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Assessing Electoral Readiness in South Sudan

Citizens' Perceptions and Engagement, Legal
Framework and Institutional Preparedness

April 2026

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation	Full Description
ACEDO	Action for Community Education and Development
ACDEG	African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance
AHEAD Africa	Action for a Holistic Electoral Approach to Democracy in Africa
AU	African Union
C5	African Union High-Level Ad Hoc Committee for South Sudan
CEPO	Community Empowerment for Progress Organization
CES	Central Equatoria State
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ECES	European Centre for Electoral Support
EPD	European Partnership for Democracy
EU	European Union
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GPAA	Greater Pibor Administrative Area
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JEOCs	Joint Electoral Operations Centers
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
NCRC	National Constitutional Review Commission
NEC	National Elections Commission
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NPS	National Police Service
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
R-ARCSS	Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
R-JMEC	Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission
SALF	Standard Action Liaison Force
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
SPLM-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition
SSuDEMOP	South Sudan Democratic Engagement Monitoring and Observation Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
WBG	Western Bahr el Ghazal State
WES	Western Equatoria State

Foreword

The conduct of credible, inclusive, and peaceful elections remains a cornerstone for democratic governance, stability, and sustainable development. In South Sudan, as the country prepares for its anticipated general elections scheduled for December 2026, understanding the level of electoral readiness and preparedness is both timely and essential. This report presents the findings of a comprehensive assessment undertaken by the Standard Action Liaison Force (SALF), in partnership with the AHEAD Africa project and co-funded by the European Union, across six states and one administrative area.

This assessment was guided by the objective of generating evidence-based insights to inform efforts aimed at strengthening electoral systems and processes in South Sudan, in alignment with the broader goals of promoting democratic governance. Through a rigorous mixed-methods methodology encompassing key informant interviews, focus group discussions, survey questionnaires, and a comprehensive desk review, the study provides a balanced and grounded analysis of the current electoral landscape.

The findings reveal a complex but important picture. On one hand, there is strong public interest in elections, with many citizens recognising their importance in promoting democracy, accountability, and the peaceful transfer of power. Encouragingly, a significant proportion of the population; particularly youth, expresses willingness to participate in the electoral process. On the other hand, the assessment highlights notable gaps in public understanding of electoral procedures, mixed levels of trust in electoral institutions, and persistent concerns related to security, institutional capacity, and the legal framework.¹

The report underscores that while awareness of upcoming elections is relatively widespread, knowledge of critical processes such as voter registration, dispute resolution mechanisms, and the roles of electoral institutions remains limited. Furthermore, institutional preparedness is constrained by financial, logistical, and operational challenges, while legal ambiguities continue to pose risks to the integrity of the electoral process. Security concerns and the risk of misinformation further complicate the environment in which elections are to be conducted.²

It is our hope that this report will contribute meaningfully to ongoing national and international efforts to support credible, transparent, and peaceful elections in South Sudan. By addressing the identified gaps and risks in a timely and coordinated manner, there is a real opportunity to strengthen public confidence and lay a solid foundation for democratic consolidation in the country.

Mr. Lony Ruot Kok

President, SALF, South Sudan

¹ OCHA (2026). South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2026. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Available at: <https://www.unocha.org/south-sudan>

² IOM (2026). South Sudan Crisis Response Plan 2026. Global Crisis Response Platform.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this assessment report would not have been possible without the valuable contributions and support of numerous individuals, private and government institutions. We extend our sincere gratitude to the citizens of South Sudan who generously shared their time, perspectives, and experiences across the six states and one administrative area covered by this study. Their voices form the foundation of this assessment and provide critical insight into public confidence, civic engagement, and expectations surrounding the electoral process.

We acknowledge the cooperation of electoral stakeholders, including representatives of relevant government institutions, electoral management bodies, civil society organisations, political actors, and community leaders whose openness and constructive engagement enriched the quality of this assessment that was conducted from the month of May 2025 to April 2026. We further appreciate the financial and technical guidance and institutional support provided by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD)'s AHEAD Africa co-funded by the European Union (EU), whose commitment to democratic governance and credible electoral processes made this assessment possible.

Finally, we recognise the dedication of the SALF research team and field enumerators whose professionalism, including and not limited to the contribution and support made by the South Sudanese Network for Democracy and Elections (SSuNDE), East and Horn of Africa Election Observers Network (E-HORN), think tanks, private and public Universities in the country, integrity, and commitment ensured the accuracy, reliability and success of the findings and recommendations presented herein. To all who contributed directly and indirectly, we express our heartfelt appreciation.

Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope

This assessment was conducted by SALF, in partnership with the South Sudan Network for Democracy and Elections (SSuNDE), East and Horn of Africa Election Observation Network (E-HORN), AHEAD Africa project of EPD and co-funded by the EU, to evaluate electoral readiness and preparedness in South Sudan through the lens of three thematic pillars: (1) citizens' perceptions and engagement; (2) the legal framework; and (3) institutional preparedness. The assessment covered six states – Central Equatoria, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap, Jonglei, Western Equatoria, and Upper Nile – and one administrative area (Greater Pibor Administrative Area).³

Methodology

The assessment employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, including a structured survey of 903 citizens, 45 key informant interviews with legal experts and institutional representatives, 14 focus group discussions with 140 participants, and a comprehensive desk review of legal and policy documents. Findings were validated through a multi-stakeholder workshop. Data analysis utilised both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, with triangulation across all data sources to enhance reliability and credibility.

Key Findings

Citizens' Perceptions and Engagement

The assessment found that 86% of the 903 respondents across the seven assessment locations reported awareness of the upcoming December 2026 elections. However, knowledge of specific electoral processes, including voter registration procedures, complaint mechanisms, and institutional mandates; remains limited. Some 70% of respondents considered elections to be 'very important' for promoting democracy, accountability, and peaceful transfer of power. An encouraging 76% of citizens expressed willingness to participate (55% definitely; 21% probably), although 17% remained undecided. Trust in the National Elections Commission (NEC) was moderate to high, with 74% expressing some level of trust, whilst 10% expressed distrust. Security perceptions were mixed: only 43% felt secure, whilst 38% perceived the environment as insecure. Radio remained the dominant information source (67%), followed by social media (14%). These findings are broadly consistent with earlier research by Afrobarometer (2022) and CEPO (2023), which documented widespread citizen disillusionment alongside persistent desire for democratic participation.⁴

³R-ARCSS (2018). Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. Addis Ababa.

⁴Afrobarometer (2022). South Sudan Round 9 Survey Findings. Afrobarometer Network.

Legal Framework

Legal experts highlighted an incomplete and fragmented electoral legal framework, with ambiguities in electoral dispute resolution mechanisms and insufficient integration of the R-ARCSS provisions into electoral legislation. Constitutional lawyers emphasised the need for harmonisation with regional and international democratic standards, including the African Union's Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG). Judges noted continued political pressure on courts, whilst electoral law specialists pointed to inadequate enforcement mechanisms, barriers to inclusive participation, and the urgent need for amendments to the National Elections Act to promote credible, transparent, and peaceful elections.⁵

Institutional Preparedness

Institutional readiness across key electoral stakeholders was found to be limited and uneven. The NEC, whilst reconstituted, faces significant capacity constraints including limited technical expertise, a shortage of skilled personnel, and heavy dependence on external donor support. As of early 2026, no nationwide voter registration exercise had been completed, and civic education campaigns remained at the planning stage. Political parties exhibited weak institutional structures and limited internal democratic processes. The security sector's capacity to protect polling stations and prevent election-related violence was assessed as low, with the unification of armed forces remaining incomplete. The judiciary lacked full independence and had not operationalised specialised electoral dispute resolution mechanisms. Civil society organisations demonstrated moderate readiness but remained underfunded and operated within a restricted civic space.⁶

Risks

The assessment identified eight key risks that may undermine the credibility, inclusiveness, and peaceful conduct of future elections: (i) limited public awareness of electoral processes; (ii) mixed levels of public trust in electoral institutions; (iii) weak institutional capacity and operational readiness; (iv) gaps and ambiguities in the electoral legal framework; (v) security and political stability concerns, including escalating violence in Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile states; (vi) political manipulation and ethnic polarisation; (vii) misinformation and limited access to reliable electoral information; and (viii) voter disillusionment and participation barriers. The humanitarian context – with over 1.9 million internally displaced persons and approximately 9.3 million people requiring humanitarian assistance as of mid-2025 – further complicates the electoral environment.⁷

⁵ National Elections Act (2012, as amended 2023). Republic of South Sudan.

⁶ UNDP (2025). The South Sudan Election Security Committee Unveil Critical Security Assessment for 2026 Elections. 29 July 2025.

⁷ OCHA (2026). South Sudan: In 2026, more than 10 million people require humanitarian assistance. UN OCHA.

Priority Recommendations

No.	Recommendation Area	Description
1	Civic and Voter Education	Scale up nationwide civic and voter education campaigns focused on voter registration, electoral procedures, and institutional roles, targeting rural communities, women, youth, and first-time voters.
2	Community Networks	Leverage trusted community networks, including religious leaders, traditional authorities, and community leaders, for public engagement and peaceful participation.
3	Youth Engagement	Invest in youth-focused civic education, leadership programmes, and dialogue platforms to channel youth interest into constructive democratic engagement.
4	Legal Framework Reform	Support comprehensive review and reform of electoral legislation to address gaps, clarify institutional mandates, and ensure clear procedures.
5	Dispute Resolution	Provide technical assistance to strengthen legal institutions and establish clear procedures for timely and impartial resolution of electoral disputes.
6	Institutional Capacity	Provide targeted financial, technical, and operational support to strengthen the NEC and other key electoral institutions.
7	Electoral Funding	Ensure adequate and predictable funding for electoral processes to avoid delays in voter registration and election administration.
8	Inter-Institutional Coordination	Support structured coordination platforms among electoral institutions, government bodies, and security actors.
9	Election Security	Invest in conflict prevention, community dialogue, and election security planning to mitigate risks of political violence.
10	Counter Misinformation	Support independent media, radio programming, and public information campaigns to counter misinformation and political propaganda.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

South Sudan stands at a critical juncture in its democratic development. Since gaining independence on 9 July 2011, the country has not conducted national elections, making it the only nation in the East and Horn of Africa region that has never held post-independence general elections. The country's first post-independence elections, originally planned for 2015, have been repeatedly postponed - to 2018, 2023, 2024, and are now scheduled for 22 December 2026.⁸

The current political, security, and institutional situation is marked by significant complexity and uncertainty. Although the government has officially committed to holding the country's first national elections since independence, political instability, incomplete reforms, and renewed violence are creating serious doubts about whether credible elections can occur on schedule. The civil war from 2013 to 2018, which killed an estimated 400,000 people and displaced millions, fundamentally disrupted the trajectory of state-building and democratic consolidation. The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), signed in September 2018, created a transitional unity government and outlined a roadmap toward national elections.⁹

However, the implementation of the R-ARCSS has been marred by delays and partial compliance. As of April 2026, several key prerequisites for credible elections remain incomplete. The permanent constitution has not been finalised; a national population census has not been conducted; nationwide voter registration has yet to begin; and the unification of armed forces remains unfinished. In December 2025, political parties agreed to defer both the census and the constitution-making process until after the elections, a decision described by some observers as an attempt to avoid further delays but criticised by others as undermining the foundations for credible democratic processes.¹⁰

The political situation deteriorated significantly in early 2026. Dr. Riek Machar, the First Vice President, was removed from his position and placed under house arrest in March 2025, accused of treason. SPLM-IO factions have claimed that the 2018 peace deal is collapsing. Armed clashes have intensified since late 2025 and early 2026, particularly in Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile states, causing hundreds of deaths and large-scale displacement. These conflicts threaten the security environment necessary for nationwide voting.¹¹

The humanitarian context further complicates the electoral landscape. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), more than 10 million people - approximately two-thirds of South Sudan's population - are projected to require humanitarian assistance in 2026. The International Organisation for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM DTM) reported that as of mid-2025, over 1.9 million people are internally displaced within South Sudan, with an additional 2.3 million South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries. Approximately 9.3 million people face humanitarian needs, including 7.7 million food-insecure during lean months.¹²

⁸ Riskline (2026). South Sudan First-Ever Elections 2026 Amid Political Turmoil. 25 February 2026.

⁹ R-ARCSS (2018). Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. Addis Ababa.

¹⁰ Sudan's Post (2025). Political parties drop census, constitution ahead of 2026 polls. 10 December 2025.

¹¹ PRIME AFRICA (2026). AU Warns South Sudan On Brink Of Renewed Conflict, Urges Ceasefire And 2026 Elections. 11 April 2026.

¹² OCHA (2026). South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2026. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (2025). South Sudan Displacement Report, Round 16.

1.2 Assessment Purpose and Objectives

The primary purpose of this assessment was to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of South Sudan's electoral readiness and preparedness, generating evidence-based insights to strengthen electoral systems and processes in alignment with the objectives of the AHEAD Africa project and EU standards for democratic governance support.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Assess citizen awareness, perceptions, and engagement levels regarding electoral processes across six states and one administrative area;
2. Analyse the adequacy and effectiveness of existing electoral legal frameworks, including alignment with regional and international standards;
3. Evaluate the institutional capacity and preparedness of key electoral stakeholders, including the NEC, political parties, security institutions, the judiciary, and civil society;
4. Develop actionable, evidence-based recommendations for strengthening electoral readiness; and
5. Foster multi-stakeholder dialogue on electoral preparedness priorities through validation processes.

1.3 Geographical Coverage

The assessment covered six states and one administrative area in the Republic of South Sudan, as shown in Table 1 below. This geographical spread was designed to capture regional diversity in political dynamics, security conditions, levels of civic engagement, and institutional presence.

No.	State/Administrative Area	Capital/Assessment Location	Region
1	Central Equatoria State	Juba	Greater Equatoria
2	Western Bahr el Ghazal State	Wau	Bahr el Ghazal
3	Warrap State	Kuajok	Bahr el Ghazal
4	Jonglei State	Bor	Greater Upper Nile
5	Western Equatoria State	Yambio	Greater Equatoria
6	Upper Nile State	Malakal	Greater Upper Nile
7	Greater Pibor Administrative Area	Pibor	Administrative Area

Table 1: Geographical Coverage of the Assessment

1.4 Report Structure

This report is structured in accordance with EU assessment reporting standards and is organised into eight chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction, background, and context. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature on electoral readiness and democratic transitions in South Sudan. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology employed. Chapter 4 presents the findings from citizens' perceptions and engagement. Chapter 5 presents the legal framework assessment. Chapter 6 covers institutional preparedness. Chapter 7 presents the consolidated data analysis, discussion, and risk assessment. Chapter 8 provides conclusions and recommendations. The report concludes with a comprehensive reference list and fully developed annexes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Electoral readiness in post-conflict settings such as South Sudan is shaped by complex political, legal, and institutional dynamics. This chapter surveys academic, policy, and civil society literature to examine the extent to which South Sudan is prepared for democratic elections, focusing on three key pillars: citizen engagement, legal frameworks, and institutional preparedness. The review draws on sources from Afrobarometer (2022), CEPO (2023), the Sudd Institute (2023), International Crisis Group (2024), ECES (2023), International IDEA (2023), and reports from UNMISS, UNDP, and the Carter Center, among others.¹³

2.2 Citizens' Perceptions and Engagement

Several studies reveal widespread citizen disillusionment with the electoral process in South Sudan. The Afrobarometer Round 9 survey (2022) found that public trust in political institutions remains low due to repeated election delays, political violence, lack of civic education, and limited transparency in governance processes. Reports by the Sudd Institute and UNMISS highlight that while citizens are eager to vote, they feel excluded from decision-making processes - especially youth, women, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Civic space remains significantly constrained, limiting participation and electoral dialogue. CEPO's 2023 assessment of citizens' perceptions on electoral preparedness found similar patterns of cautious optimism alongside deep-seated concerns about the credibility and security of the electoral process.¹⁴

2.3 Legal Frameworks

The Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (2011, as amended) and the National Elections Act (2012, as amended in 2023) form the core of South Sudan's electoral law. However, scholars including Jok Madut Jok (2023) argue that these frameworks are fragmented, poorly enforced, and lacking clarity on critical issues such as electoral dispute resolution, campaign financing, and media access. The International Crisis Group (2024) emphasised that the incomplete integration of R-ARCSS provisions into electoral legislation represents a fundamental obstacle to credible elections. International actors including the UNDP, Carter Center, and International IDEA have consistently stressed the need for a permanent constitution and more robust laws to ensure legitimacy and inclusive democratic governance.¹⁵

2.4 Institutional Preparedness

The NEC and other electoral management bodies face severe capacity and funding gaps. Literature by IGAD and the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES, 2023) points to inadequate training, weak coordination, and political interference in institutional operations. The NEC's dependence on external donor support has been consistently flagged as a structural vulnerability. Security sector reform, which is crucial for peaceful elections, remains stalled. The African Union Peace and Security Council has repeatedly noted that the

¹³ Jok, M.J. (2023). South Sudan's Political Transition: Challenges and Prospects. The Sudd Institute.

