



# Policy Brief on Security and Governance: National Survey on Perceptions of Peace in South Sudan

David Deng, Sophia Dawkins, Christopher Oringa and Jan Pospisil



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH



Authors: David Deng, Sophia Dawkins, Christopher Oringa and Jan Pospisil

Detcro Research and Advisory, LLC  
1629 K St., Ste. 300, Washington, D.C., 20006  
<http://detcro.com>

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform  
School of Law, Old College, The University of Edinburgh, South Bridge, Edinburgh, EH8 9YL

Tel. +44 (0)131 651 4566  
Fax. +44 (0)131 650 2005  
E-mail: [peacerep@ed.ac.uk](mailto:peacerep@ed.ac.uk)  
[PeaceRep.org](http://PeaceRep.org)

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The views in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent the views of Detcro, USIP, AF/SSS, or FCDO.

#### About the Authors:

David Deng is a human rights lawyer who has been conducting research and advocacy in South Sudan since 2008. Deng's work has touched on a range of issues, including citizen perspectives on peace processes and transitional justice, land governance, and housing, land and property (HLP) rights, and local security and justice provision.

Sophia Dawkins is a doctoral candidate at Yale University researching peace processes, human rights and civilian protection issues. Sophia has worked in peacebuilding in South Sudan since 2010. She was a 2019-2020 US Institute of Peace Jennings Randolph Peace Scholar, and her work appears in diverse outlets, including the Washington Post, Political Violence at a Glance, and peer-reviewed Journal of Peace Research and European Journal of International Law.

Christopher Oringa is a lecturer at the Institute of Peace, Development and Security Studies in the University of Juba. He received his BA in Social Science from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in 2006, and MA in Peace and Conflict Studies from Makerere University in 2012. Since joining the University of Juba in 2013, his research has focused on peace and development, IDPs and refugees, and education in fragile contexts. He also studies how people, organizations and societies can better resolve their conflicts and innovate in response to complex problems. His work is highly interdisciplinary, drawing on social science, environmental studies, social psychology, philosophy and complex system theory.

Jan Pospisil is Associate Professor at the Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations at the University of Coventry. He is a co-investigator of the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep), a FCDO-funded research program located at the University of Edinburgh. His research focuses on peace processes, political settlements, humanitarian negotiations, and resilience. Jan's most recent monograph on South Sudanese conflictscapes has been published with transcript in 2021. His previous monograph, "Peace in Political Unsettledness: Beyond Solving Conflict", has been published with Palgrave Macmillan in 2019.

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## Introduction

This briefing note presents the headline findings about citizens' perceptions of security and governance from a survey of South Sudanese in 2021-2022.<sup>1</sup> 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. Respondents were asked questions about their daily experiences of safety, based on indicators of everyday peace developed through focus groups.<sup>2</sup> They also shared their views on a wide range of governance topics, from power sharing to the implications of army unification.

## Points of Unity

The survey revealed that South Sudanese strongly prioritize government accountability. Respondents across all walks of life, who were otherwise divided about how the government should rule, rallied around the value of accountability. They also voiced overwhelming support for parliamentary input to presidential decision making, even if that slowed down decisions (Figures 1 & 2).

### **IMPLICATIONS:**

- ▶ These findings underline the importance of policies that preserve a strong parliament and create mechanisms for citizen input to government. These need to remain central to arrangements for an extended transition period.

Figure 1: Which statement do you agree with most?

