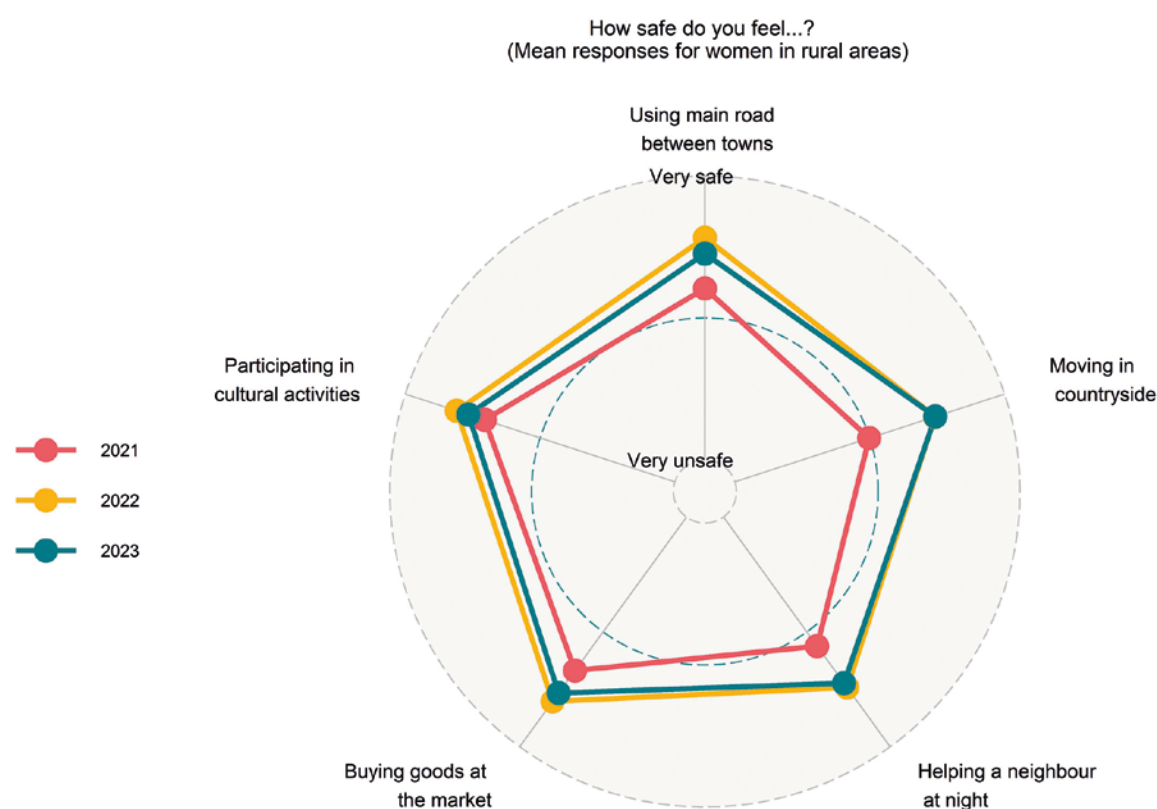
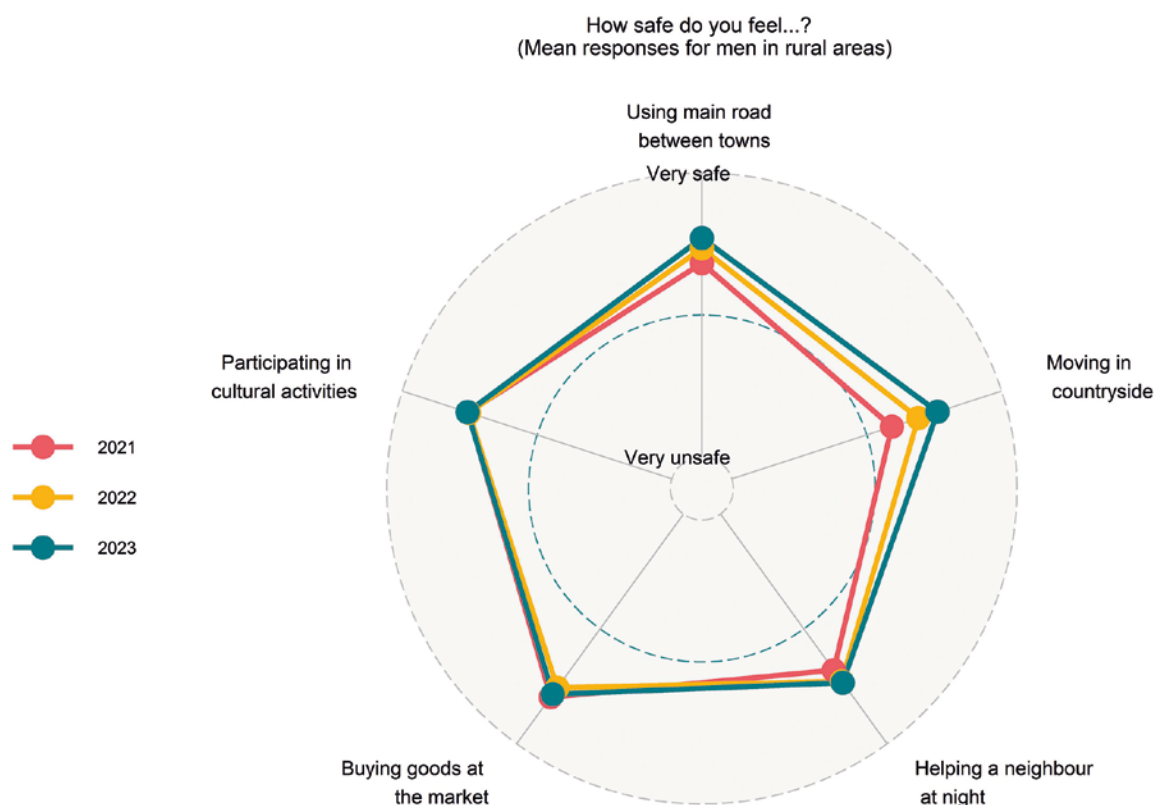