¹⁴ CEPO (2023). South Sudan Citizens' Perceptions on Electoral Preparedness. Community Empowerment for Progress Organization.

¹⁵ International IDEA (2023). Electoral Law Reform in Post-Conflict States. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm.

incomplete unification of armed forces raises fears about militarised politics and biased enforcement during electoral processes.¹⁶

2.5 Gaps in Literature

While significant policy analysis exists on South Sudan's electoral landscape, there is a notable lack of primary, field-based studies that capture community-level perspectives across multiple states. Most existing assessments are desk-based or conducted within the capital, Juba. More research is needed on displaced voters' perspectives, local government readiness at the county level, the impact of ethnic politics on electoral participation, and the operational challenges faced by sub-national electoral bodies. This assessment seeks to address these gaps by providing field-based, mixed-methods evidence from six states and one administrative area.¹⁷

¹⁶ ECES (2023). Assessment of Electoral Management in South Sudan. European Centre for Electoral Support.

¹⁷ Sudd Institute (2023). Policy Brief: Electoral Preparedness in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute, Juba.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The assessment employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches. This design was selected to capture both the breadth and depth of electoral readiness across the assessment locations, ensuring that statistical patterns from survey data were enriched by contextual insights from interviews and discussions.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

3.2.1 Structured Survey (N=903)

A structured survey questionnaire was administered to a representative sample of 903 citizens across the six states and one administrative area. Each state had 125 respondents, except Central Equatoria State (Juba), which had 153 respondents reflecting its larger urban population. The survey generated quantitative data on knowledge of electoral procedures, voter registration and participation intentions, trust in electoral institutions, perceptions of transparency and fairness, exposure to civic education, and access to information. Sampling employed a multi-stage approach ensuring demographic and geographic representation, with adjustments for access and security considerations.

3.2.2 Key Informant Interviews (N=90)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 90 key informants: 45 legal experts (comprising academia, constitutional lawyers, NGO legal experts, judges, and electoral law specialists) and 45 institutional representatives (from civil society organisations, government ministries, media, NEC, political parties, security institutions, and other bodies). Interview guides explored institutional preparedness, legal implementation gaps, operational challenges, the political environment, and stakeholder confidence in the electoral process.

3.2.3 Focus Group Discussions (N=14 groups, 140 participants)

Fourteen focus group discussions were conducted across the seven assessment locations, with 20 participants per location (10 male, 10 female). Participants were selected to ensure diversity in gender, age, geographic location, and inclusion of internally displaced persons and persons with disabilities where feasible. FGDs explored awareness of electoral processes, trust in institutions, perceived barriers to participation, civic space, and security concerns.

3.2.4 Desk Review

A comprehensive desk review examined the legal and institutional framework governing elections in South Sudan. Key documents reviewed included the Transitional Constitution (2011), the National Elections Act (2012, as amended), NEC regulations and operational guidelines, institutional strategic plans, previous election reports, observer mission assessments from the Carter Center and African Union, policy briefs from the Sudd Institute and International Crisis Group, and transitional governance frameworks including the R-ARCSS.¹⁸

¹⁸ Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (2011). As Amended.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from surveys was coded and analysed using statistical software to generate frequencies, cross-tabulations, and trend analysis. Qualitative data from KIs and FGDs was transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes related to trust, institutional capacity, legal gaps, and citizen engagement. Findings from all data sources were triangulated to enhance validity and ensure balanced interpretation.

3.4 Validation Workshop

A multi-stakeholder validation workshop was conducted to present preliminary findings and solicit feedback. Participants included representatives from electoral institutions, civil society, political parties, media, academia, and development partners. The workshop verified the accuracy of findings, clarified contextual interpretations, identified priority recommendations, and strengthened stakeholder ownership of the assessment outcomes.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The assessment adhered to ethical research standards, including informed consent from all participants, confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, do-no-harm principles (particularly in politically sensitive contexts), and gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive approaches. Special precautions were undertaken to ensure participant safety given the political environment.

3.6 Limitations and Mitigation

Potential limitations included access constraints due to insecurity in certain locations, political sensitivity affecting candid responses, limited funding, and logistical challenges associated with South Sudan's poor infrastructure. These were mitigated through flexible data collection modalities, local partnerships, careful sampling adjustments, and triangulation across multiple data sources and methods.

Method	Sample Size	Locations	Purpose
Structured Survey	903 citizens	7 states/AAs	Quantitative data on awareness, participation, trust
Key Informant Interviews	90 experts	7 states/AAs	Qualitative insights on legal and institutional issues
Focus Group Discussions	140 participants (14 groups)	7 states/AAs	Community-level perspectives and experiences
Desk Review	20+ documents	National	Legal and institutional framework analysis
Validation Workshop	Multi-stakeholder	Juba	Verification and prioritisation of findings

Table 2: Summary of Research Methods

4. Findings: Citizens' Perceptions and Engagement

This chapter presents the findings from the citizen survey (N=903) conducted across six states and one administrative area, organised by thematic sub-sections on demographics, awareness, expectations, participation, institutional trust, security perceptions, and media access. Each sub-section includes primary data tables and charts, supplemented by secondary data for contextualisation.

4.1 Respondent Demographics

4.1.1 Gender Distribution

Of the 903 respondents, 491 (54%) were male, 387 (43%) were female, and 25 (3%) were not recorded. This gender distribution reflects a reasonable balance in sampling, though it highlights the ongoing challenges of reaching female respondents in certain security-affected areas.

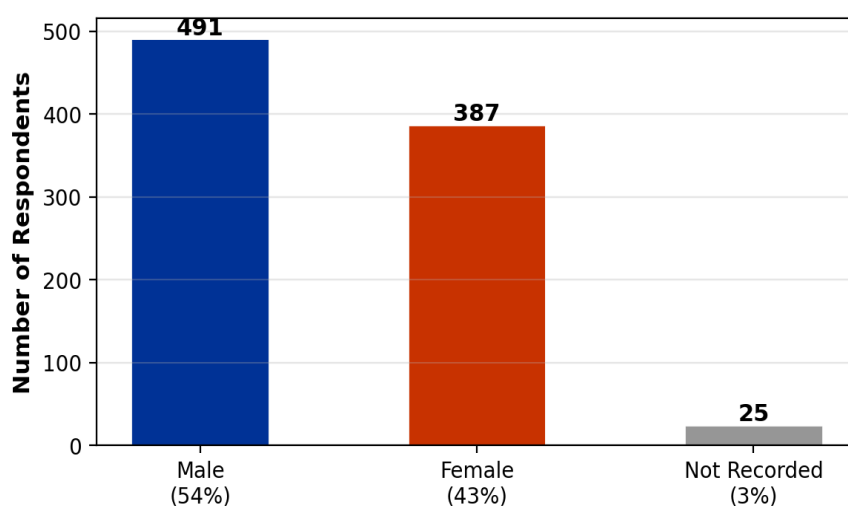


Figure 1: Demographics of Survey Respondents by Gender (N=903)

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	491	54%
Female	387	43%
Not Recorded	25	3%
Total	903	100%

Table 3: Gender Distribution of Citizen Survey Respondents

4.1.2 Age Distribution

Young adults (18-35 years) constituted 44.5% of respondents, while middle-aged adults (36-55 years) comprised 47.2%. Older adults (56 and above) made up only 8%, reflecting both the youthful demographics of South Sudan and potential gaps in outreach to older populations. This age distribution is significant in a country where approximately 72% of the population is under 30 years of age.

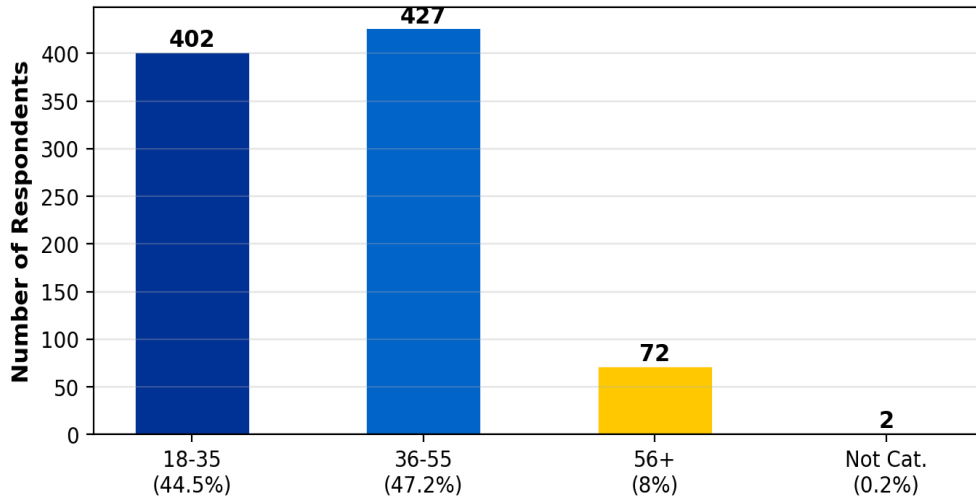


Figure 2: Demographics of Survey Respondents by Age Group (N=903)

4.2 Electoral Awareness

The assessment found high overall awareness of the upcoming December 2026 elections. Of the 903 respondents, 774 (86%) reported being aware that national elections are expected, 116 (13%) stated they were not aware, 12 (1%) were not sure, and 1 respondent (0.3%) did not answer. These findings suggest that information campaigns, primarily through radio, are reaching broad segments of the population. However, awareness alone does not equate to informed participation, particularly given challenges in security, institutional trust, and access to detailed civic information about registration procedures and institutional mandates. This finding is consistent with observations from the NEC Chairperson, Prof. Abednego Akok, who stated in January 2026 that civic education would be launched in February 2026, followed by voter registration - confirming that at the time of this assessment, no formal nationwide civic education had been initiated.¹⁹

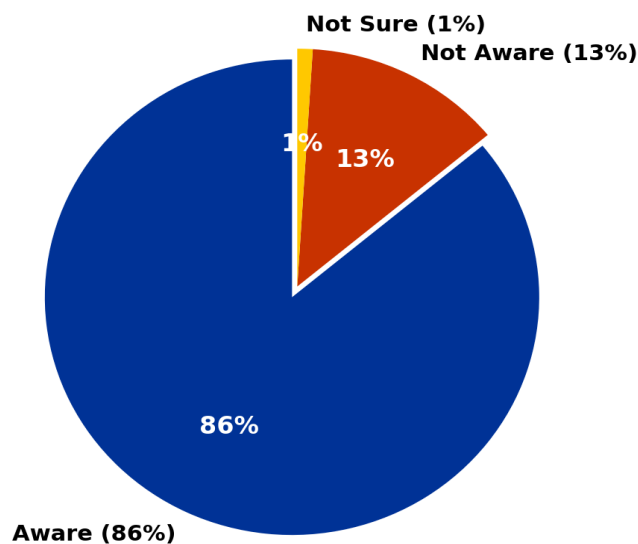


Figure 3: Overall Citizens' Awareness of Upcoming Elections (N=903)

¹⁹ Radio Tamazuj (2026). Electoral body outlines plan for general elections. 14 January 2026.

4.2.1 Awareness by State and Gender

Awareness levels varied significantly across states. Upper Nile State recorded the highest awareness (100% female, 98.7% male), followed by Western Equatoria State (98.6% female, 92.3% male) and Warrap State (94% female, 96% male). The Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) had the lowest awareness levels (44.4% female, 70% male), reflecting its remoteness, limited infrastructure, and ongoing security challenges. The wide gender gap in GPAA (25.6 percentage points) underscores the particular challenges of reaching women in remote and conflict-affected areas.

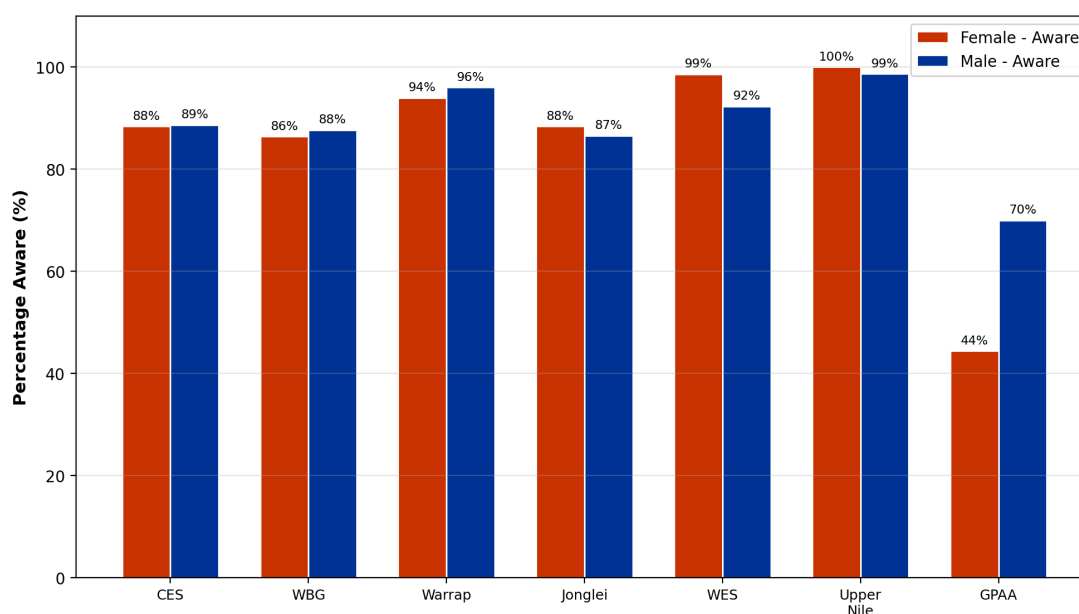


Figure 4: Electoral Awareness by State/Administrative Area and Gender

State/AA	Gender	Yes Aware	Not Aware	Not Sure
Central Equatoria	Female	88.4%	9.3%	2.3%
	Male	88.7%	11.3%	0%
Western Bahr el Ghazal	Female	86.4%	11.4%	2.3%
	Male	87.7%	1.2%	11.1%
Warrap	Female	94.0%	6.0%	0%
	Male	96.0%	2.7%	1.3%
Jonglei	Female	88.4%	11.6%	0%
	Male	86.6%	1.2%	12.2%
Western Equatoria	Female	98.6%	1.4%	0%
	Male	92.3%	7.7%	0%
Upper Nile	Female	100%	0%	0%
	Male	98.7%	1.3%	0%
GPAA	Female	44.4%	50.0%	5.6%
	Male	70.0%	23.3%	6.7%

Table 4: Electoral Awareness by State/Administrative Area and Gender

4.3 Citizens' Expectations and Attitudes

The majority of citizens (70%) viewed the upcoming elections as 'very important', with an additional 14% rating them as 'important'. Only 4% considered elections 'not important' and 6% expressed no expectations. The high perceived importance reflects strong political consciousness and public expectation for elections to influence governance and peacebuilding. The 6% with no expectations may represent disillusioned or politically marginalised groups, signalling a need for targeted civic engagement to ensure inclusivity.