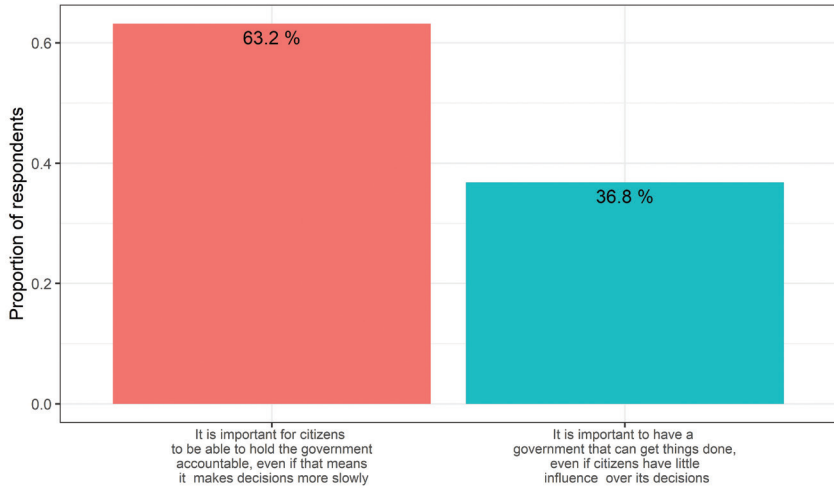
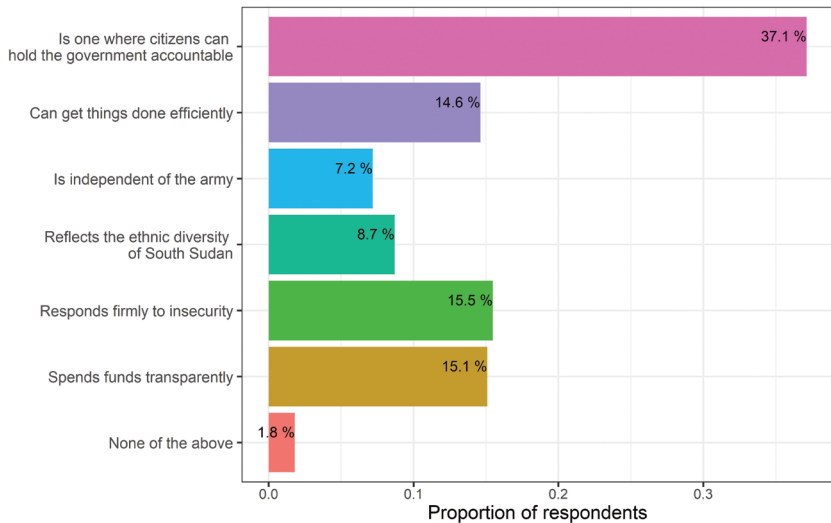


Figure 2: It is most important to me that the government:



Respondents across geographic locations, urban, rural and IDP camp areas, also believe that army unification will increase local stability but that elections should be delayed if army unification has not occurred by February 2023 (Figures 3 & 4).

**IMPLICATIONS:**

- ▶ These findings underline the importance of policies that sustain army unification and anticipate acute insecurity should elections take place before that process is complete. An extended transition that culminates in elections should continue to make army unification a priority.

Figure 3: Do you agree or disagree? 'The unification of forces will improve the security in this area'