Figure 5: Rural Respondents





A view of safety patterns across locations in IDP camps and rural areas reveals more detail about men and women's contrasting experiences. Women in IDP camps in Bor South and Juba experienced the greatest fluctuations in safety compared to men, indicating that these are places where women find movement outside the home especially risky (Figure 6).

In rural areas, Yei and Pibor are the riskiest places for both genders, but places where men have felt more unsafe than women (Figure 7). This finding signals the risks specific to men from forced recruitment and targeting on suspicion of being allied (or insufficiently allied) with armed groups. For example, qualitative interviews for this research in Yei revealed that men who stayed at home were often susceptible to insults from men who had been recruited into rebel groups. Moreover, armed groups sometimes threatened the families of men who resisted recruitment. Also, men who worked in the transport sector (doing 'boda-boda business') faced special insecurities in Yei because they rode frequently across the border between South Sudan and Uganda.

Figure 6:

Perceptions of everyday safety in IDP camps - mean score by gender and location
1 = very unsafe, 5 = very safe
N = 3,176

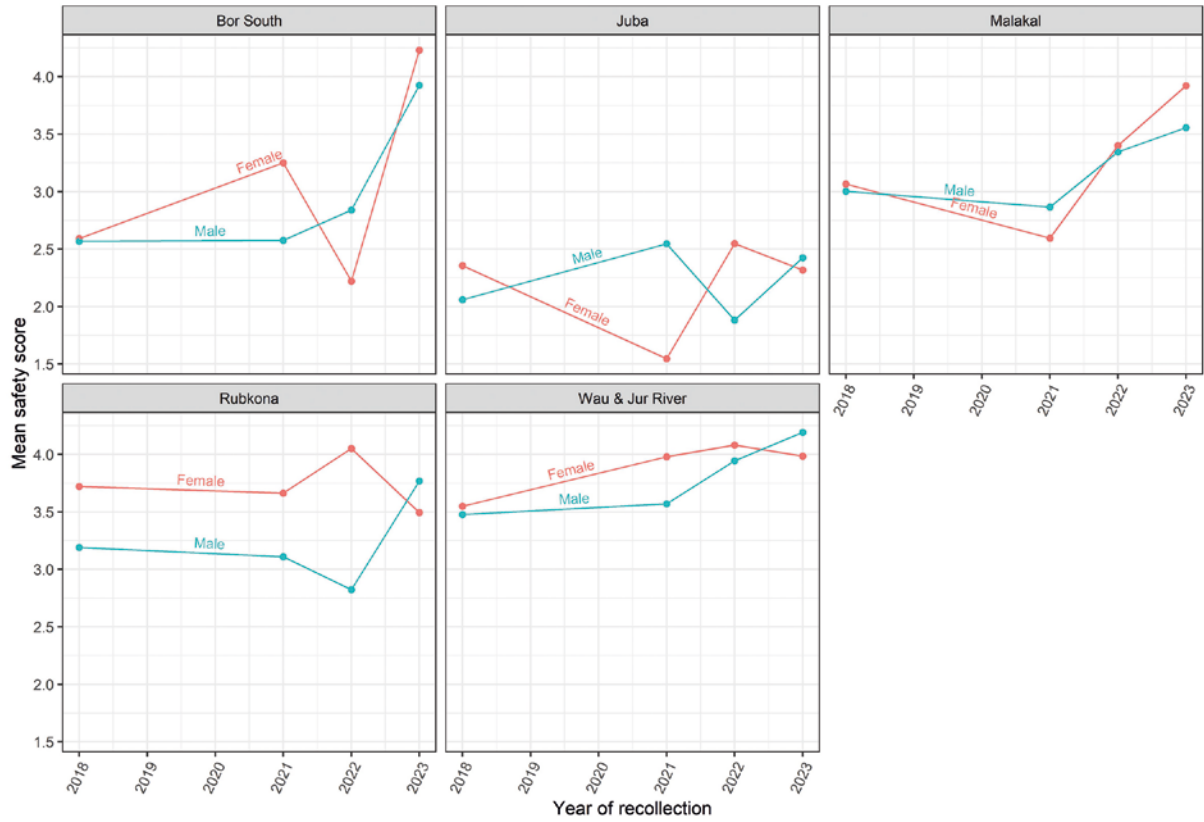
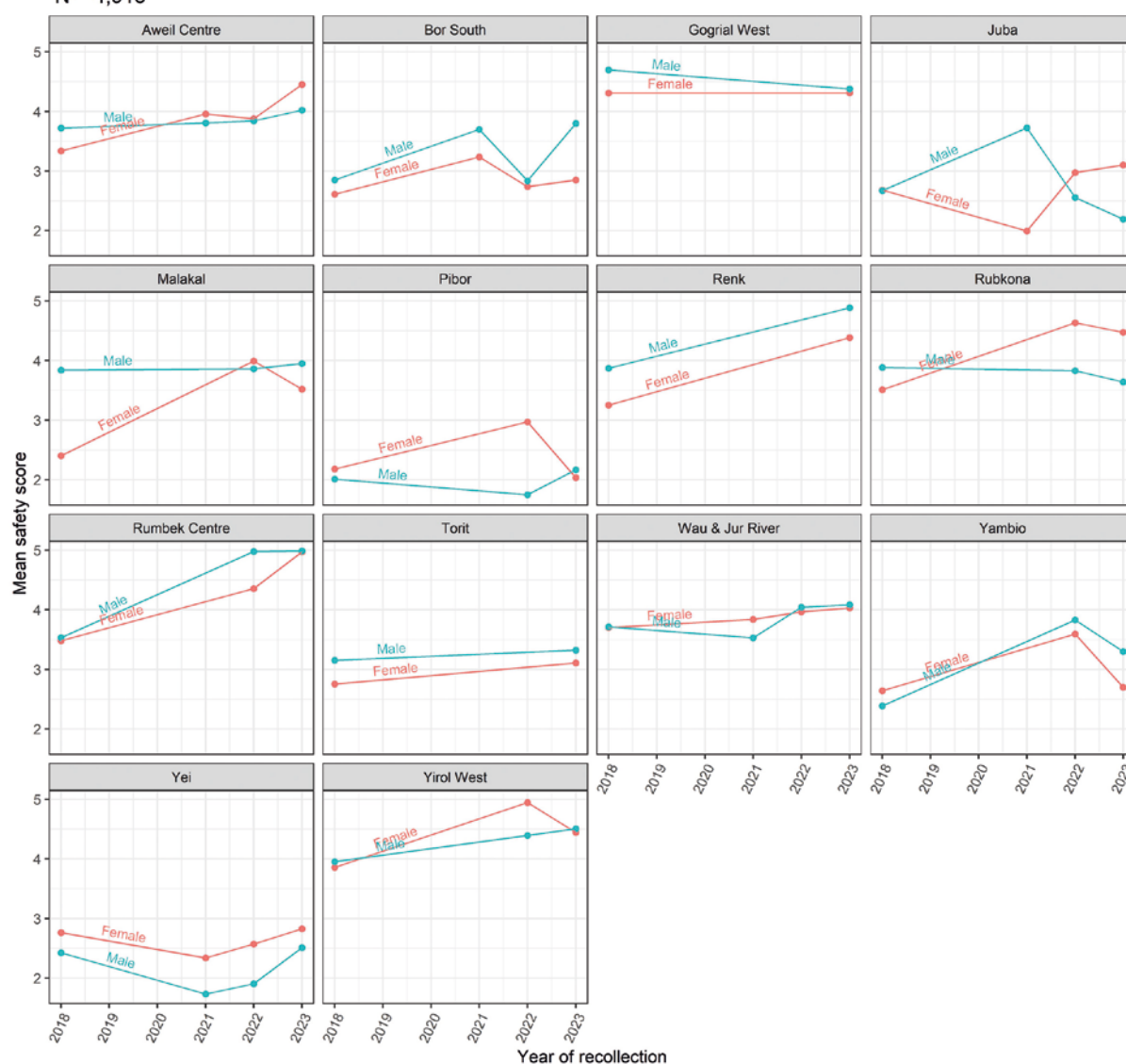


Figure 7:

Perceptions of everyday safety in rural areas - mean score by gender and location
 1 = very unsafe, 5 = very safe
 N = 4,913



Gender, Age and Marital Status

Gender, age and marital status are conditions that interact to shape safety experiences. On its own, age experiences little variation in safety. However, gender and age together indicate important contrasts: while younger women feel safer than younger men, older women (36+ years) feel less safe than older men (Figure 8). In 2023, older women in rural areas and IDP camps felt especially unsafe compared to older men. With the exception of 2022, older women in rural areas appear to have felt consistently insecure relative to older men since 2018 (Figure 9).