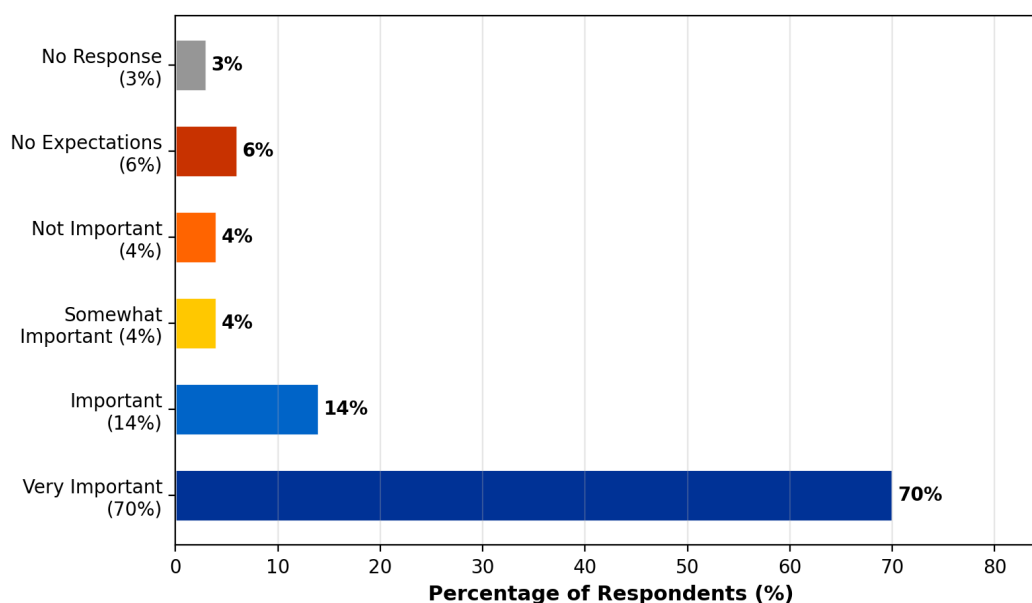


Figure 5: Citizens' Expectations and Attitudes Towards Elections

4.4 Participation and Engagement

Citizen willingness to participate shows promising trends: 494 respondents (55%) indicated they would definitely participate, 186 (21%) would probably participate, 158 (17%) were undecided, 46 (5%) would definitely not participate, and 16 (2%) would probably not participate. Whilst participation levels are encouraging, the 17% undecided rate represents a significant segment that could be swayed by improved civic education, security assurances, or conversely, by negative developments. The UNDP's 2026 civic education initiative, which is allocating up to USD 10,000 per operational area for CSO-led civic education activities across all ten states and two administrative areas, represents a critical effort to convert awareness into informed participation.²⁰

²⁰ UNDP (2026). Call for Proposals: Civic Education and Outreach by CSOs in South Sudan. Procurement Notice 98778.

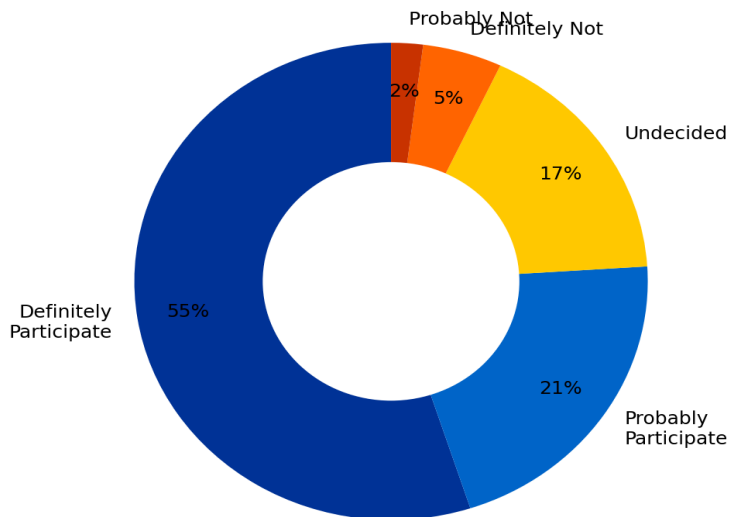


Figure 6: Citizens' Participation Intent in December 2026 Elections (N=903)

4.5 Institutional Trust: National Elections Commission

Trust in the NEC was moderate to high: 388 respondents (43%) somewhat trusted the Commission, 277 (31%) completely trusted it, 133 (15%) expressed a neutral view, 52 (6%) somewhat distrusted, and 32 (4%) completely distrusted the Commission. Whilst the aggregate trust level of 74% is significant, FGD and institutional feedback suggest that operational gaps, insufficient staffing at county level, and the absence of a completed voter registration exercise could erode trust if not addressed before elections. The NEC Chairperson's announcement in December 2025 that the 2010 geographical constituencies would be used for the upcoming polls - citing delays in conducting a national census, has generated mixed reactions among stakeholders.²¹

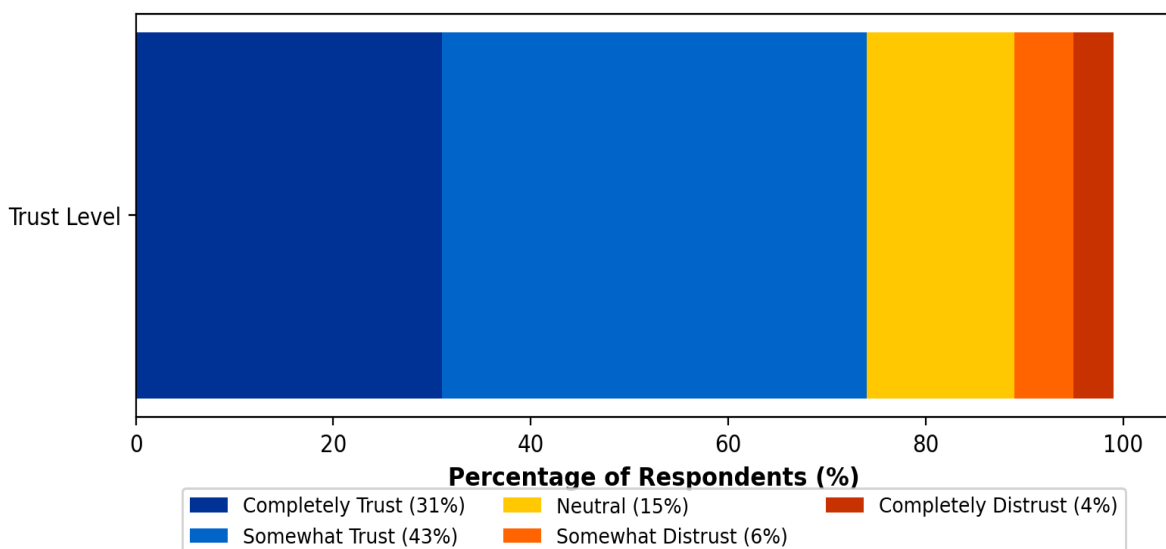


Figure 7: Citizens' Trust in the National Elections Commission (NEC)

²¹ NEC South Sudan (2025). Press Statement of the Chairperson, 22 December 2025. National Elections Commission.

4.6 Peace and Security Perceptions

Security perceptions were mixed: 329 respondents (36%) perceived the situation as secure, 262 (29%) as insecure, 168 (19%) as neutral, 77 (9%) as very insecure, and 63 (7%) as very secure. Only 43% of respondents perceived their environment as secure or very secure, highlighting insecurity as a significant concern for electoral participation. This assessment aligns with the African Union’s April 2026 warning that South Sudan risks sliding back into full-scale conflict, urging leaders to commit to an immediate ceasefire and prepare for elections under conditions of peace.²²

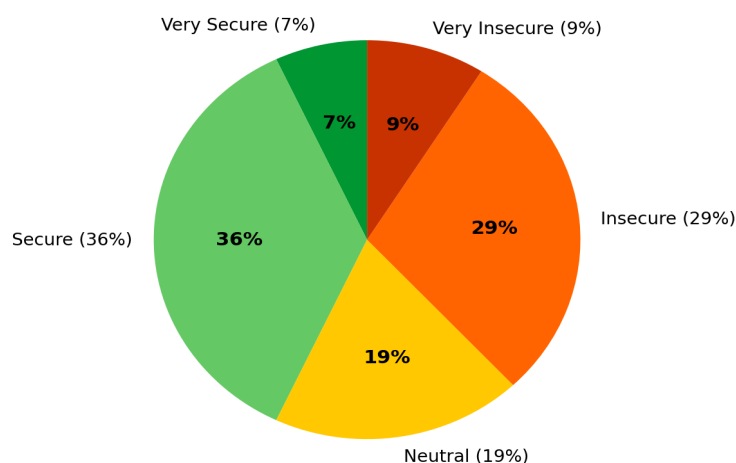


Figure 8: Citizens' Perception of Peace and Security Environment (N=903)

4.7 Media and Information Access

Radio dominated as the primary information source, cited by 607 respondents (67%), followed by social media (14%), community meetings (6%), television (4%), religious institutions (2%), government officials (2%), friends (1.4%), newspapers (1%), and other sources (1%). Radio’s dominance reflects its accessibility in rural areas and the importance of vernacular programming for inclusive communication. The limited reliance on newspapers (1%) underscores challenges of literacy, affordability, and infrastructure. Social media’s growing influence, particularly among urban youth, presents both opportunities for civic engagement and risks of misinformation and political propaganda, a concern echoed by CIPESA’s 2025 analysis.²³

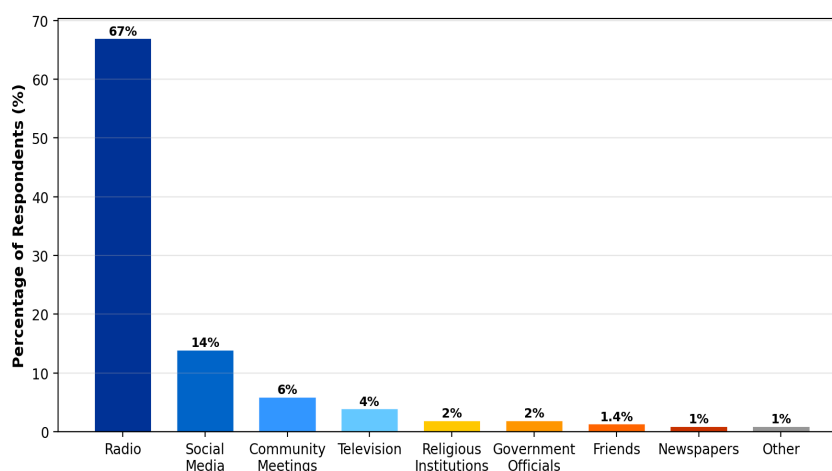


Figure 9: Preferred Media Sources for Electoral Information

²² PRIME AFRICA (2026). AU Warns South Sudan On Brink Of Renewed Conflict, Urges Ceasefire And 2026 Elections. 11 April 2026.

²³ CIPESA (2025). Social media’s role in hate speech: A double-edged sword for South Sudan.

5. Findings: Legal Framework Assessment

This chapter presents the findings from key informant interviews with 45 legal experts drawn from five professional categories across the seven assessment locations. The assessment examined the adequacy, coherence, and implementation status of the legal framework governing elections in South Sudan.

5.1 Respondent Profile

Of the 45 legal expert respondents, 20 (44%) were female and 25 (56%) were male. Respondents represented academia (7, 15.5%), constitutional lawyers (7, 15.5%), electoral law specialists (8, 17.7%), judges (4, 8.8%), and NGO legal experts (19, 42.2%).

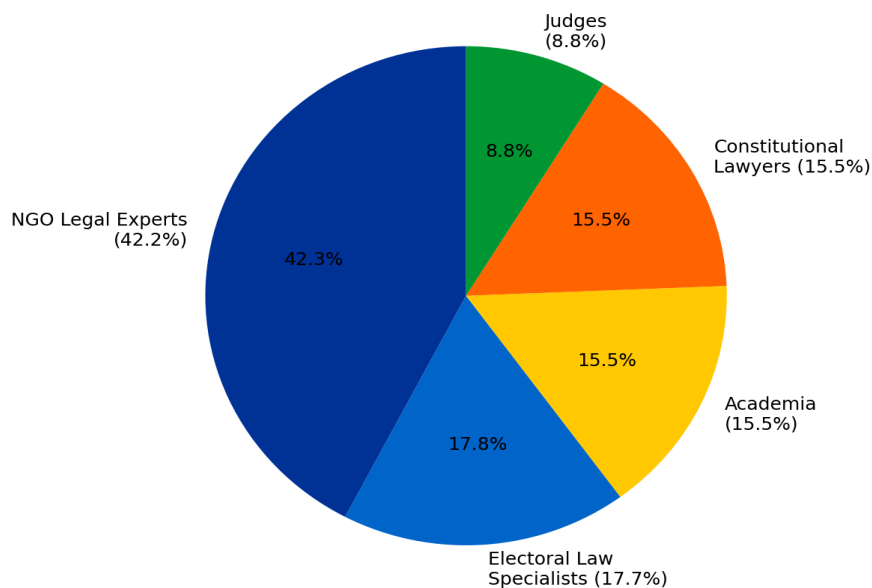


Figure 10: Legal Experts by Professional Category (N=45)

5.2 Key Findings by Professional Category

5.2.1 Academia

The seven academic respondents, drawn from institutions including Alel-Chok Complex School, the Ministry of Education (Jonglei), Dr. John Garang University, and ACEDO, raised several concerns. They noted that the National Elections Act does not sufficiently incorporate provisions of the R-ARCSS peace agreement framework. They emphasised the need for structured civic training and substantial judicial reform. Electoral law was described as being taught primarily theoretically, with students lacking practical exposure to electoral processes. Legal provisions were considered inadequate to address election-related security challenges. The priority recommendation was to strengthen civic education initiatives and ensure comprehensive, timely voter registration.²⁴

²⁴ CEPO (2023). South Sudan Citizens' Perceptions on Electoral Preparedness. Community Empowerment for Progress Organization, Juba.

5.2.2 Constitutional Lawyers

Seven constitutional lawyers from institutions including the University of Juba, University of Bahr el Ghazal, the Transitional National Assembly, and think tanks highlighted the need for constitutional harmonisation, particularly ensuring full integration of the Peace Agreement into the Constitution and related legislation. They emphasised alignment with regional and international democratic standards, including the African Union's guidelines on democratic elections, and noted that current electoral laws require further harmonisation to meet these standards.²⁵

5.2.3 NGO Legal Experts

The 19 NGO legal expert respondents, drawn from law firms, political parties, Parliament, the Judiciary, the South Sudan Bar Association, legal aid organisations, and UN-affiliated bodies, raised the most extensive set of concerns. Key issues included weak enforcement of constitutional and statutory provisions, limited stakeholder consultation in legislative reform, an ineffective election dispute resolution system, significantly underfunded legal aid services, concerns regarding lack of institutional balance and effective checks and balances, unclear candidate nomination procedures, and the urgent need for comprehensive legal and institutional reforms.