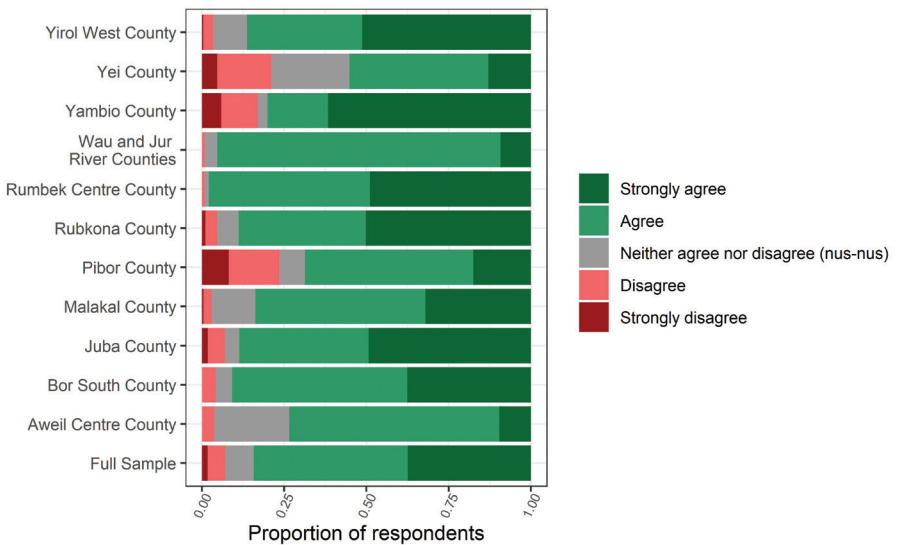
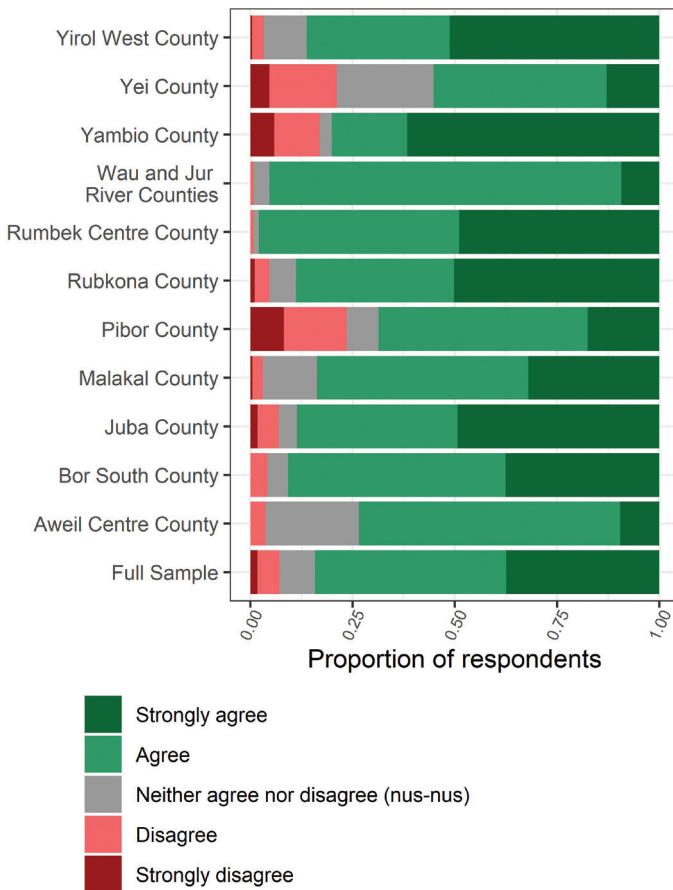


Figure 4: Do you agree or disagree? 'If government and opposition forces have not unified by the end of the transitional period in February 2023, elections should be delayed until they are able to unify'



## Points of Safety

Overall, people felt safer in their daily lives in 2022 compared to 2021.<sup>3</sup> The majority of respondents in 2022 believed that the peace agreement was helping to resolve the conflict in South Sudan, that it would hold until the end of the transition period, that it had increased daily security and that it had made daily life easier (Figure 5). But these experiences varied starkly by location, with Aweil and Yei at two poles of stability (Figure 6).

The safer people felt, the more likely they were to believe national peace agreements would resolve South Sudan's conflicts. They were also more comfortable with the idea of army rule (Figure 7). Conversely, the more unsafe people felt, the more skeptical they were of national peace agreements and the more strongly they disagreed with the idea of army rule.<sup>4</sup>

### IMPLICATIONS:

- ▶ The findings underline the importance of sustaining the political transition. This appears to be producing a general increase in stability, though unevenly distributed.
- ▶ The uneven distribution of improvements in daily safety underlines the need for stabilization policies to focus, as a priority, on the acute needs of places like Pibor and Yei. Pibor's experiences of acute conflict during the CPA interim period and immediately post-independence offers a warning about war conditions prevailing in some places during times that observers and political leaders label as peaceful. This history and the survey findings offer a warning.
- ▶ The findings also underline that for South Sudanese to buy in to national peace agreements, citizens need to observe direct improvements in their daily safety.
- ▶ Army rule is not a solution most South Sudanese see to local insecurity; policies that protect people at the local level need to focus on civil-military independence.