Figure 8:

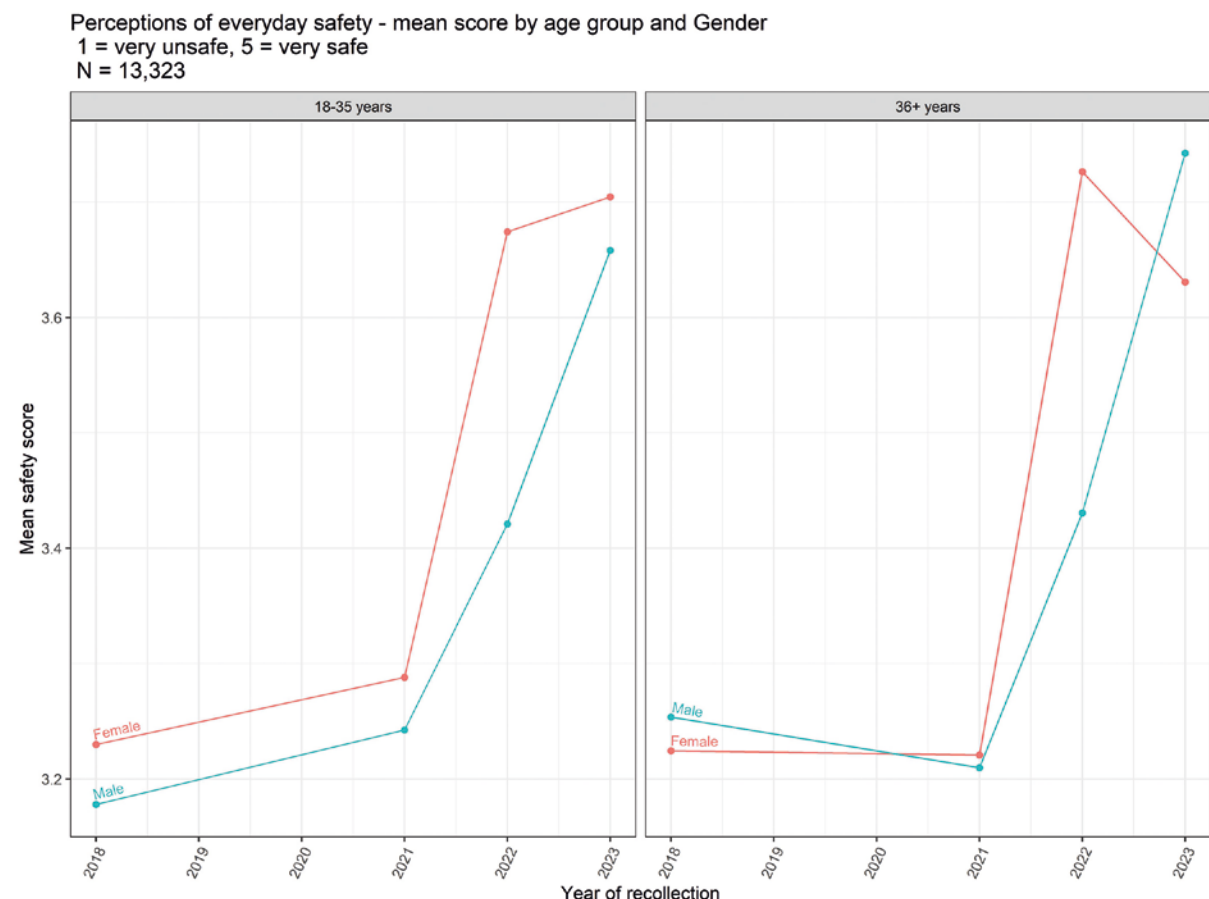
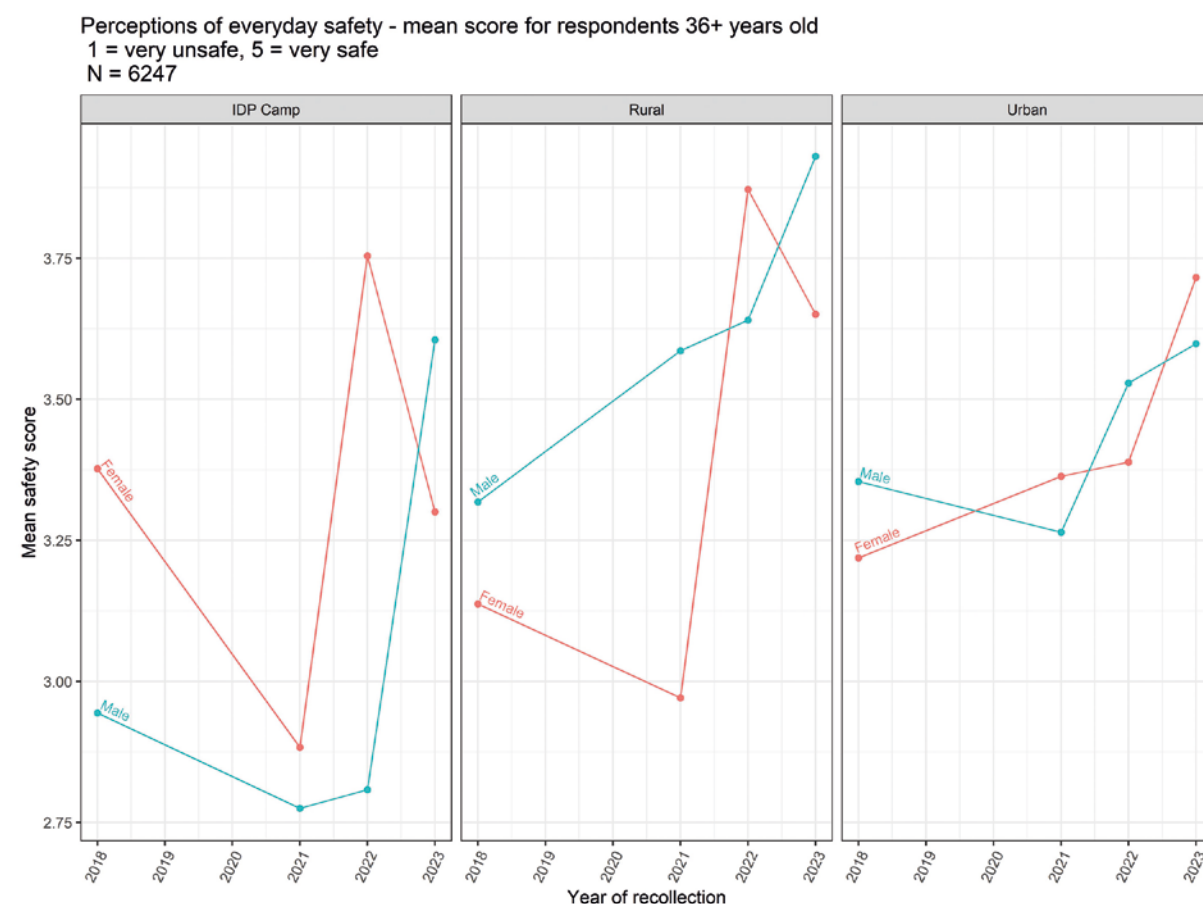