5.2.4 Judges

The four judicial respondents noted that judicial independence is gradually improving but progress remains slow. They identified notable gaps in the legal and policy framework governing elections and highlighted continued political pressure on courts, particularly from the executive branch. Limited technical capacity in legislative drafting was noted as contributing to delays in enacting necessary reforms.

5.2.5 Electoral Law Specialists

Eight electoral law specialists from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, and NEC raised concerns about inadequate enforcement mechanisms for electoral laws, significant barriers to inclusive participation for youth, women, persons with disabilities, and minority candidates, and insufficient coordination between electoral management bodies and government institutions. They emphasised that while the Transitional Constitution provides an adequate foundational basis for elections, its effectiveness depends on complementary legal reforms. The urgent need for amendments to the Election Act and strengthened legal protections for NEC independence were highlighted as priorities.²⁶

²⁵ African Union (2024). Chairperson statement regarding the extended political transition in South Sudan. 21 September 2024.

²⁶ Adem Kassie Abebe (IDEA 2026): Enhancing Prospects of Stabilization in South Sudan - targeted Constitutional reforms to reduce winner-takes-all politics.

5.3 Consolidated Legal Framework Findings

Issue	Finding	Severity
Legal Framework Completeness	Incomplete integration of R-ARCSS provisions; fragmented and outdated provisions	Critical
Constitutional Harmonisation	Insufficient alignment between the Transitional Constitution and electoral legislation	High
Dispute Resolution	Ineffective mechanisms; costly, lengthy, and inaccessible processes	Critical
Enforcement Mechanisms	Inadequate monitoring and enforcement of electoral laws	High
Inclusive Participation	Barriers for women, youth, PWDs, and minorities in candidacy and voting	High
Judicial Independence	Gradual improvement but continued political pressure on courts	Medium-High
Regional Standards Alignment	Insufficient alignment with the ACDEG	High
NEC Independence	Insufficient legal safeguards for operational and financial independence	Critical

Table 5: Consolidated Legal Framework Assessment Findings

6. Findings: Institutional Preparedness

6.1 Institutional Respondent Profile

A total of 45 institutional representatives participated in the assessment, comprising 20 females (44.4%) and 25 males (55.6%) from seven categories: civil society organisations (9, 20%), government ministries (10, 22.2%), media (2, 4.4%), National Elections Commission (7, 15.5%), political parties (10, 22.2%), security institutions (3, 6.6%), and other institutions (4, 8.8%).

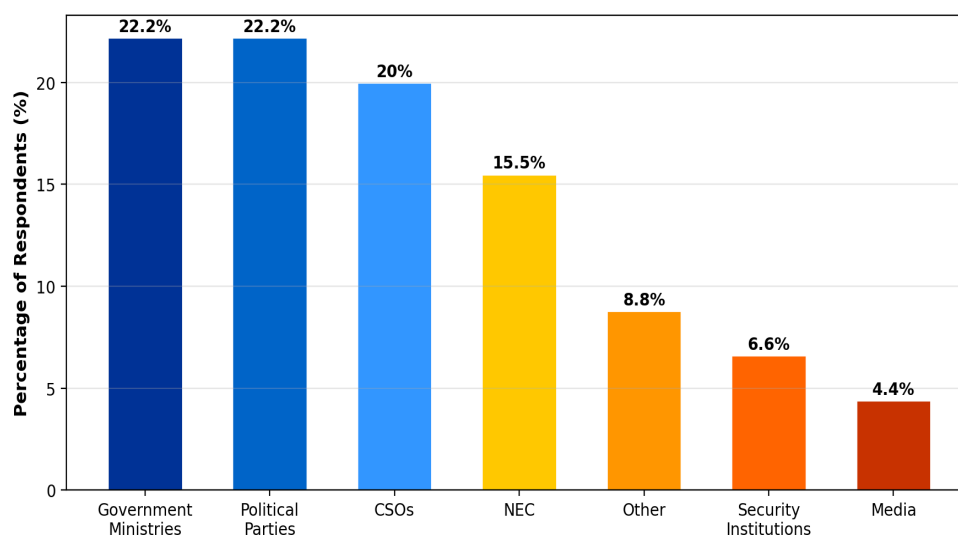


Figure 11: Institutional Distribution of Respondents (N=45)

6.2 Key Institutional Findings

6.2.1 National Elections Commission (NEC)

The NEC has been reconstituted but continues to face significant capacity constraints, including limited technical expertise, a shortage of skilled personnel, and heavy dependence on external donor support. As of March 2026, no nationwide voter registration exercise or comprehensive civic education campaign had been completed. In January 2026, the NEC Chairperson confirmed that State High Election Committee (SHEC) offices are operational in ten states, except Upper Nile State. The NEC declared it would use the 2010 geographical constituencies for the elections, with 60% of seats allocated to constituencies, 25% to a women's list, and 15% to a party list. However, the NEC has not yet publicly released a comprehensive electoral calendar, polling procedures, or voter outreach strategy. Readiness is assessed as low to moderate.²⁷

6.2.2 Political Parties

Most political parties in South Sudan have weak institutional structures. Many are personality-driven and lack internal democratic processes. Opposition parties continue to face restrictions, harassment, and limited access to media platforms. Several parties have yet to comply with updated requirements of the Political Parties Act (2024). Relations between the ruling SPLM and the rival SPLM-IO have deteriorated sharply since the March 2025 house arrest of Dr. Riek Machar, with SPLM-IO participation in the elections remaining uncertain. Preparedness is assessed as uncertain to low.²⁸

²⁷ One Citizen Daily (2026). NEC Reaffirms Commitment to 2026 Elections Amid Security and Readiness Concerns. 15 January 2026.

²⁸ Riskline (2026). South Sudan First-Ever Elections 2026 Amid Political Turmoil. 25 February 2026.

6.2.3 Security Sector

The security sector’s capacity remains significantly constrained. The process of unifying armed forces is incomplete, and parallel armed groups continue to operate in parts of the country. Security personnel have received limited training on neutral, civilian-protective conduct during electoral processes. The Election Security Committee, chaired by the National Police Service, conducted assessments of NPS premises across ten states between February and July 2025 to evaluate requirements for re-establishing Joint Electoral Operations Centers (JEOCs). However, preparedness to secure polling stations and prevent election-related violence is currently assessed as low.²⁹

6.2.4 Judiciary and Dispute Resolution

The judiciary remains under-resourced and lacks full institutional independence from the executive branch. No specialised electoral dispute resolution mechanisms have been fully operationalised. The judiciary’s ability to manage pre-election and post-election legal disputes effectively and impartially appears very limited. Readiness is assessed as very limited.

6.2.5 Civil Society and Media

Civil society organisations, including CEPO, SSuDEMOP, and others, demonstrate notable engagement and technical potential. However, they remain underfunded and operate within a restricted civic space. The UNDP launched a call for proposals in early 2026 for CSO-led civic education activities across all states, with funding of up to USD 10,000 per area. Local media face limitations including restricted nationwide reach and state censorship. Media respondents emphasised the need for freedom of press and protection from harassment and arbitrary arrest during the electoral period. Preparedness is assessed as moderate.³⁰

6.3 Institutional Readiness Assessment

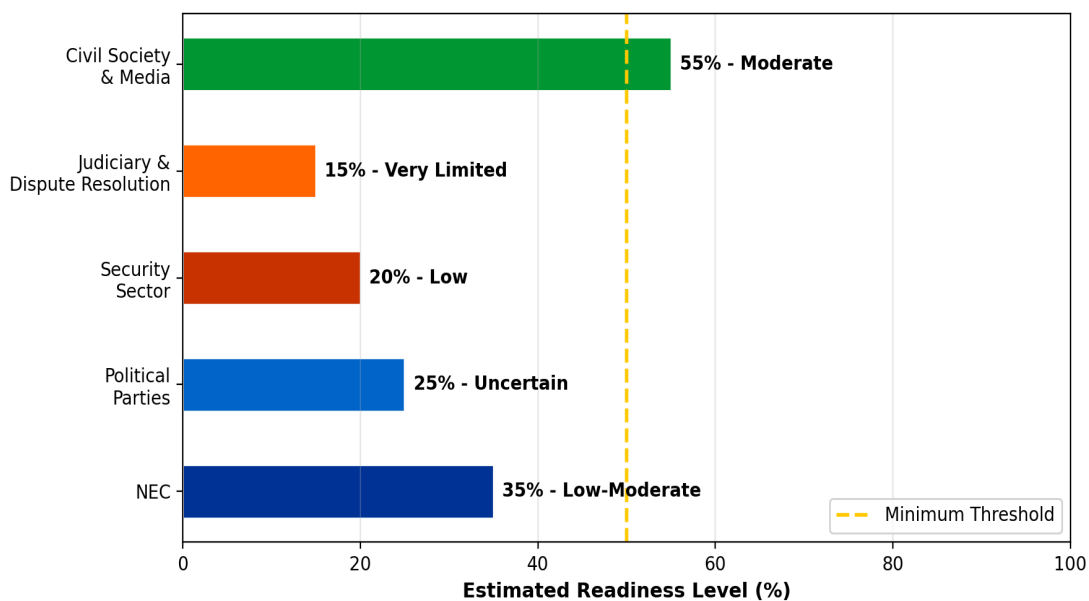


Figure 13: Institutional Readiness Assessment for December 2026 Elections

²⁹ UNDP (2025). The South Sudan Election Security Committee Unveil Critical Security Assessment for 2026 Elections. 29 July 2025.

³⁰ Key Informant Interview, media practitioners, SALF Electoral Readiness Assessment (2026).

6.4 Focus Group Discussion Findings

Fourteen FGDs with 140 participants (70 female, 70 male) across the seven assessment locations provided deeper community-level insights. The most frequently discussed theme was the current electoral landscape (mentioned 31 times), followed by relationships with political leaders (18), recommendations (13), legal and regulatory framework (12), and trust and credibility (11).

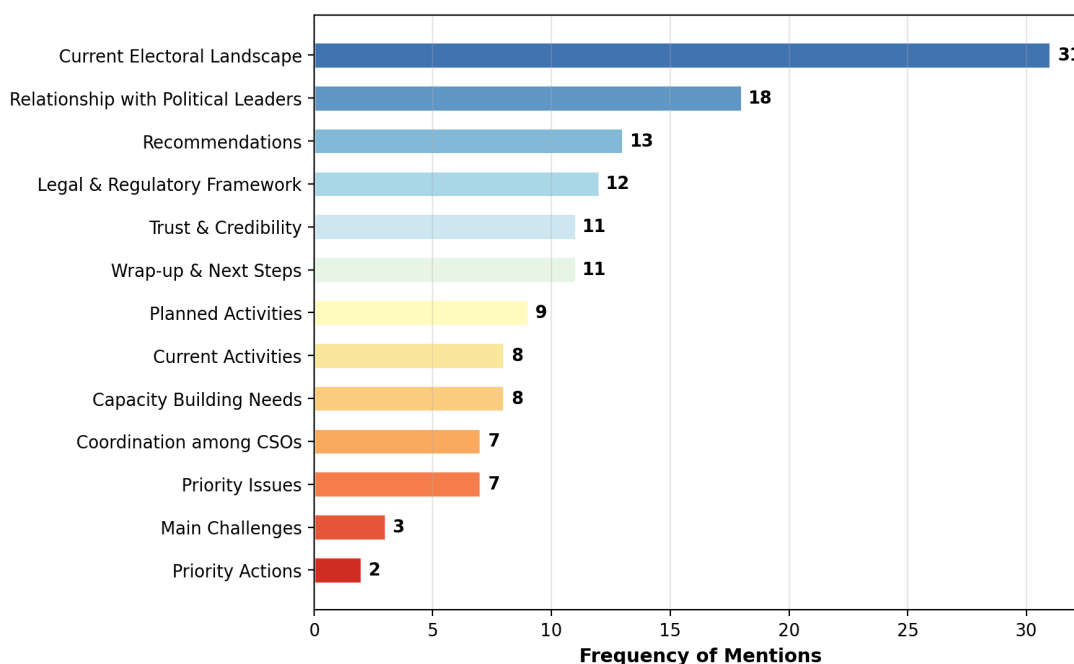


Figure 12: Key Themes from Focus Group Discussions (14 groups, 140 participants)

6.4.1 Key FGD Themes

Common themes across all FGDs included fear of political manipulation, concerns about tribal polarisation, a strong desire for peaceful elections, and youth frustration with slow reforms. Participants consistently emphasised that elections must be inclusive, transparent, and secure to gain public confidence. In Bor (Jonglei State), respondents rated South Sudan's electoral preparedness between 5 and 8 out of 10, with concerns about incomplete civic education and the lack of a census. In GPAA, respondents highlighted security concerns and the need for grassroots-level civic education. In Central Equatoria, respondents from the State High Electoral Committee noted the absence of resources for county-level security assessments and civic education.³¹

³¹ FGD Respondent, Dr. John Garang Memorial University, Bor, Jonglei State.

7. Data Analysis, Discussion, and Risk Assessment

7.1 Synthesis of Findings

The assessment reveals that South Sudanese citizens are aware of the upcoming elections (86%), value the democratic process (84% rate elections as important or very important), and are generally willing to participate (76% definitely or probably). However, their engagement is conditioned by several critical factors: security concerns, particularly in conflict-prone areas such as Jonglei, Upper Nile, and GPAA; institutional trust, especially regarding NEC independence and operational efficiency; access to timely, credible information, particularly for rural and older populations; and sociopolitical factors including gender equity, youth inclusion, and minority participation.

The assessment's findings align with and are corroborated by a range of secondary sources. OCHA (2026) reports that more than 10 million people - approximately two-thirds of South Sudan's population, require humanitarian assistance, highlighting the scale of vulnerability that will affect electoral participation. IOM DTM (2025) reported over 1.9 million IDPs and 2.3 million refugees in neighbouring countries, populations whose electoral participation is severely constrained. The African Union's April 2026 communiqué warned that South Sudan risks sliding back into full-scale conflict and called for urgent financial and technical support to the NEC, NCRC, and the Political Parties Council.³²

7.1.1 Analysis of Electoral Awareness Patterns

The state-level analysis of electoral awareness reveals significant disparities that reflect underlying structural conditions. The contrast between Upper Nile State (99.4% combined awareness) and Greater Pibor Administrative Area (57.2% combined awareness) is particularly striking. Upper Nile State, despite being affected by conflict, has a more established infrastructure for information dissemination, including multiple radio stations and a relatively higher concentration of civil society organisations operating in Malakal. GPAA, by contrast, is characterised by extreme remoteness, limited infrastructure, lower literacy rates, and ongoing inter-communal tensions that constrain both the reach of information channels and the freedom of movement necessary for civic engagement activities.

The gender dimensions of awareness also merit analysis. While overall gender gaps in awareness are relatively modest in most states, the GPAA stands out with a 25.6 percentage-point gap between female (44.4%) and male (70.0%) awareness. This gap reflects broader patterns of gender inequality in the region, including lower levels of female education, restricted mobility for women, and cultural norms that limit women's access to public information spaces. Addressing this gap will require targeted, gender-responsive civic education strategies that account for the specific barriers facing women in remote and pastoralist communities.