Figure 5: Do you agree or disagree?

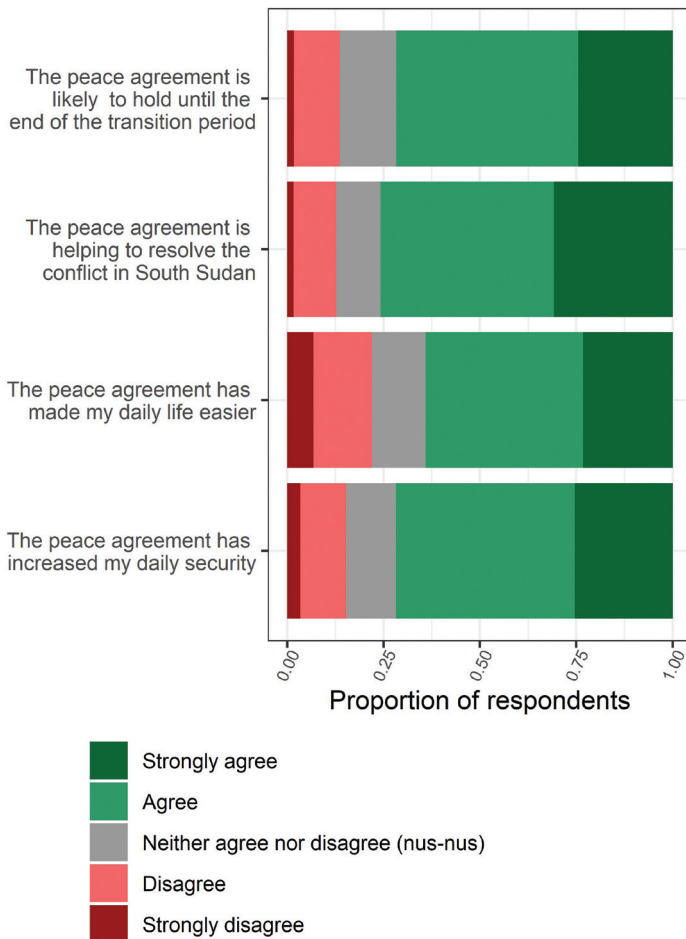


Figure 6: Perceptions of everyday