Figure 9:



Marital status partially accounts for this gender variation within age groups. For both men and women, the currently married feel safer than the never married, who feel safer than the divorced, separated or widowed (Figure 10). For 18-35 year-olds in 2023, the currently married and never married had similar safety experiences and felt much safer than the divorced, separated or widowed. For the older age group, the never married felt the most unsafe.

These correlations overlay several potential explanations and reverse causal stories. For example, respondents with more severe experiences of violent conflict are both more likely to feel more unsafe and to have lost a partner compared to those living in more stable areas. However, there were no significant differences by marital status in how frequently respondents heard gunshots at night, and no consistent correlations between the proportion of respondents with a particular marital status and the conflict histories of locations. For example, Rubkona had the second smallest proportion (after Yirol) of divorced, separated or widowed respondents. However, the divorced, separated or widowed were less likely to believe that South Sudan was at peace compared to the currently married and never married. These findings are correlational, but they are not entirely explained by exposure to violent conflict. This suggests that a unified family unit proxies stability.

Figure 10:

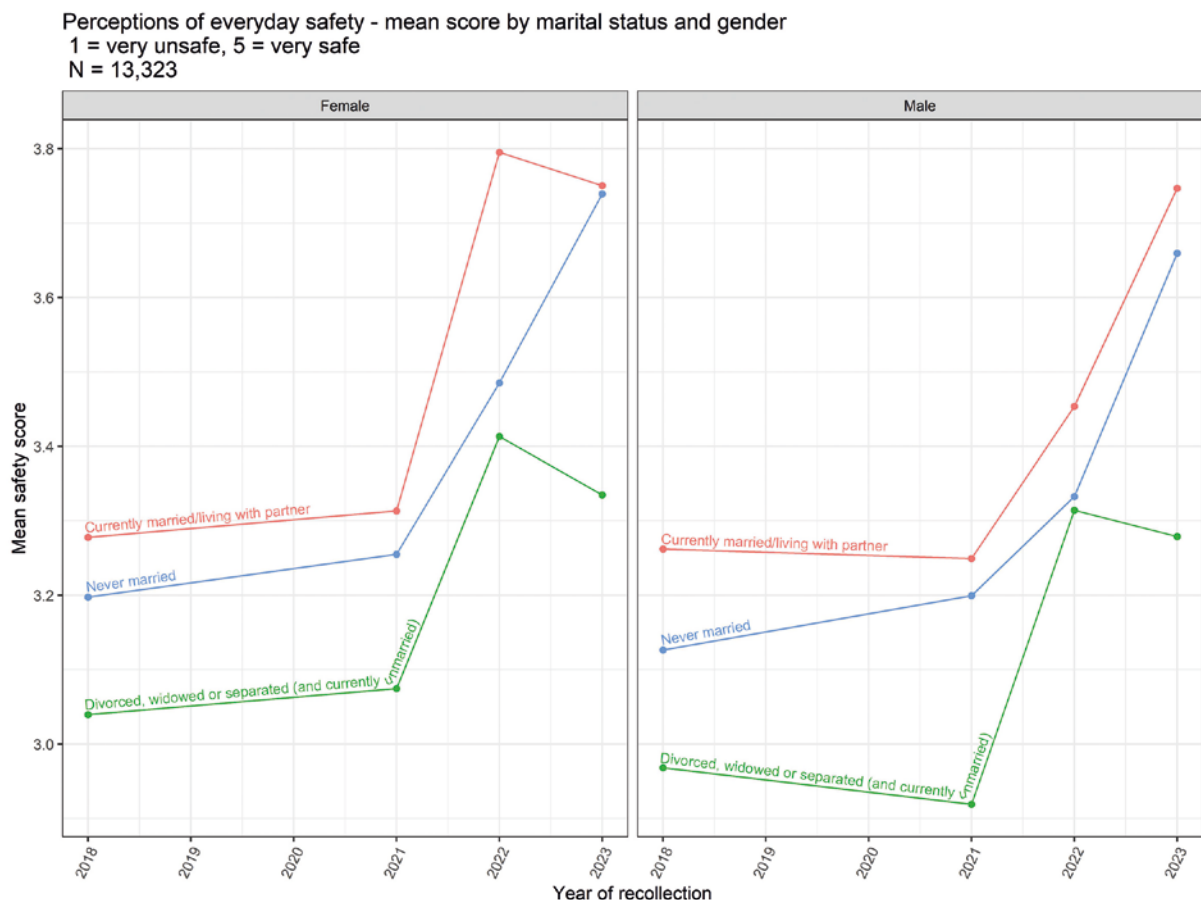
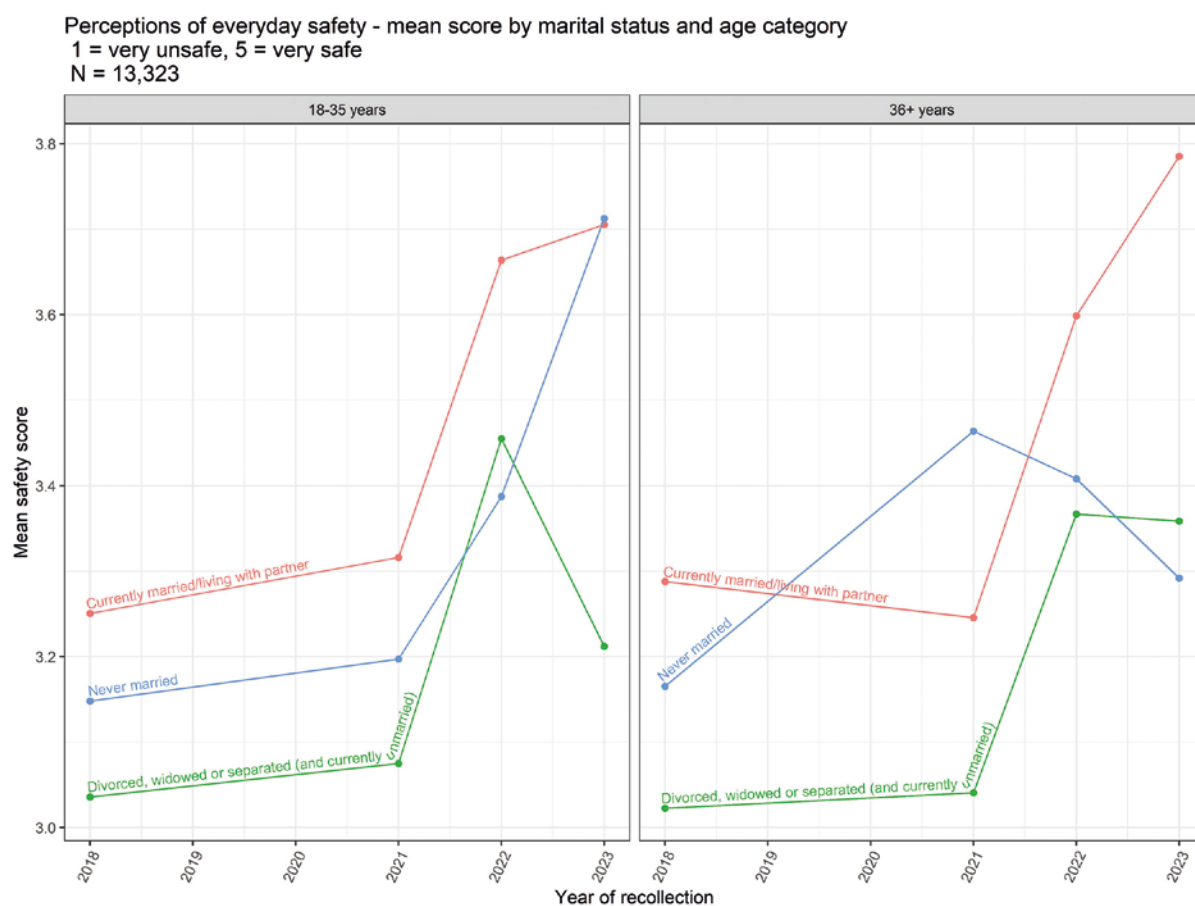


Figure 11:



Variations across Communities and Locations

The trajectories of locations in Figure 1 raises questions: for example, why, on average, did respondents feel safer in Malakal and Rubkona than in Torit and Yambio? These variations become clearer with closer analysis of ethnolinguistic identification, location and survey environment.

On average, Dinka respondents felt significantly safer than Nuer, Shilluk and other ethnolinguistic groups (Figure 12). However, Dinka felt comparatively unsafe in Bor South and Yei (Figure 13).