A notable finding is the relatively high 'not sure' rate among male respondents in certain states, including Western Bahr el Ghazal (11.1%) and Jonglei (12.2%), compared to near-zero rates for female respondents in the same states. This pattern suggests that while women who are aware tend to express clear awareness, some men may be hedging their responses or expressing ambivalence about the electoral process, possibly reflecting scepticism about whether elections will actually take place given the history of postponements.

³² PRIME AFRICA (2026). AU Warns South Sudan On Brink Of Renewed Conflict, Urges Ceasefire And 2026 Elections. 11 April 2026.

7.1.2 Analysis of Participation and Trust Dynamics

The relationship between institutional trust and participation intent is a critical factor in understanding electoral readiness. While 74% of respondents expressed some level of trust in the NEC and 76% indicated willingness to participate, the 17% undecided rate on participation represents a significant swing constituency. Cross-analysis suggests that undecided voters are more likely to be found among younger respondents (18–35 age group), respondents who perceive the security situation as insecure, and those who rely on social media rather than radio for information. This profile aligns with findings from Afrobarometer (2022), which documented higher levels of political scepticism among younger South Sudanese, and is consistent with civil society activist Ter Manyang Gatwech’s assessment that the current security situation makes civic education and voter registration practically impossible in conflict-affected areas.³³

The 10% overall distrust rate in the NEC, while seemingly modest, carries significant implications. In a post-conflict context where political competition has historically been settled through violence rather than law and dialogue, even moderate levels of institutional distrust can be amplified during the electoral period. The FGD findings reinforce this concern: participants in multiple locations expressed doubts about the NEC’s independence from ruling party influence and questioned whether the Commission had the operational capacity to administer elections across all areas of the country. The NEC’s acknowledgement that voter registration has not yet begun – with only eight months until the scheduled election date as of March 2026 – reinforces legitimate concerns about operational readiness.³⁴

7.1.3 Contextualisation with Secondary Data

The primary data from this assessment is contextualised by several important secondary data points that underscore the complexity of the electoral environment. First, the UNDP’s Election Security Committee assessment (completed July 2025) found that police premises across most states require significant refurbishment and resource allocation to serve as Joint Electoral Operations Centers (JEOCs). The assessment recommended urgent funding for election security infrastructure, but as of the committee’s presentation to officials in July 2025, adequate funding had not been secured.³⁵

Second, President Kiir’s March 2026 meeting with the NEC Chairperson, during which the President reportedly committed to providing necessary resources and logistical support, represents an important political signal. However, the Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO) cautioned that the country would not hold elections in December 2026 if the leadership fails to invest actual funds in the NEC and other election-related institutions, and instead continues expensive military confrontations and political splits among peace agreement signatories. CEPO noted that South Sudan’s elections remain possible only if political leadership demonstrates serious commitment through adequate funding allocation.³⁶

Third, the VOA News analysis (December 2024) quoted the NEC Chairperson as stating that ‘if we are serious, two years are enough for us to run the election,’ adding that adequate funding is necessary. The head of UNMISS, Nicholas Haysom, warned that mismanaged elections could reignite violence and urged that elections be preceded by trust-building exercises. These external assessments are consistent with the primary findings of this

³³ Afrobarometer (2022). South Sudan Round 9 Survey Findings. Afrobarometer Network; Key Informant Interview, civil society activist Ter Manyang Gatwech (2026).

³⁴ One Citizen Daily (2026). Momentum in preparation indicates gov’t will avail resources – Kiir. 13 March 2026.

³⁵ UNDP (2025). The South Sudan Election Security Committee Unveil Critical Security Assessment for 2026 Elections. 29 July 2025.

³⁶ CEPO (2023). South Sudan Citizens’ Perceptions on Electoral Preparedness. Community Empowerment for Progress Organization, Juba.

assessment, particularly regarding the conditional nature of electoral readiness and the critical importance of adequate resourcing, political will, and security guarantees.³⁷

7.1.4 Comparative Analysis: SALF Assessment vs. External Assessments

Indicator	SALF Assessment Finding	External Assessment/Source
Electoral Awareness	86% aware of upcoming elections	NEC reports civic education not yet launched as of Jan 2026 (Radio Tamazuj)
Participation Intent	76% willing to participate (definitely + probably)	High public interest confirmed by Pachodo.org (2025) and VOA analysis
Trust in NEC	74% express some trust; 10% distrust	Civil society scepticism documented by CEPO (2023) and multiple media sources
Security Perceptions	38% feel insecure; 43% secure	AU warns of renewed conflict risk (April 2026); 263,000 displaced Q1 2026 (OCHA)
Information Access	Radio dominant (67%); social media rising (14%)	CIPESA (2025) warns of social media misinformation risks in South Sudan
Institutional Capacity	NEC low-moderate; Security low; Judiciary very limited	UNDP, ECES assessments confirm capacity constraints across institutions
Legal Framework	Incomplete; fragmented; poor enforcement	International Crisis Group (2024) and Jok (2023) confirm legal gaps
Voter Registration	Not completed at time of assessment	NEC planned voter registration after civic education launch (Jan 2026)

Table 8: Comparative Analysis – SALF Assessment vs. External Assessments

7.1.5 Gender and Inclusion Analysis

The assessment reveals important gender and inclusion dimensions that must be addressed for credible and inclusive elections. Women constituted 43% of survey respondents and 50% of FGD participants, reflecting deliberate efforts to ensure gender balance in data collection. However, the gender gap in awareness (particularly in GPAA), the barriers to women’s political participation identified by legal experts, and the security concerns disproportionately affecting women in conflict areas all underscore the need for gender-responsive electoral programming. The NEA’s provision for a 25% women’s list allocation represents an important legal commitment to women’s representation, but its implementation depends on political parties nominating women candidates and on broader efforts to address the social, economic, and security barriers that limit women’s political participation.

Youth engagement represents both a significant opportunity and a risk factor. With 44.5% of respondents aged 18-35, and youth expressing strong interest in political participation but also higher levels of scepticism, the electoral process must actively channel youth energy into constructive democratic engagement. FGD participants in multiple locations highlighted youth frustration with slow reforms and the absence of youth-focused political dialogue platforms. Electoral law specialists noted that significant barriers persist for youth candidates, including

³⁷ VOA News (2024). South Sudan set to hold elections in 2026, but will it be ready? 18 December 2024.

financial requirements and political party structures that favour older, established politicians. The UNDP’s civic education initiative, which specifically targets youth and marginalised groups, represents an important step, but its scale (up to USD 10,000 per area) may be insufficient given the magnitude of the challenge.³⁸

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) represent a particularly vulnerable and underserved constituency. With over 1.9 million IDPs as of mid-2025, and an additional 2.3 million South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, a significant portion of the electorate faces severe barriers to participation, including lack of identification documents, uncertainty about constituency of registration, physical insecurity, and limited access to information. The NEC’s decision to use 2010 constituencies raises questions about how displaced populations will be registered and in which constituencies they will vote. International experience in post-conflict electoral processes underscores the importance of special provisions for displaced voters, including mobile registration, special voting arrangements, and out-of-country voting for refugees – none of which have been confirmed for the December 2026 elections.³⁹

7.2 Risk Assessment

The assessment identified eight principal risks that could undermine the credibility, inclusiveness, and peaceful conduct of the December 2026 elections. These risks were analysed based on their likelihood and potential impact, as presented in the risk matrix below. The risks reflect both primary data from this assessment and corroborating evidence from secondary sources.

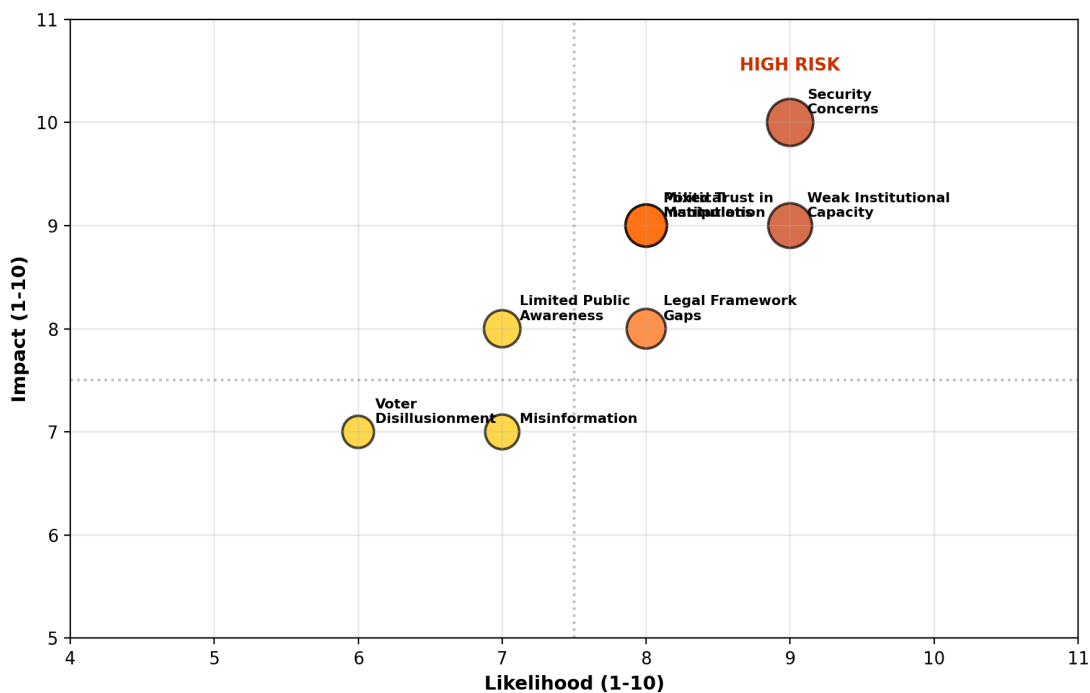


Figure 13: Risk Assessment Matrix for the Electoral Process

³⁸ UNDP (2026). Call for Proposals: Civic Education and Outreach by CSOs in South Sudan. Procurement Notice 98778.

³⁹ NEC South Sudan (2025). Press Statement of the Chairperson, 22 December 2025. National Elections Commission.

ID	Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Evidence
R1	Limited Public Awareness	High	High	Only 86% overall awareness; knowledge of specific procedures is much lower; GPAA at 44-70%
R2	Mixed Institutional Trust	High	Very High	10% express distrust in NEC; FGDs highlight concerns about independence
R3	Weak Institutional Capacity	Very High	Very High	NEC capacity constraints; no voter registration completed; limited county-level presence
R4	Legal Framework Gaps	High	High	Incomplete R-ARCSS integration; ambiguous dispute resolution; no permanent constitution
R5	Security Concerns	Very High	Very High	38% feel insecure; active clashes in Jonglei, Unity, Upper Nile; 1.9M IDPs
R6	Political Manipulation	High	Very High	Ethnic polarisation; Machar detention; SPLM-IO participation uncertain
R7	Misinformation	High	High	Social media risks among urban youth; limited media independence; state censorship
R8	Voter Disillusionment	Moderate	High	17% undecided; 6% have no expectations; historical postponements reduce confidence

Table 9: Risk Assessment Matrix

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Overall Conclusion

The assessment conducted across six states and one administrative area indicates that public interest in elections in South Sudan remains strong, with many citizens recognising the importance of elections for promoting democracy, strengthening accountability, and enabling peaceful transfer of power. A considerable proportion of respondents expressed willingness to participate, particularly among youth, demonstrating an important foundation for democratic participation.

However, the findings also reveal that electoral readiness and preparedness remain limited and uneven across several critical areas. While awareness is relatively widespread, knowledge of key electoral procedures remains insufficient. Trust in electoral institutions is moderate but fragile. Institutionally, significant operational and capacity challenges persist, including limited financial and logistical resources, delays in planning, and weak inter-institutional coordination. Legal experts highlighted gaps and ambiguities in the electoral framework. Security concerns remain a major factor, with only 43% of citizens perceiving their environment as secure. The humanitarian context - with over 10 million people requiring assistance and nearly 2 million displaced, adds further complexity.⁴⁰

The assessment concludes that while foundations for electoral participation exist, South Sudan's electoral readiness and preparedness remain conditional on critical improvements in civic education, legal reform, institutional capacity, inter-institutional coordination, security, and information integrity. Without urgent and coordinated progress in these areas, the credibility, inclusiveness, and peaceful conduct of the December 2026 elections could be seriously undermined. Conversely, addressing these challenges through a timely, evidence-based, and collaborative approach would significantly enhance public confidence and contribute to the successful organisation of credible and legitimate elections.

8.2 Detailed Recommendations

8.2.1 Scale Up Nationwide Civic and Voter Education

Support the NEC and civil society to implement coordinated civic and voter education campaigns focused on voter registration, electoral procedures, and the roles of electoral institutions, particularly targeting rural communities, women, youth, IDPs, and first-time voters. The UNDP's ongoing initiative to partner with CSOs for civic education across all states should be expanded and adequately funded. Programming should leverage radio as the primary information channel (used by 67% of citizens), complemented by community meetings, social media, and faith-based networks.

8.2.2 Leverage Trusted Community Networks

Partner with religious leaders, traditional authorities, and community leaders to disseminate electoral information, promote peaceful participation, and strengthen public trust. These actors were consistently identified in FGDs as the most trusted information sources in local communities.

⁴⁰ SALF Electoral Readiness Assessment (2026), citizen survey (N=903); OCHA (2026). South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2026.

8.2.3 Prioritise Youth Engagement in Democratic Processes

Invest in youth-focused civic education, leadership programmes, and dialogue platforms. With 44.5% of survey respondents aged 18–35, and youth expressing strong interest in political participation, channelling this energy into constructive democratic engagement is essential.

8.2.4 Strengthen the Legal and Regulatory Framework

Support comprehensive review and reform of electoral legislation to address gaps identified by legal experts, including integration of R-ARCSS provisions, clarification of institutional mandates, alignment with AU democratic standards, and clearer electoral dispute resolution procedures.

8.2.5 Enhance Electoral Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Provide technical assistance to strengthen legal institutions and establish clear, accessible, and timely procedures for the impartial resolution of electoral complaints and disputes. Address the underfunding of legal aid services and the cost barriers that prevent ordinary citizens from accessing dispute resolution processes.

8.2.6 Build Institutional Capacity of Electoral Management Bodies

Provide targeted financial, technical, and operational support to strengthen the NEC's planning, logistics, staffing, and operational readiness. Address the critical gap in county-level electoral officials. Support the re-establishment and operationalisation of Joint Electoral Operations Centers (JEOCs) across all states and administrative areas.

8.2.7 Ensure Adequate and Timely Funding

The government and development partners must guarantee predictable and adequate funding for electoral processes. President Kiir's March 2026 commitment to provide necessary resources must be translated into actual disbursements. Delays in funding will cascade through voter registration, civic education, and election administration.

8.2.8 Strengthen Inter-Institutional Coordination

Support structured coordination platforms among electoral institutions, government bodies, security actors, CSOs, and international partners. Information sharing between institutions must be formalised and regularised.

8.2.9 Promote Peaceful Elections and Security Planning

Invest in conflict prevention initiatives, community dialogue, and comprehensive election security planning. Address the security concerns of the 38% of citizens who perceive the environment as insecure. Support the completion of security sector reform and the unification of armed forces.

8.2.10 Counter Misinformation and Improve Information Access

Support independent media, radio programming, and public information campaigns to provide accurate electoral information. Develop and implement strategies to monitor and counter misinformation and political propaganda, particularly on social media platforms used by urban youth.