safety across locations

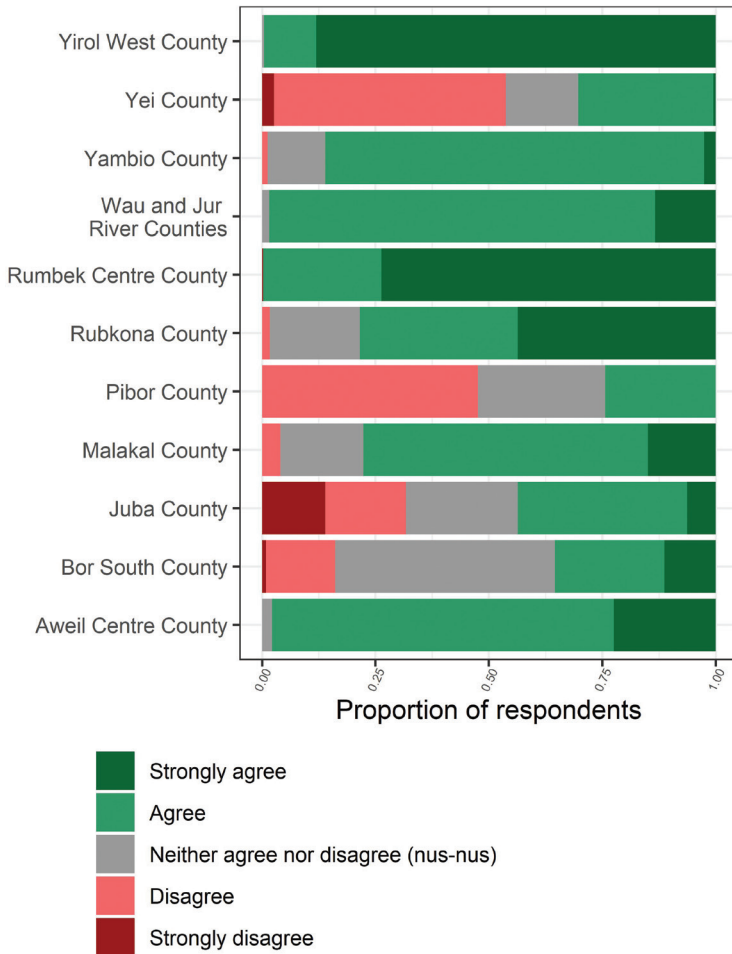
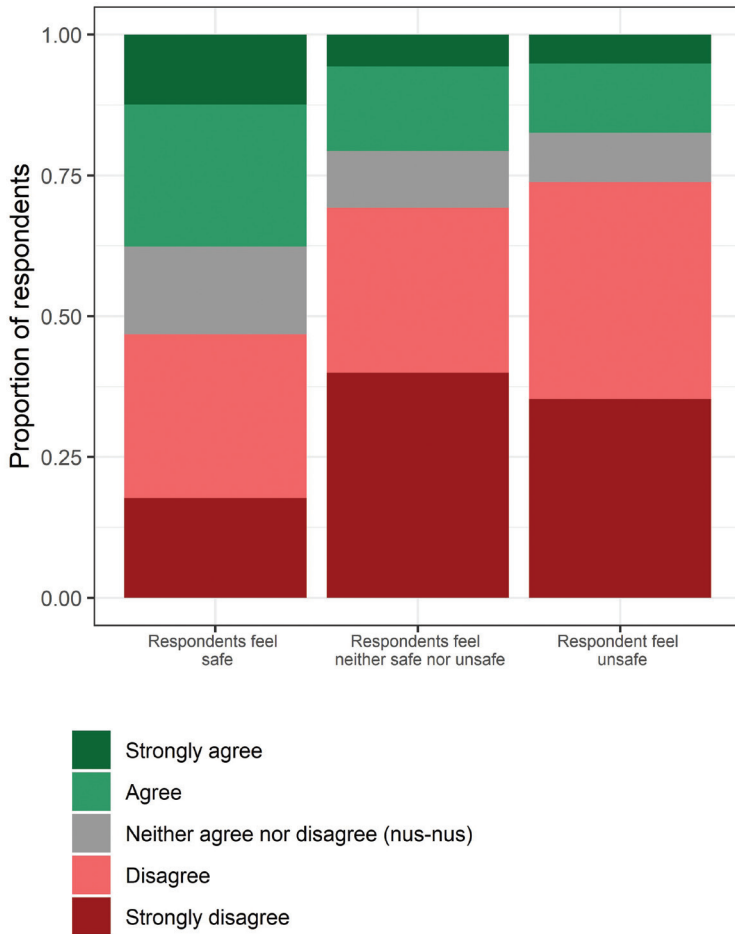