A closer look at Malakal explains the puzzle of its relatively high safety average: Analysis of the survey data showed that respondents from urban areas felt significantly safer than IDP camp respondents; indeed, their safety trajectories are direct opposites. This might be explained by perceptions being relative: respondents might compare their current situation to previous experiences in the same location, and not to other locations in the country.

Figure 12:

Perceptions of everyday safety - mean score by ethnolinguistic group
 1 = very unsafe, 5 = very safe
 N = 13,323

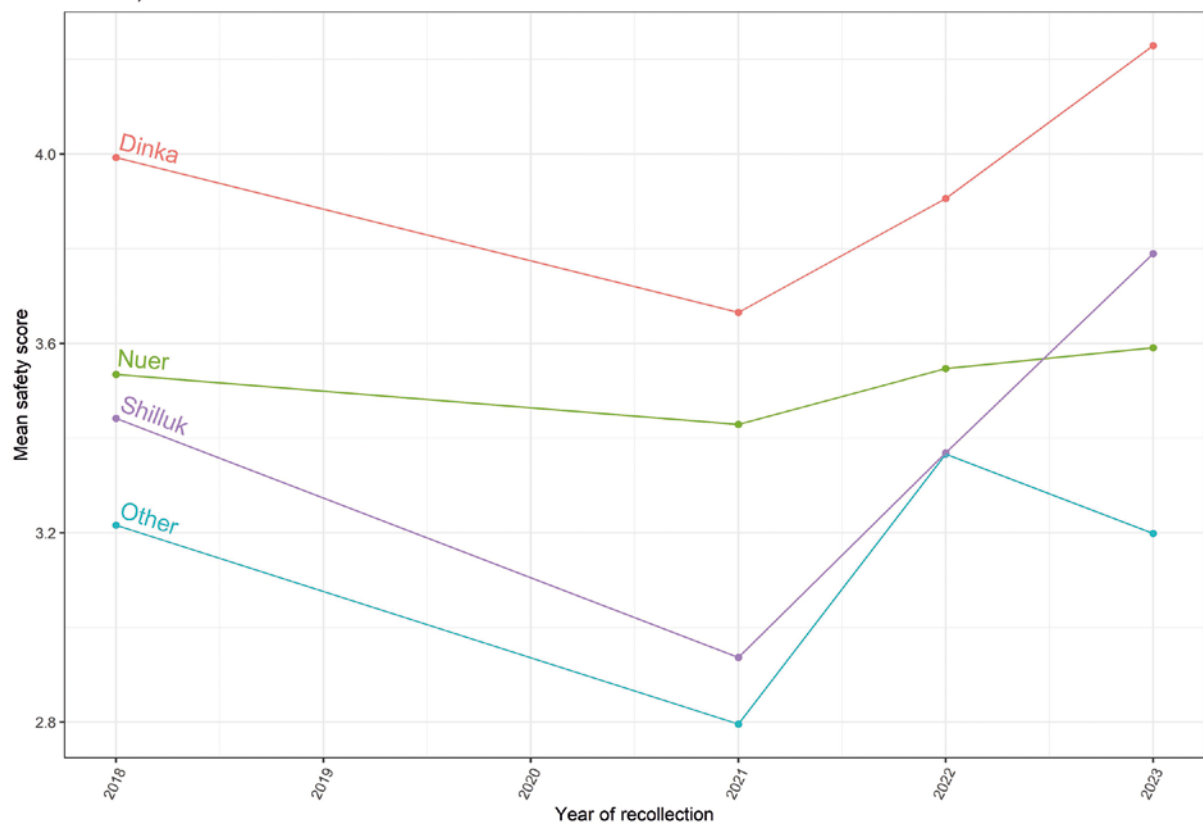
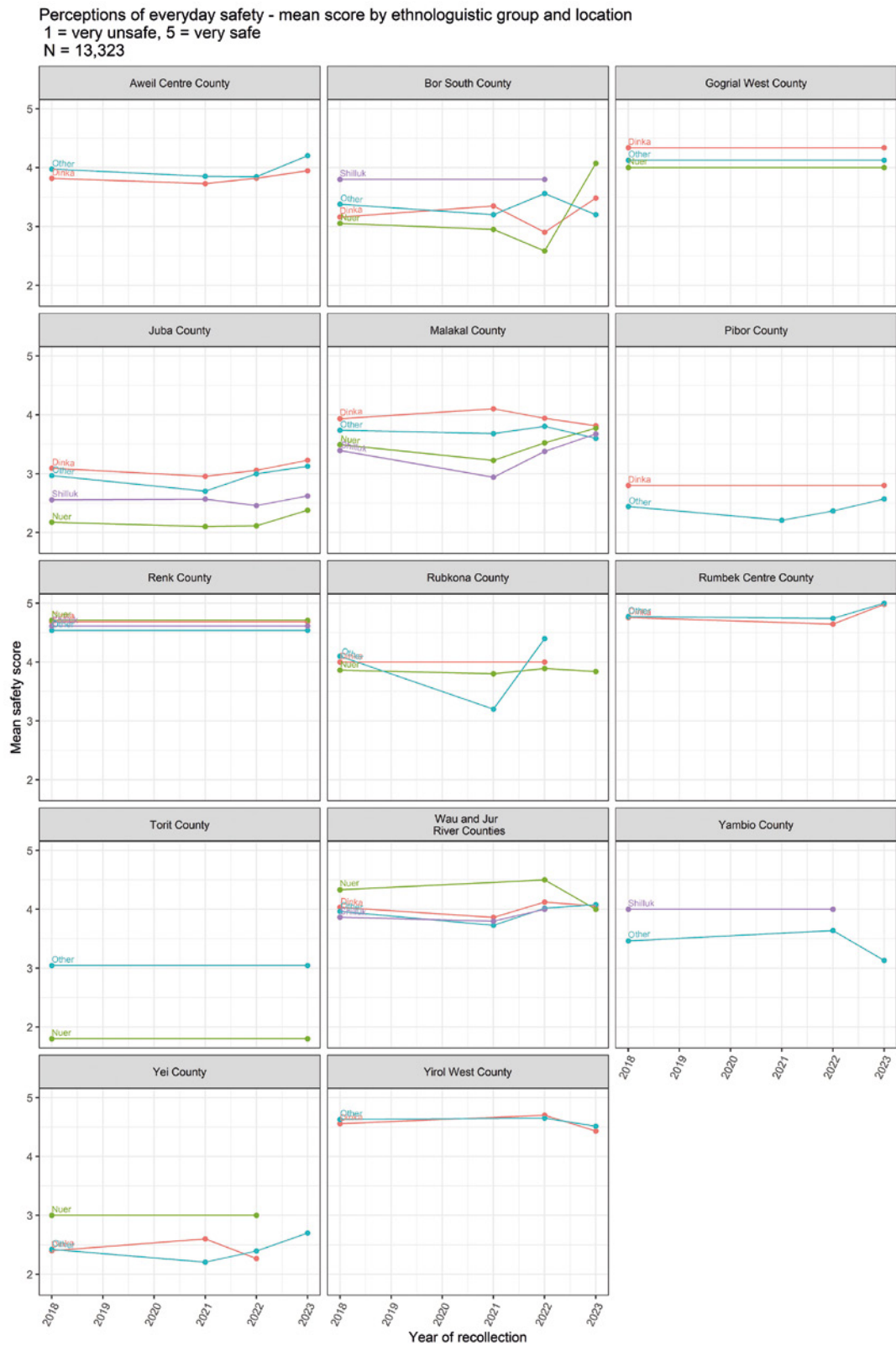