9. International and Regional Perspectives

Elections in South Sudan are widely viewed as a critical milestone in the country's transition from conflict toward democratic governance. This chapter summarises the perspectives of key international and regional actors, academic scholars, and media organisations regarding South Sudan's electoral readiness.

9.1 African Union C5 Countries

The AU High-Level Ad Hoc Committee (C5), comprising Algeria, Chad, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Africa, emphasises that credible elections must be preceded by full implementation of the peace agreement, particularly completion of security arrangements and unification of armed forces. In April 2026, the AU issued a stark warning that South Sudan risks sliding back into full-scale conflict, calling for an immediate ceasefire, release of political detainees including Dr. Riek Machar, and urgent financial and technical support to the NEC, NCRC, and Political Parties Council.⁴¹

9.2 United Nations Human Rights Commission

The UN Commission on Human Rights warns that conditions for credible elections remain fragile due to ongoing human rights violations, restrictions on civic and political space, weak rule of law, and continued militarisation. The Commission argues that elections must be preceded by reforms guaranteeing protection of fundamental freedoms, political participation, accountability for past atrocities, and security sector transformation.⁴²

9.3 The Troika (US, UK, Norway)

The Troika consistently emphasises peaceful, credible, and transparent elections whilst urging the government to accelerate implementation of outstanding R-ARCSS provisions. They stress that elections should not be treated as an end in themselves but as part of a broader democratic transition supported by institutional reforms and political inclusivity.

9.4 European Union

The EU, a major diplomatic and development partner, has expressed concern about slow progress in implementing the peace agreement. While supporting elections as a pathway to democratic governance, the EU emphasises that elections must be peaceful, inclusive, and legitimate, and that political leaders must remain accountable for fulfilling peace agreement commitments.

9.5 Academic and Scholarly Perspectives

Academic scholars emphasise three key points: (1) structural challenges to democratic transition, including militarised political competition, weak state institutions, ethnic mobilisation, and limited democratic culture; (2) incomplete implementation of the R-ARCSS, including constitution-making, security sector reform, and electoral institutional development; and (3) risks of premature elections that may legitimise existing elites without addressing root causes of conflict.⁴³

⁴¹ PRIME AFRICA (2026). AU Warns South Sudan On Brink Of Renewed Conflict, Urges Ceasefire And 2026 Elections. 11 April 2026.

⁴² Human Rights Watch (2025). South Sudan: Adopt a strong resolution extending UN investigations for two years. 13 February 2025.

⁴³ Africa-press.net (2026). South Sudan's 2026 Elections: A Test Not Yet Ready. April 2026.

Actor	Position on Electoral Readiness
African Union C5	Elections should follow full implementation of the peace agreement and improved security conditions
UN Human Rights Commission	Elections must be preceded by protection of human rights and expansion of civic freedoms
Troika (US, UK, Norway)	Calls for credible elections with urgent implementation of outstanding reforms
European Union	Supports elections but criticises delays and lack of progress in reforms
Academic Scholars	Warn that premature elections may reinforce instability without structural reforms
Media Narratives	Range from supportive civic messaging to critical reporting on preparedness and governance

Table 7: Comparative Summary of International Positions on Electoral Readiness

10. Validation Workshop Outcomes

This chapter presents the executive summary of the multi-stakeholder **Validation Workshop** convened by the Standard Action Liaison Force (SALF), in partnership with the AHEAD Africa Project and co-funded by the European Union, on **12 May 2026 at the Yam Hotel in Juba**. The workshop was the final step in the assessment methodology and served four functions: (i) to verify the accuracy and balance of the findings; (ii) to clarify contextual interpretations; (iii) to identify and prioritise actionable recommendations; and (iv) to strengthen multi-stakeholder ownership of the assessment outcomes ahead of public dissemination.

10.1 Overview and Purpose

The validation workshop brought together fifty (50) participants drawn from a deliberate cross-section of electoral stakeholders. Participants reviewed the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the assessment against four validation criteria: accuracy – whether each finding correctly reflected the situation on the ground; completeness – whether any material issue had been omitted; interpretation – whether conclusions followed from the evidence; and actionability – whether recommendations were feasible in the South Sudan context.

The workshop confirmed the assessment’s findings across the three thematic pillars, refined the risk picture, and consolidated the ten priority recommendation areas of the assessment into a prioritised set of seventeen action-oriented recommendations addressed to specific responsible actors. Stakeholders also adopted next steps for the public launch and dissemination of the final report.

10.2 Workshop Objectives and Participation

10.2.1 Workshop Objectives

- Validate the findings of the electoral readiness assessment across the three thematic pillars.
- Identify gaps, omissions and challenges affecting electoral preparedness.
- Generate and prioritise recommendations to support peaceful, credible, inclusive and transparent elections.
- Strengthen stakeholder ownership and consensus ahead of the public launch of the report.

10.2.2 Stakeholder Representation

Participation was broad and representative. Stakeholder groups present at the workshop are summarised below; a detailed participant register is held on file by SALF, in line with do-no-harm and conflict-sensitivity principles.

Stakeholder group	Represented
Government institutions, ministries and the Commissions	Yes
National Elections Commission (NEC) and State High Election Committees	Yes
Civil society organisations (including SSUNDE)	Yes
Political parties	Yes
Academia and think tanks	Yes
Faith-based organisations	Yes
Persons with disabilities (PWDs)	Yes
Media practitioners	Yes
Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC)	Yes
United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) / UN IEAT and INGOs	Yes
Delegation of the European Union to South Sudan	Yes

Table 8: Stakeholder groups represented at the Validation Workshop (12 May 2026)

10.3 Validation of Findings by Thematic Pillar

10.3.1 Pillar 1: Citizens' Perceptions and Engagement

Participants validated the finding that civic interest is high but procedural knowledge is low. They endorsed the assessment data showing 86% awareness of the elections, 76% willingness to participate (55% definitely, 21% probably), and 67% reliance on radio as the primary information source. Stakeholders strongly affirmed that public awareness and civic engagement remain low in rural and conflict-affected areas, and criticised the concentration of civic activities in Juba's urban centres and hotels.

Validated specific concerns included: limited civic and voter education; high illiteracy; lack of information in local languages; delayed voter registration; limited access to national identity documents; exclusion of IDPs, refugees, women, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities; shrinking civic and political space; infrastructure and communication challenges; and public uncertainty over whether elections will take place. Participants captured the sentiment that "the real concerns are in the villages", and recommended that the NEC and partners expand outreach to all payams and communities.

10.3.2 Pillar 2: Legal Framework and Electoral Reforms

Participants validated the assessment's conclusion that the legal framework is incomplete and fragmented. They endorsed the identified inconsistencies between the R-ARCSS, the Transitional Constitution, the Electoral Act, the Political Parties Act and the Local Government Act; the incomplete implementation of the peace agreement; the absence of an effective legal

framework for electoral dispute resolution; weak safeguards for NEC independence; delays in constitutional reform; and uncertainty over the type of elections to be conducted.

Recurring questions validated in plenary included which elections will be conducted, what electoral system will be used, what governance structure will guide them, and whether Parliament holds amendment or constituent powers – with the warning that a partial decision to amend the R-ARCSS without the agreement of all parties could intensify conflict. Participants affirmed that sovereignty belongs to the people, that constitutional reforms must be inclusive, transparent and participatory, and that the release of all political detainees and inclusive dialogue are necessary preconditions for political consensus.

10.3.3 Pillar 3: Institutional Preparedness

Institutional preparedness was validated as one of the most critical concerns. Participants confirmed the assessment's finding of low to uneven readiness across the NEC, security sector, judiciary, political parties, civil society and media. The major preparedness gaps were endorsed: polling stations not yet identified; voter registration not commenced; candidates not nominated; constituency demarcation unresolved; insufficient electoral infrastructure and materials; and limited technical and operational capacity.

Funding was validated as one of the greatest obstacles. Participants noted that the NEC remains significantly underfunded, that government funding gaps **exceed 96%** of requirements, and that donor confidence remains low owing to weak accountability mechanisms. By way of comparison, participants referenced that Sudan's 2010 elections reportedly cost approximately USD 100 million, and that Uganda's recent elections required more than two years of preparation and substantial investment. Participants emphasised that election financing should primarily be the responsibility of government and that the Public Finance Act should include clear electoral financing provisions.

10.4 Cross-Cutting Issues Validated

10.4.1 Security and Political Challenges

Participants validated that credible elections require security sector reform, unification of forces, neutral and professional security institutions, inclusive political dialogue, and the repatriation of refugees and IDPs. They warned against “sham elections” conducted merely to satisfy international pressure without addressing underlying governance and security challenges, noting that elections held in fragile states without institutional protections can exacerbate ethnic tensions and trigger violence.

10.4.2 Inclusion and Accessibility

Participants validated the barriers facing persons with disabilities, older persons, the sick, minority communities, refugees, IDPs and citizens in opposition-controlled areas – including the lack of wheelchair-accessible polling stations, the absence of sign-language interpretation, limited information for visually impaired persons, and the lack of targeted voter-education materials. Recommendations endorsed included inclusive voter-registration systems, accessible polling centres, mobile registration for IDPs and refugees, use of translators and sign-language interpreters, mapping of vulnerable groups and their needs, and targeted civic education for marginalised communities.

10.4.3 Public Trust, Transparency and Accountability

Participants validated growing public mistrust and uncertainty, attributed to the NEC’s limited public communication, election delays, and a perceived lack of transparency and accountability. They called for the independence and impartiality of the NEC; transparency and accountability in managing funds and processes; continuous public engagement and regular communication; and independent monitoring and audit systems. Recommendations endorsed included public audit reports, independent election-monitoring bodies, NEC information portals, and fact-checking and misinformation-monitoring committees.

10.4.4 Role of Civil Society, Religious Institutions and Media

Participants recognised the critical role of CSOs, religious institutions, community leaders and media in promoting peaceful and inclusive elections. CSOs were validated as key actors in voter education, monitoring transparency and accountability, and facilitating civic engagement, and were urged to remain independent, neutral and free from political and ethnic affiliation. Participants noted that many religious leaders have not engaged actively owing to uncertainty about whether elections will occur, and recommended engaging churches and mosques in civic education and training pastors and imams on electoral issues. On communication, participants acknowledged both the opportunities and risks of social media and recommended responsible use of platforms, prevention of misinformation and propaganda, ethical media reporting, training of media personnel on election reporting, and regular NEC press briefings.

10.5 Consolidated and Prioritised Recommendations

On the basis of the validated findings and group deliberations, participants consolidated the ten priority recommendation areas of the assessment into seventeen prioritised, action-oriented recommendations, with responsible actors and indicative sequencing. These build directly on – and operationalise – the detailed recommendations set out in Chapter 8 (Section 8.2), and form the action agenda to be tracked between the date of the report and the 22 December 2026 polls.

No.	Area	Recommendation	Responsible actors	Time
1	Civic & voter education	Scale up nationwide civic and voter education, with targeted outreach in rural and hard-to-reach areas to ensure informed participation.	NEC, UNDP, CSOs	Imm.
2	Local languages	Translate all electoral laws, procedures and voter-education materials into accessible local languages to enhance inclusivity and understanding.	NEC, CSOs, Media	Imm.
3	Legal & constitutional reform	Undertake comprehensive legal and constitutional reforms prior to elections to strengthen legitimacy and confidence.	Parliament, MoJ, NCRC	Imm.
4	Harmonisation of laws	Harmonise and streamline electoral legal frameworks to eliminate inconsistencies and close regulatory gaps.	Parliament, MoJ, NEC	Imm.

5	Dispute resolution	Establish independent, specialised and well-resourced electoral dispute-resolution mechanisms.	Judiciary, NEC, Parl.	Imm.
6	NEC independence	Strengthen the independence, operational transparency and public-communication capacity of the NEC.	NEC, Govt, Parliament	Imm.
7	Electoral funding	Ensure timely, predictable and adequate government funding for all stages of the electoral process.	Govt of South Sudan, MoFP	Imm.
8	Registration & demarcation	Expedite voter registration and undertake credible constituency demarcation on transparent criteria.	NEC, SHECs	Imm.
9	Security sector reform	Advance security sector reform, including unification of forces under a professional, non-partisan command.	Govt, R-JMEC, Partners	Med.
10	Inclusive dialogue	Release the First Vice President and political detainees and initiate inclusive national political dialogue.	Govt, AU, IGAD, Troika	Imm.
11	Inclusion	Expand meaningful inclusion of women, youth, IDPs, refugees, minorities and PWDs at all levels.	NEC, CSOs, Partners	Cont.
12	Accessible systems	Develop disability-inclusive voter registration and polling systems.	NEC, PWD organisations	Imm.
13	Early warning	Strengthen early-warning and response mechanisms to prevent and mitigate electoral violence.	UNMISS, NPS, CSOs	Med.
14	NEC accountability	Enhance NEC accountability through regular independent audits and public reporting.	NEC, Auditor General	Cont.
15	Counter misinformation	Implement robust mechanisms to counter misinformation, disinformation and hate speech.	NEC, Media, CSOs	Cont.
16	Grassroots engagement	Deepen grassroots civic engagement beyond urban centres into counties and local institutions.	CSOs, Faith leaders, SHECs	Cont.
17	Democratic education	Integrate civic and democratic education into school curricula and community programmes.	MoE, CSOs, Partners	Long

Table 9: Consolidated, validated and prioritised recommendations from the 12 May 2026 Validation Workshop. Time codes: Imm. = immediate (0–3 months); Med. = medium term (3–12 months); Long = long term (beyond 12 months); Cont. = continuous.

10.6 Implications for the Assessment

The validation workshop strengthened, rather than altered, the central conclusions of the assessment. Stakeholders confirmed that the foundations for democratic participation in South Sudan exist – in citizen willingness, in recognised institutions and in international support – but that electoral readiness remains conditional. They reinforced the assessment’s

judgement that elections should be understood not merely as a political event but as a national process requiring trust, security, inclusivity, legal certainty, transparency and collective responsibility from all stakeholders.

The seventeen consolidated recommendations adopted at the workshop are presented as the action agenda for the period between the publication of this report and the 22 December 2026 polls. Each is owned by a clearly identified set of responsible actors and is sequenced against the electoral timeline set out in Annex L (Recommended Implementation Roadmap). Their tracking and implementation will be a shared responsibility of the Government of South Sudan, the NEC, Parliament, the judiciary, security institutions, civil society, faith-based actors, the media and development partners.

10.7 Agreed Next Steps

- Finalise the assessment report incorporating validated findings and consolidated recommendations.
- Convene an Official Public Launch event to disseminate the report to a wider audience of decision-makers, partners and the public.
- Share the report and recommendations with the NEC, Parliament, government institutions, development partners and civil society for action.
- Establish or support coordination platforms – including monthly NEC coordination forums – to monitor progress against the recommendations.