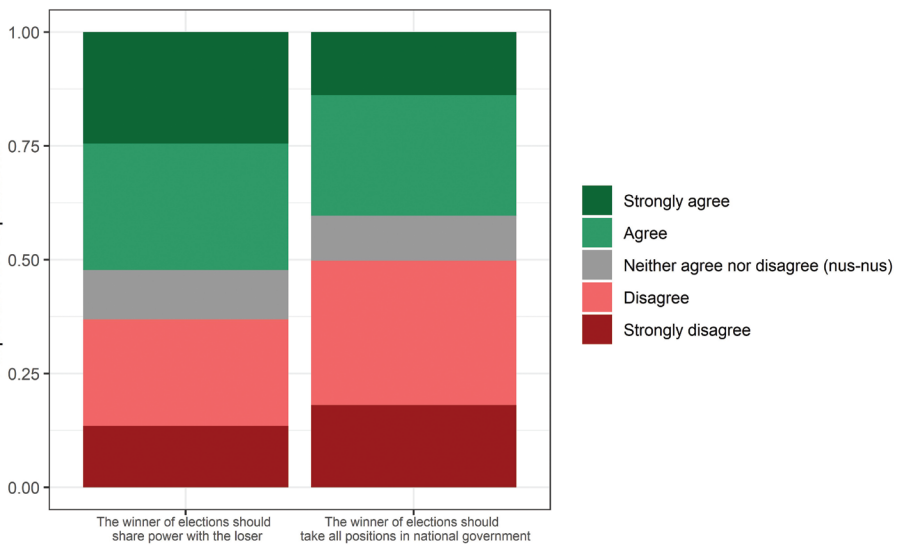
Figure 7: Do you agree or disagree? 'The army should govern the country'



## Points of Division

Respondents showed no uniform support for either a powersharing/consociational or winner-takes-all/majoritarian system. South Sudan's form of government remains a point of division, down to the community level. Figure 8 show this division.

Figure 8: Do you agree or disagree?



The survey also revealed significant variation across locations about how much people cared about what kind of government South Sudan had (Figure 9). Women were significantly more indifferent than men about the form government should take.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 9: Do you agree or disagree? It doesn't matter what kind of government we have'

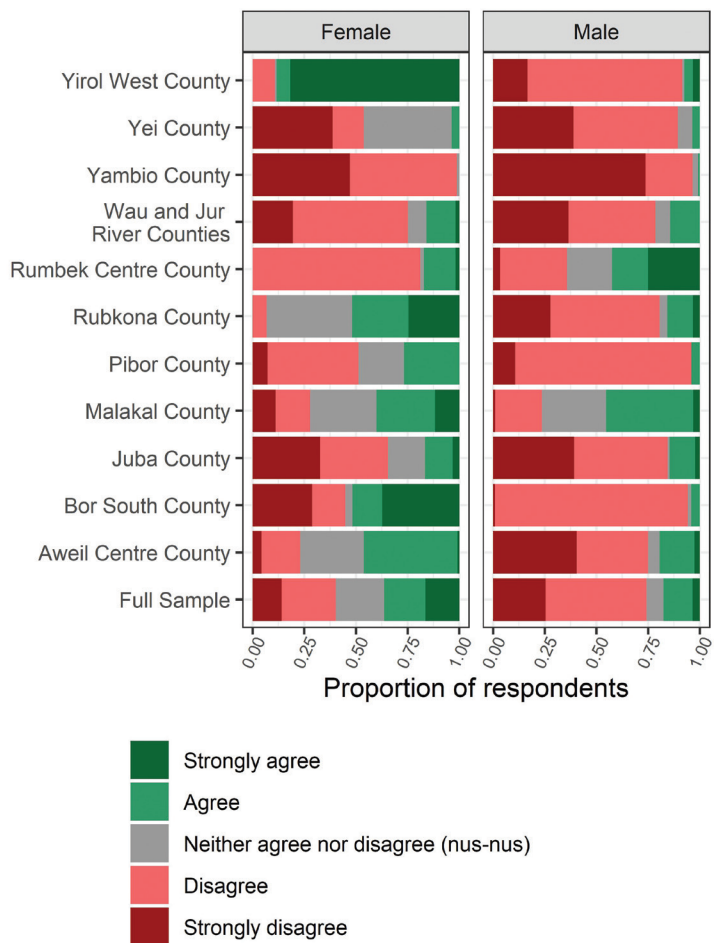


Figure 10: Do you agree or disagree? If the government and opposition are still at war there are still ways that my community can be at peace