Figure 13:



Conclusions

This survey has tracked South Sudanese daily experiences of safety for three years, revealing a general improvement in overall safety since 2021, with dramatic improvements since the signing of R-ARCSS in 2018. This positive trend overlays contrasting patterns of safety across locations, living environments, genders, ages, marital statuses and ethnolinguistic groups.

Respondents in the Equatorias and Pibor continue to experience acute insecurity compared to other areas of South Sudan. They remain excluded from the improvements of the transition period.

Women in IDP camps have experienced a deterioration in safety from 2022-2023. Movement outside the home seems to have become riskier. In all settings, the separated, divorced and widowed feel especially unsafe compared to the married or never married. Conflict histories and prior exposure to violent events does not entirely account for this correlation, suggesting that family units are associated with levels of security through mechanisms that require further research.

These variations in safety highlight the populations most at risk and can help humanitarian and development agencies make decisions about whom they target for assistance.

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Methodology

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 the five questions which were asked in each survey.

A convenience sample of 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 random selection implemented using ArcGIS and the GRID3 South Sudan Settlement Extents, Version 01.01 dataset. For each workday, enumerators began at randomly-drawn map coordinates and followed a random walk guided by smartphone apps. Enumerators recorded responses using Kobo Toolbox Smartphone software.

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Endnotes

¹ The rise in perceptions of insecurity measured in the survey offers a marker of rising tensions, and thus a potential early warning signal of violent conflict. For an explanation of rising tensions in Western Equatoria, see Joshua Craze, 'Jemma's War: Political Strife in Western Equatoria' (October 2023): <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/Situation-Update-Western-Eq-Jemmas-War.pdf>.

² Attacks in Baidit in January 2022 contributed to the fluctuations in security in Bor. See 'UNMISS Statement on the Situation in Baidit in Jonglei State, South Sudan' (25 January 2022): <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/statement-unmiss-situation-baidit-jonglei-state-south-sudan>

³ See p.11 of 'Conflict Sensitivity Analysis: United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites transition: Bentiu, Unity State, and Malakal, Upper Nile State', Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (26 March 2021): <file:///C:/Users/Sophia/Downloads/CSRF-Conflict-Sensitivity-Analysis-Protection-of-Civilians-Site-Transition-Bentiu-and-Malakal-Final-26-March-2021-1.pdf>

⁴ See p.30 of Marie Riquier, 'Improving the Prospects for Peace in South Sudan: Spotlight on Measurement,' Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and World Food Program (June 2023): https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/wfp_south_sudan_measurement.pdf

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Detcro, LLC is a management, research, and advisory company with offices in Washington, D.C. and Juba, South Sudan. Our team has more than 50 years of combined experience serving as intermediaries between communities and international development partners across Africa.

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