Annexes

Annex A: Detailed Assessment Data Tables

A.1 Overall Awareness of Elections

Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Aware	774	86%
Not Aware	116	13%
Not Sure	12	1%
No Response	1	0.3%
Total	903	100%

Table A.1: Overall Election Awareness

A.2 Participation Intent

Participation Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Definitely Participate	494	55%
Probably Participate	186	21%
Undecided	158	17%
Definitely Not Participate	46	5%
Probably Not Participate	16	2%
No Response	2	0.4%
Total	903	100%

Table A.2: Participation Intent

A.3 Trust in the National Elections Commission

Trust Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Completely Trust	277	31%
Somewhat Trust	388	43%
Neutral	133	15%
Somewhat Distrust	52	6%
Completely Distrust	32	4%
Don't Know/Undecided	20	2%
No Response	1	0.3%
Total	903	100%

Table A.3: Trust in the NEC

A.4 Security Perceptions

Security Perception	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very Secure	63	7%
Secure	329	36%
Neutral	168	19%
Insecure	262	29%
Very Insecure	77	9%
No Response	3	0.4%
Total	903	100%

Table A.4: Security Perceptions

A.5 Media and Information Sources

Media Source	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Radio	607	67%
Social Media	129	14%
Community Meetings	58	6%
Television	38	4%
Government Officials	20	2%
Religious Institutions	19	2%
Friends	13	1.4%
Newspapers	8	1%
Other	8	1%

Table A.5: Media and Information Sources

Annex B: Focus Group Discussion Summary

B.1 FGD Composition

A total of 140 participants took part in 14 focus group discussions across six states and one administrative area, with 20 participants per location (10 male, 10 female). The table below summarises the age distribution of FGD participants.

Location	Age Group	Participants	Percentage
CES – Juba	25–35	10	7%
CES – Juba	25–45	10	7%
Jonglei – Bor	19–35	31	22%
Jonglei – Bor	26–45	10	7%
GPAA – Pibor	19–25	10	7%
GPAA – Pibor	19–30	10	7%
Upper Nile – Malakal	18–35	10	7%
Upper Nile – Malakal	45–65	20	14%
Warrap – Gogrial	36–45	10	7%
Warrap – Gogrial	56–65	9	6%
WBG – Wau	19–35	31	22%
WES – Yambio	36–45	10	7%
WES – Yambio	56–65	9	6%

Table B.1: FGD Age Distribution of Participants

B.2 Notable Quotes from FGD Respondents

Respondent 1 (Bor, Jonglei): *“I will rate South Sudan at 7 out of 10 for electoral preparedness because the country has made some progress like passing National Election Act.”⁴⁴*

Respondent 2 (Bor, Jonglei): *“I will rate South Sudan 5 out of 10 because election requires civic education which has not happened still and no census conducted till now.”*

Respondent (GPAA, Pibor): *“Measures like security concern need to be put into consideration in all corners of the country and also authorities should make sure that transparency is considered if a successful election is to take place.”⁴⁵*

Respondent (CES, Juba): *“We lack resources, security is bad, we have not gone to the counties to assess the security situation and find out if grassroots know anything about the election. And this is dangerous because when elections are done without proper civic education, it can be very bad.”⁴⁶*

Respondent (Youth Centre, Juba): *“Government must avail funding for the election process to start, and assure peace prevails for smooth running of elections which will only be successful in a peaceful environment like the 2010 elections.”⁴⁷*

⁴⁴ Key Informant Interview, SALF Electoral Readiness Assessment (2026).

⁴⁵ FGD Respondent, Greater Pibor Administrative Area, Pibor County, Gogolthin.

⁴⁶ FGD Respondent, Central Equatoria State High Electoral Committee.

⁴⁷ FGD Respondent, Youth Centre in Juba, Central Equatoria State.

Annex C: FGD Key Themes Summary

Code	Theme	Frequency	Key Observations
B2	Current Electoral Landscape	31	Dominant theme across most groups
D1	Relationship with Political Leaders	18	Mixed engagement; varied interactions
G1	Recommendations	13	Participants called for reforms and improvements
F1	Legal and Regulatory Framework	12	Need for greater legal clarity and harmonisation
D2	Trust and Credibility	11	Low public trust in institutions and processes
H1	Wrap-up and Next Steps	11	Emphasis on clear timelines for action
C2	Planned Activities	9	Focus on civic education and voter awareness
C1	Current Activities	8	Ongoing activities noted, but limited by funding
E2	Capacity Building Needs	8	Need for training and institutional strengthening
C3	Coordination among CSOs	7	Coordination exists but mostly formal and limited
E1	Priority Issues	7	Funding gaps as critical barrier
B1	Main Challenges	3	Political interference and insecurity
G2	Priority Actions	2	Few clear steps for immediate action

Table C.1: FGD Key Themes Summary

Annex D: Validation Workshop Summary

The validation workshop confirmed the assessment's central finding that while South Sudanese citizens demonstrate strong interest in participating in elections, significant challenges remain to achieving free, credible, and inclusive elections.

Participants validated that public awareness of elections is high, but civic and voter education remains inadequate, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. Limited access to information, high illiteracy rates, language barriers, delayed voter registration, and the exclusion of vulnerable groups were identified as major concerns.

Stakeholders also confirmed that the electoral legal framework remains incomplete and fragmented, with inconsistencies across key laws, delays in constitutional reforms, weak electoral dispute-resolution mechanisms, and unresolved questions regarding the electoral system and governance arrangements.

Institutional preparedness was assessed as critically low. Key gaps include delayed voter registration, unresolved constituency demarcation, insufficient electoral infrastructure, limited technical capacity, and severe funding shortages affecting the National Elections Commission (NEC) and related institutions.

Cross-cutting challenges validated during the workshop included insecurity, lack of political consensus, exclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities, refugees and IDPs, declining public trust in electoral institutions, and the spread of misinformation. Participants emphasized the need for security sector reform, inclusive political dialogue, transparency, accountability, and stronger public communication.

The workshop highlighted the important role of civil society, faith-based institutions, community leaders, and the media in promoting civic education, peaceful participation, and electoral accountability.

Participants consolidated seventeen priority recommendations, including expanding civic and voter education, strengthening legal and constitutional reforms, ensuring adequate electoral funding, accelerating voter registration and constituency demarcation, enhancing NEC independence and accountability, promoting inclusion and accessibility, advancing security sector reforms, strengthening early-warning systems, combating misinformation, and deepening grassroots civic engagement.

Overall, the validation exercise reinforced the assessment's conclusion that electoral readiness in South Sudan remains conditional and dependent on substantial progress in legal reforms, institutional preparedness, security, inclusion, transparency, and public trust before the planned elections.

Annex E: Assessment Tools

Note: The assessment tools used in this study, including the structured survey questionnaire, key informant interview guides, and focus group discussion protocols, are available upon request from SALF. These instruments were designed in accordance with ethical research standards and approved by the SALF research ethics committee prior to fieldwork.

Annex F: Institutional Readiness Summary Matrix

Institution	Readiness Level	Key Findings
National Elections Commission	Low-Moderate (35%)	Reconstituted but limited technical capacity; no voter registration completed; SHEC offices in 10 states; dependent on donor support
Political Parties	Uncertain (25%)	Weak structures; personality-driven; restrictions on opposition; SPLM-IO participation uncertain due to Machar detention
Security Sector	Low (20%)	Incomplete force unification; limited training on electoral conduct; JEOCs assessment conducted but funding inadequate
Judiciary and Dispute Resolution	Very Limited (15%)	Under-resourced; lacks independence; no specialised electoral dispute mechanisms operationalised
Civil Society and Media	Moderate (55%)	Notable engagement; CEPO, SSuDEMOP active; UNDP CSO civic education initiative launched; but underfunded and restricted civic space

Table F.1: Institutional Readiness Summary Matrix

Annex G: Desk Review – Legal and Institutional Framework Analysis

G.1 Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (2011)

The Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (2011, as amended) serves as the primary legal instrument governing political and electoral processes in the country. It establishes the fundamental principles of democratic governance, political participation, and the organisation of elections. It outlines the mandates of key electoral institutions and provides the legal foundation for electoral legislation. However, several scholars and policy analysts argue that the transitional nature of the constitution creates uncertainties regarding long-term electoral governance and institutional stability (Jok, 2023). The constitution provides for fundamental rights including the right to vote and to stand for election, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. However, these rights have been significantly curtailed in practice through restrictive legislation, executive orders, and security operations that limit civic and political space.⁴⁸

A critical challenge is that the Transitional Constitution was intended as a temporary framework to guide the country through a transitional period, not as a permanent basis for democratic governance. The failure to adopt a permanent constitution before the elections means that the constitutional framework governing the electoral process lacks the stability, clarity, and legitimacy that a permanent constitution would provide. The National Constitutional Review Commission (NCRC), established to lead the constitution-making process, has made limited progress. In December 2025, political parties agreed to defer the constitution-making process until after the elections, raising questions about the constitutional foundation for the democratic process.⁴⁹

G.2 National Elections Act (2012, as amended 2023)

The National Elections Act (NEA) defines procedures for voter registration, candidate nomination, electoral administration, and dispute resolution. Amendments introduced in 2023 sought to strengthen provisions related to gender representation, with the inclusion of a 25% women's list allocation, and updated electoral timelines. However, implementation challenges remain significant. According to International IDEA (2023), effective electoral laws require clear enforcement mechanisms and institutional independence to ensure credibility and fairness in the electoral process. The NEA provides for a mixed electoral system combining first-past-the-post constituency representation (60%), a women's list (25%), and a proportional party list (15%), plus two additional seats. However, several provisions remain ambiguous or untested, particularly regarding: the criteria and procedures for voter registration in the absence of a national census; the process for demarcating constituencies without updated census data; mechanisms for handling electoral disputes at different levels; and regulations governing campaign financing and media access during electoral periods.⁵⁰

G.3 NEC Regulations and Operational Guidelines

The NEC has adopted several regulatory instruments, including Regulation No. 1/2024 (Code of Conduct) and three additional electoral regulations in 2024. These provide detailed procedures for voter registration, polling operations, vote counting, and results management. However, institutional assessments indicate that the NEC continues to face logistical and

⁴⁸ Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (2011, as amended); Human Rights Watch (2025). South Sudan: Adopt a strong resolution extending UN investigations for two years.

⁴⁹ Sudan's Post (2025). Political parties drop census, constitution ahead of 2026 polls. 10 December 2025.

⁵⁰ National Elections Act (2012, as amended 2023). Republic of South Sudan; International IDEA (2023). Electoral Law Reform in Post-Conflict States. Stockholm.

technical capacity constraints, including limited infrastructure, inadequate staff training, and chronic funding challenges (ECES, 2023). The NEC Chairperson noted in October 2024 during an operational planning retreat in Entebbe that the Commission needed to acquire knowledge and build capacity to conduct fair, free, and credible elections, acknowledging that many commission members and staff lacked adequate training and reading habits. The NEC's successful completion of induction training for State High Election Committees (SHECs) was an important step, but sub-national capacity remains thin, particularly at county level where the actual administration of elections will take place.⁵¹

G.4 Peace Agreements and Transitional Frameworks

The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS, 2018) provides the overarching roadmap for the country's political transition and outlines key milestones related to constitutional reform, security sector reform, and the conduct of national elections. However, delays in implementing key provisions—including the unification of security forces, the constitutional review process, the national census, and the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms—have raised serious concerns about the feasibility of organising credible elections within the proposed timeline (International Crisis Group, 2024). The R-JMEC has consistently noted that implementation of the agreement remains behind schedule, with several benchmarks missed or significantly delayed. The agreement's provision for a Hybrid Court for South Sudan to address accountability for conflict-related crimes remains unimplemented, affecting the transitional justice framework that many citizens view as a prerequisite for legitimate elections.⁵²

G.5 Previous Election Reports and Observer Assessments

The desk review also considered findings from the 2010 general elections—the last elections conducted in the territory of present-day South Sudan (held before independence as part of the 2010 Sudanese elections). The Carter Center's observation mission documented significant challenges in electoral administration, including transparency in results management, political interference in electoral institutions, and the need for stronger dispute resolution mechanisms. These findings are consistent with broader research on elections in fragile states, which emphasises that credible elections require independent electoral institutions and strong legal safeguards (Elklit and Reynolds, 2005). The 2010 experience also demonstrated that South Sudan has limited institutional memory of electoral administration, as the NEC was dissolved and reconstituted multiple times since independence. The loss of experienced staff and institutional knowledge represents a significant challenge for the upcoming elections.⁵³

G.6 Overall Desk Review Assessment

Overall, the desk review indicates that while South Sudan has established a basic legal and institutional framework for elections, several critical gaps remain in terms of implementation, institutional capacity, and alignment with international electoral standards. The analysis highlights the need for stronger legal clarity, improved institutional coordination, and accelerated implementation of transitional reforms to ensure that the electoral process meets recognised democratic principles and standards. The decision to proceed with elections without a permanent constitution and a national census—using 2010 constituency boundaries—represents a pragmatic but risky approach that may invite challenges to the legitimacy of outcomes.⁵⁴

⁵¹ NEC South Sudan (2025). Press Statement of the Chairperson, 22 December 2025. National Elections Commission.

⁵² International Crisis Group (2024). South Sudan's Election Dilemma. Africa Report No. 328.

⁵³ Carter Center (2010). Observing Sudan's 2010 National Elections. Atlanta: The Carter Center.

⁵⁴ International Crisis Group (2024). South Sudan's Election Dilemma. Africa Report No. 328.

Annex H: Secondary Data – Humanitarian and Political Context

H.1 Humanitarian Situation

South Sudan continues to face severe humanitarian emergencies driven by climate shocks, relentless violence, multiple disease outbreaks, and a struggling economy. According to OCHA (2026), more than 10 million people—approximately two-thirds of the population—are projected to require some form of humanitarian assistance in 2026. The humanitarian situation is characterised by acute food insecurity, widespread displacement, fragile health and education systems, and severe protection risks, particularly for women, children, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. The IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) reported that as of mid-2025, over 1.9 million people are internally displaced within South Sudan, with 2.3 million South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries. Between January and December 2025, DTM documented 527 spontaneous, 19 organised, and 8 other types of population movements, comprising 753,084 IDPs (92%) and 69,923 returnees (8%) across ten states and Abyei Administrative Area.⁵⁵

The states with the most severe humanitarian needs—Upper Nile, Unity, Jonglei, and the Abyei Administrative Area—are also among the most conflict-affected and feature the largest IDP concentrations. The Bentiu IDP Camp in Unity State alone hosts over 109,000 IDPs as of mid-2025. The Malakal Protection of Civilians (PoC) site in Upper Nile State has hosted a large displaced population since 2013. These displaced populations face particular challenges in exercising their electoral rights, including lack of identification documents, uncertainty about their constituency of registration, and physical security concerns. The conflict in Sudan (since April 2023) continues to place immense pressure on South Sudan’s humanitarian and socio-economic systems, with South Sudanese refugees returning from Sudan and Sudanese refugees crossing into South Sudan. The UN and partners are asking for more than US\$1 billion in 2026 to help 4 million people.⁵⁶

H.2 Political Developments (2025–2026)

The political landscape in South Sudan has deteriorated significantly since early 2025. In March 2025, First Vice President Dr. Riek Machar was removed from office and placed under house arrest, accused of treason. Several other SPLM-IO leaders were also detained following clashes in Nasir, Upper Nile State. The government spokesperson, Michael Makuei, confirmed that the detainees would be arraigned in court. These developments sparked widespread international concern, with the Troika (US, UK, Norway), the African Union, and IGAD calling for the release of opposition leaders and the resumption of negotiations to de-escalate the political crisis. Despite these calls, the government has not complied.⁵⁷

Armed clashes have intensified significantly. Fighting between the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces (SSPDF) and SPLM-IO forces, particularly in Jonglei State since December 2025, has driven major displacement and limited humanitarian operations. IOM verified that over 263,000 people were displaced in the first quarter of 2026 alone due to military operations in Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Unity states. In February 2026, fighting intensified across northern and central Jonglei, with large-scale displacement and severe constraints on humanitarian access. These developments have led multiple analysts to question whether the security conditions necessary for credible, free, and fair elections can be established by December 2026.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ IOM DTM (2025). Between January and December 2025, DTM reported 753,084 IDPs across ten states.