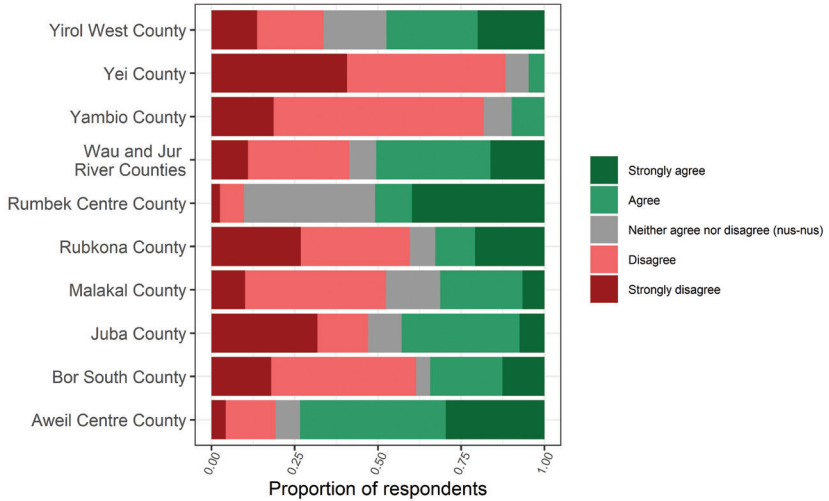
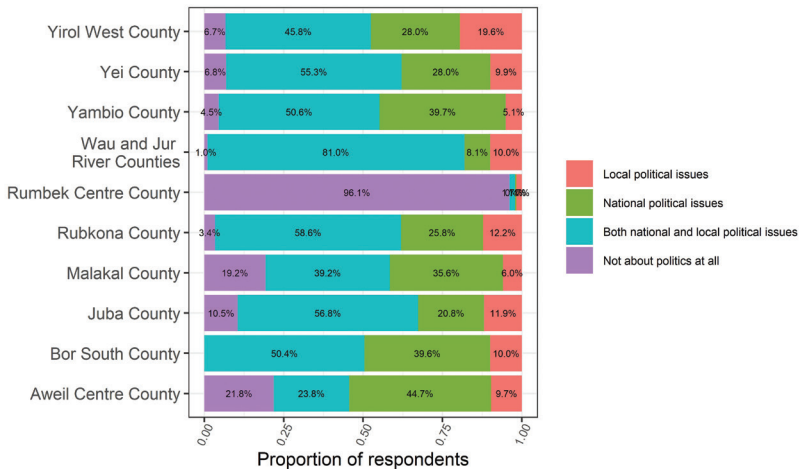
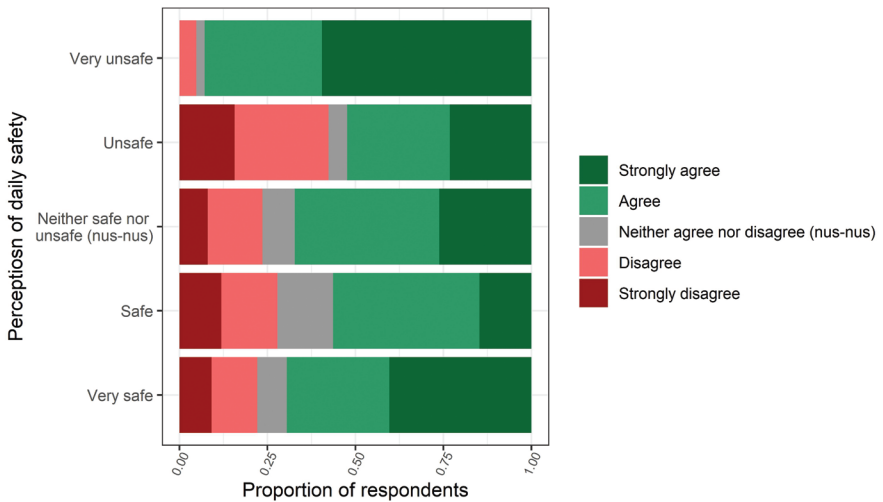


Figure 11: When armed group are fighting in this area, is it primarily about national political issues, local political issues, both national and local political issues, or not about politics at all? (2002)



Respondents were also divided about how strongly government should respond to insecurity, even if that meant violating human rights. Women were more likely than men to support security responses that were strong but violated human rights. Respondents who identified as 'very unsafe' voiced the strongest support for forceful government responses. However, the moderately 'unsafe' were the most likely group to object to the government responding firmly to insecurity, even if that meant violating human rights (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Do you agree or disagree? 'The government should respond firmly to insecurity even if that means violating human rights sometimes'



## **IMPLICATIONS:**

- ▶ These findings warn against making assumptions about the type of government South Sudanese citizens might prefer. Respondents revealed no consensus desire for either a power sharing or winner-takes-all system. South Sudanese national peace agreements and laws have traditionally prioritized power-sharing arrangements. This survey suggests that policy makers should not assume that this is a majority preference of citizens.
- ▶ Some communities feel especially vulnerable to national politics generating local insecurity. These communities – especially in the Equatorias – need special attention in stabilization interventions.
- ▶ Security sector policies need to address the unique protection needs of people experiencing different degrees and types of insecurity. The moderately 'unsafe' feel especially vulnerable during forceful government responses to insecurity.



## Conclusions

1. In general, South Sudanese felt safer in the first half of 2022 than they did in 2021. This finding underlines the importance of sustaining the political transition. However, the increase in stability is uneven, as citizens in places like Yei and Pibor experience persistent and acute insecurity. The inequality in civilian safety across South Sudan serves as a warning to policy makers about decreeing peace when some communities remain at heavy risk of armed violence.
2. South Sudanese of all regions and walks of life – urban, rural, and IDP – care about government accountability. This finding shows citizen support for a transition that sustains a strong parliament and mechanisms for public input to decision making.
3. For South Sudanese to buy in to national peace agreements, citizens need to observe direct improvements in their daily safety. Some communities feel especially vulnerable to national politics generating local insecurity. For the transition to end successfully, policy makers need to deliver protection to communities where national political dynamics have a history of undermining peace agreement implementation at the local level.
4. Policy makers should not assume that the majority of South Sudanese prefer power sharing to other governance options. Respondents revealed no consensus desire for either a power sharing or winner-takes-all system. The country is divided in what its government should look like. This begs for policy makes to think creatively about governance options – and to consult citizens about them.

## 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 random selection 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 A substantively and statistically significant correlation at the 90% level was found by regressing, using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS), a composite indicator for perceptions of daily safety on year of response (2021 and 2022). County and survey environment (urban, rural and IDP camp) were included in the regression as fixed effects, and standard errors were clustered at the county level.
- 4 The positive association between feeling safer and supporting army rule, and the converse association of feeling less safe and objecting more to army rule, were found to be substantively and statistically significant at the 90% level by regressing, using OLS, a Likert scale for support for army rule onto a composite indicator for perceptions of daily safety in 2022. County and survey environment were included in the regression as fixed effects, and standard errors were clustered at the county level.
- 5 The difference in gender preferences for how much people cared about South Sudan's type of government was substantively and statistically significant at the 90% level. This was tested by an OLS regression of a Likert scale for how much respondents agreed that the type of government matters on gender, with county and survey environment as fixed effects, and standard errors clustered at the county level.

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PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform | @Peace\_Rep\_ | [peacerep@ed.ac.uk](mailto:peacerep@ed.ac.uk)

School of Law, University of Edinburgh, Old College, South Bridge, EH8 9YL

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K St., Ste. 300, Washington, D.C., 20006  
<http://detro.com>

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[peacerep@ed.ac.uk](mailto:peacerep@ed.ac.uk) | <https://peacerep.org> | @Peace\_Rep\_

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