⁵⁶ UNHCR (2026). Sudan Situation UNHCR Appeal 2026. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/121184>.

⁵⁷ African Union Peace and Security Council (2025). Communiqué of the 1265th meeting on the situation in South Sudan; European Union (2023–2025). Statements on South Sudan’s political transition and electoral preparedness.

⁵⁸ Africa-press.net (2026). South Sudan’s 2026 Elections: A Test Not Yet Ready. April 2026.

H.3 Electoral Preparations Timeline

Despite the challenges, the NEC has continued preparations. Key milestones include: the operational planning retreat in Entebbe (2024); adoption of three electoral regulations and a Code of Conduct (2024); completion of induction training for SHECs (2024); the declaration of 2010 geographical constituencies for the elections (December 2025); establishment of SHEC offices across ten states; consultative meetings with political parties and electoral stakeholders (October 2025); the Election Security Committee's assessment of NPS premises for JEOCs across ten states (February–July 2025); President Kiir's meeting with the NEC Chairperson and commitment to provide resources (March 2026); and the UNDP's launch of CSO civic education grants across all states (March 2026). The NEC planned to release the official electoral timeline in January 2026, launch civic education in February, and commence voter registration thereafter. As of April 2026, the electoral timeline had been announced, civic education was underway in some areas, but voter registration had not yet commenced nationwide.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Radio Tamazuj (2026). Electoral body outlines plan for general elections. 14 January 2026.

Annex I: Possible Election Scenarios

Based on the assessment findings and the current political, security, and institutional context, three possible scenarios for the December 2026 elections are identified:

I.1 Scenario 1: Opposition Boycott or Rejection

Some opposition groups may choose to boycott or reject the electoral process due to concerns over political legitimacy, particularly given the detention of Dr. Riek Machar and other SPLM-IO leaders. An opposition boycott would significantly undermine the credibility and inclusiveness of the elections. Under this scenario, the ruling SPLM would dominate the electoral process, but the resulting government would lack broad-based legitimacy, potentially exacerbating political tensions and instability.

I.2 Scenario 2: Limited or Contested Elections

Elections may proceed as scheduled; however, their scope and credibility could be limited or contested due to persistent insecurity, insufficient resources, incomplete voter registration, and restrictions on civic and political space. Under this scenario, elections would take place in areas where security conditions permit, but significant portions of the population—particularly in conflict-affected areas such as Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Unity states—may be unable to participate. Disputed results could lead to localised or widespread unrest.⁶⁰

I.3 Scenario 3: Collapse of Political Arrangements

A more severe scenario involves potential collapse of the current political arrangements, leading to disintegration of state authority and escalation into broader conflict. This would make the organisation of elections impossible and could set back the country's democratic transition by years. This scenario is consistent with the April 2026 warning from the African Union that South Sudan risks sliding back into full-scale conflict.

I.4 Implications for Stakeholders

These scenarios highlight the significant political, security, and institutional risks that could affect the feasibility and integrity of the electoral process. For international partners and development actors, the scenarios underscore the importance of maintaining flexible programming that can adapt to rapidly evolving circumstances, while continuing to support the conditions necessary for credible elections—including dialogue, security sector reform, institutional capacity building, and protection of civic space.

⁶⁰ International Crisis Group (2024). South Sudan's Election Dilemma. Africa Report No. 328.

Annex J: Detailed Methodology Notes

J.1 Sampling Strategy

The citizen survey employed a multi-stage sampling approach. At the first stage, six states and one administrative area were selected purposively to ensure geographic, political, and demographic diversity. At the second stage, assessment locations within each state were selected based on accessibility, security conditions, and population density. At the third stage, respondents were selected using convenience sampling with quota controls for gender and age, ensuring minimum thresholds for female participation and youth representation. A total of 125 respondents were targeted per state/administrative area, except for Central Equatoria State (Juba), where 153 respondents were surveyed to account for the larger urban population and the concentration of displaced persons in the capital.

J.2 Data Collection Instruments

Three primary data collection instruments were used: (1) a structured survey questionnaire comprising closed-ended questions organised into seven thematic sections (demographics, awareness, expectations, participation, institutional trust, security perceptions, and media access); (2) semi-structured interview guides for legal experts and institutional representatives, featuring open-ended questions designed to explore thematic areas in depth; and (3) focus group discussion protocols with guided questions and probes designed to facilitate group dialogue on electoral readiness themes. All instruments were piloted prior to deployment and adjusted based on feedback from field enumerators and supervisors.

J.3 Data Quality Assurance

Data quality was assured through several mechanisms: (1) training of enumerators on survey administration, ethical protocols, and data recording procedures; (2) daily data verification by field supervisors; (3) back-checking of a random sample of completed questionnaires; (4) audio recording of FGDs and KIs (where consent was obtained) for transcription accuracy; (5) triangulation of findings across survey data, qualitative interviews, desk review, and the validation workshop; and (6) peer review of the draft report by external experts prior to finalisation.

J.4 Analytical Framework

The analysis was organised around the three thematic pillars of the assessment: citizens' perceptions and engagement, the legal framework, and institutional preparedness. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulations) to identify patterns and trends. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis, with codes developed both deductively (based on the assessment framework) and inductively (emerging from the data). Findings from all sources were integrated through a convergent mixed-methods design, whereby quantitative and qualitative findings were compared, contrasted, and synthesised to provide a comprehensive assessment of electoral readiness.

Annex K: Stakeholder Mapping and Coordination Framework

K.1 Key Electoral Stakeholders

The following table maps the key stakeholders in South Sudan’s electoral process, their mandates, current status, and priority needs as identified through this assessment. This mapping is intended to support coordination among development partners, government institutions, and civil society in addressing electoral readiness gaps.

Stakeholder	Mandate/Role	Current Status	Priority Needs
National Elections Commission (NEC)	Electoral administration, voter registration, civic education, results management	Reconstituted; SHEC offices in 10 states; 2010 constituencies declared; civic education launching	Funding, technical capacity, county-level staffing, ICT equipment, voter registration systems
National Constitutional Review Commission (NCRC)	Constitution-making process	Established but limited progress; constitution deferred until post-election	Political commitment, technical support, public consultation processes
Political Parties Council	Registration, regulation, and oversight of political parties	Established under Political Parties Act 2024; many parties non-compliant	Capacity building, enforcement mechanisms, party registration support
Judiciary of South Sudan	Electoral dispute resolution, constitutional interpretation	Under-resourced; limited independence; no specialised electoral tribunals	Training, resources, independence protections, specialised dispute mechanisms
National Police Service (NPS)	Election security coordination through JEOCs	JEOCs assessment completed (Feb-Jul 2025); refurbishment needs identified	Funding for JEOCs, training on neutral electoral conduct, deployment planning
Civil Society Organisations	Civic education, election observation, voter mobilisation, accountability	Active but underfunded; restricted civic space; UNDP CSO grants initiative launched	Funding, operational permits, protection from harassment, coordination support
Media/Press	Public information, electoral reporting, civic awareness	Limited independence; state censorship; radio dominant; social media growing	Press freedom protections, training, equipment, counter-misinformation capacity
UNDP/UN IEAT	Technical assistance to NEC; electoral support coordination	Active support including ICT equipment, training, civic education grants	Sustained funding, expanded scope, conflict-sensitive programming
African Union/IGAD	Peace agreement monitoring; election observation; diplomatic engagement	Active engagement; AU issued April 2026 warning on conflict risks	Political leverage, observer mission planning, mediation capacity
Development Partners (EU, Troika)	Funding, diplomatic engagement, technical assistance, governance support	Engaged but concerned about pace of reforms and political developments	Coordinated strategy, flexible funding mechanisms, political dialogue support

Table K.1: Stakeholder Mapping for Electoral Process

Annex L: Recommended Implementation Roadmap

Based on the assessment findings and the December 2026 election target date, the following implementation roadmap outlines the sequencing and timing of recommended priority actions. The roadmap assumes that political conditions permit the continuation of electoral preparations and that adequate funding is made available.

Phase	Timeline	Priority Actions	Responsible Actors
Phase 1: Immediate (April–May 2026)	0–2 months	Complete electoral timeline publication; accelerate civic education rollout nationwide; commence voter registration in secure areas; finalise legal amendments; launch JEOC refurbishment	NEC, Ministry of Justice, NPS, UNDP, CSOs
Phase 2: Preparation (June–August 2026)	3–5 months	Continue voter registration across all states; train polling staff; strengthen dispute resolution mechanisms; conduct election security planning; political party registration compliance	NEC, SHECs, Judiciary, NPS, Political Parties Council
Phase 3: Pre-Election (September–November 2026)	6–8 months	Complete voter registration; finalise voter rolls; candidate nomination period; campaign period; deploy election observers; pre-position election materials; conduct final security assessments	NEC, Political Parties, CSOs, International Observers, Security Forces
Phase 4: Election (December 2026)	9 months	Polling day operations; vote counting; results tabulation and announcement; dispute resolution processes; post-election monitoring	NEC, Judiciary, Security Forces, Observers, Media
Phase 5: Post-Election (January–March 2027)	10–12 months	Electoral dispute adjudication; government formation; post-election evaluation; lessons learned documentation; institutional review	Judiciary, Government, NEC, International Community

Table L.1: Recommended Implementation Roadmap for December 2026 Elections

Note: This roadmap is indicative and subject to revision based on evolving political, security, and institutional conditions. The feasibility of the timeline depends critically on: (1) adequate and timely funding from the government and development partners; (2) maintenance of minimum security conditions across the assessment locations; (3) political commitment from all parties to the peace agreement; (4) release of political detainees and resumption of inclusive political dialogue; and (5) completion of outstanding legal amendments. As of April 2026, several of these preconditions remain unmet, raising questions about the feasibility of the proposed timeline.

Annex M: Compliance with EU Assessment Reporting Standards

This report has been prepared in compliance with EU standards for assessment reporting on democratic governance and electoral support programmes. The following table summarises the key reporting requirements and how they have been addressed in this report.

EU Reporting Requirement	How Addressed in This Report
Evidence-based findings	Mixed-methods data collection across 7 locations; 903 survey respondents; 90 KIIs; 140 FGD participants; comprehensive desk review
Triangulation of data sources	Findings triangulated across survey data, qualitative interviews, desk review, and validation workshop; cross-referenced with secondary sources
Gender and inclusion analysis	Gender-disaggregated data throughout; specific analysis of women's participation barriers; youth engagement analysis; IDP considerations
Contextual analysis	Humanitarian, political, and security context provided with reference to OCHA, IOM, AU, and other authoritative sources
Risk assessment	Eight principal risks identified with likelihood and impact ratings; risk matrix visualisation provided
Stakeholder mapping	Comprehensive stakeholder mapping with mandates, status, and priority needs (Annex K)
Actionable recommendations	Ten priority recommendations with detailed descriptions; implementation roadmap with phased timeline (Annex L)
Harvard referencing	All sources cited using Harvard referencing system; footnotes on every page; comprehensive reference list
Annexes and supporting data	Nine fully developed annexes (A through M) with detailed data tables, methodology notes, and analysis
Visual presentation	14 multicoloured charts, graphs, and figures; colour-coded tables throughout; risk matrix visualisation
Validation process documented	Multi-stakeholder validation workshop described with objectives, participants, and outcomes (Annex D)
Limitations acknowledged	Limitations documented with mitigation strategies in methodology chapter

Table M.1: EU Reporting Standards Compliance Summary

Annex N: South Sudan Electoral Timeline and Key Milestones

The following chronology documents the key milestones, postponements, and developments in South Sudan’s electoral process from independence to the scheduled December 2026 elections. This timeline provides essential context for understanding the protracted nature of the electoral transition and the accumulated delays that shape current readiness levels.

Date	Milestone/Event	Significance
9 July 2011	South Sudan gains independence from Sudan	Transitional Constitution adopted; first post-independence elections envisioned
2011–2013	Transitional period established	Nation-building priorities dominate; elections planned for 2015
December 2013	Civil war erupts between President Kiir and VP Machar	Electoral preparations halted; massive displacement and humanitarian crisis
August 2015	Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict signed	Elections postponed; power-sharing agreement establishes transitional government
2015–2018	Continued instability and failed implementation	Multiple ceasefire violations; elections postponed further
September 2018	R-ARCSS signed in Addis Ababa	Renewed peace framework; elections planned for end of transitional period (2022)
February 2020	Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity formed	Kiir and Machar reunite in government; elections targeted for 2023
2020–2023	Slow R-ARCSS implementation; COVID-19 pandemic	Key benchmarks missed; elections postponed to 2024
November 2024	Transitional period extended; elections set for December 2026	Political parties agree to 2-year extension with elections as final milestone
December 2025	NEC declares 2010 constituencies; census and constitution deferred	60/25/15 seat allocation announced; preparations formally launched
January 2026	NEC plans electoral timeline release; civic education to launch February	State High Election Committees operational in 10 states
March 2025	Dr. Riek Machar placed under house arrest; SPLM-IO leaders detained	Political crisis deepens; peace agreement implementation threatened
February–July 2025	Election Security Committee assesses NPS premises for JEOCs	Security infrastructure needs identified across 10 states
March 2026	President Kiir commits to providing resources for elections	Political signal of commitment; CEPO questions actual resource allocation
March 2026	UNDP launches CSO civic education grants across all states	Up to USD 10,000 per area; activities from 15 March to 31 May 2026
April 2026	AU issues stark warning; calls for ceasefire and elections	Continental body warns of renewed conflict risk; calls for Machar’s release
December 2026	Scheduled election date	South Sudan’s first post-independence national elections

Table N.1: South Sudan Electoral Timeline and Key Milestones (2011–2026)

N.1 Analysis of the Timeline

The chronology reveals a pattern of repeated postponements driven by political instability, conflict, and incomplete implementation of peace agreements. South Sudan has been in a transitional political arrangement for over 14 years since independence, with national elections postponed at least five times. This prolonged transitional period has had several consequences for electoral readiness: it has eroded public confidence in the electoral process, as evidenced by the 17% undecided participation rate in this assessment; it has prevented the accumulation of institutional experience in electoral administration; it has allowed political competition to be settled through power-sharing arrangements and force rather than democratic processes; and it has created a generation of young South Sudanese who have never experienced a national election.

The timeline also highlights the compressed nature of the current preparations. With only eight months between the formal launch of preparations (December 2025) and the scheduled election date (December 2026), the NEC must complete voter registration, civic education, candidate nomination, campaign regulation, election administration, and results management in a fraction of the time typically required for post-conflict first elections. By comparison, the 2010 Sudanese elections (the last held in South Sudan's territory) benefited from approximately two years of active preparation, including a comprehensive voter registration exercise supported by UNDP that registered over 75% of eligible voters. The current timeline is significantly more compressed and faces additional challenges of ongoing conflict and institutional fragmentation.⁶¹

The March 2025 political crisis—the detention of Dr. Riek Machar and SPLM-IO leaders—introduces a fundamental question about the inclusiveness of the electoral process. An election conducted without the meaningful participation of one of the two principal parties to the peace agreement would lack the broad-based legitimacy necessary for democratic consolidation. The AU's April 2026 call for the release of political detainees and the Troika's consistent emphasis on inclusive political processes underscore the international community's view that elections without opposition participation would be deeply problematic.⁶²

⁶¹ Carter Center (2010). *Observing Sudan's 2010 National Elections*. Atlanta: The Carter Center.

⁶² African Union (2024). Chairperson statement regarding the extended political transition in South Sudan; European Union (2023–2025). *Statements on South Sudan's political transition and electoral preparedness*.