

# FROM TRANSITION TO BALLOT:

## *A REPORT ON WOMEN'S PREPAREDNESS FOR ELECTIONS IN SOUTH SUDAN*

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SOUTH SUDAN  
2023-2025



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Published in collaboration with the National Ministry of  
Gender, Child & Social Welfare of South Sudan and  
the International Civil Society Action Network.

The "Preparedness of Women for Elections in South Sudan Survey"  
was conducted 2024-2025 by The National Transformational and Leadership Institute  
(NTLI), University of Juba led by Dr. Angelina Mattijo-Bazugba.

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We are grateful for the technical and financial support from ICAN.

Printed in 2025 in Juba, South Sudan

Full citation: Bazugba, A. (2025). *From Transition to Ballot: A Report On  
Women's Preparedness For Elections In South Sudan*

The National Transformational and Leadership Institute [NTLI]. .

Juba, South Sudan.

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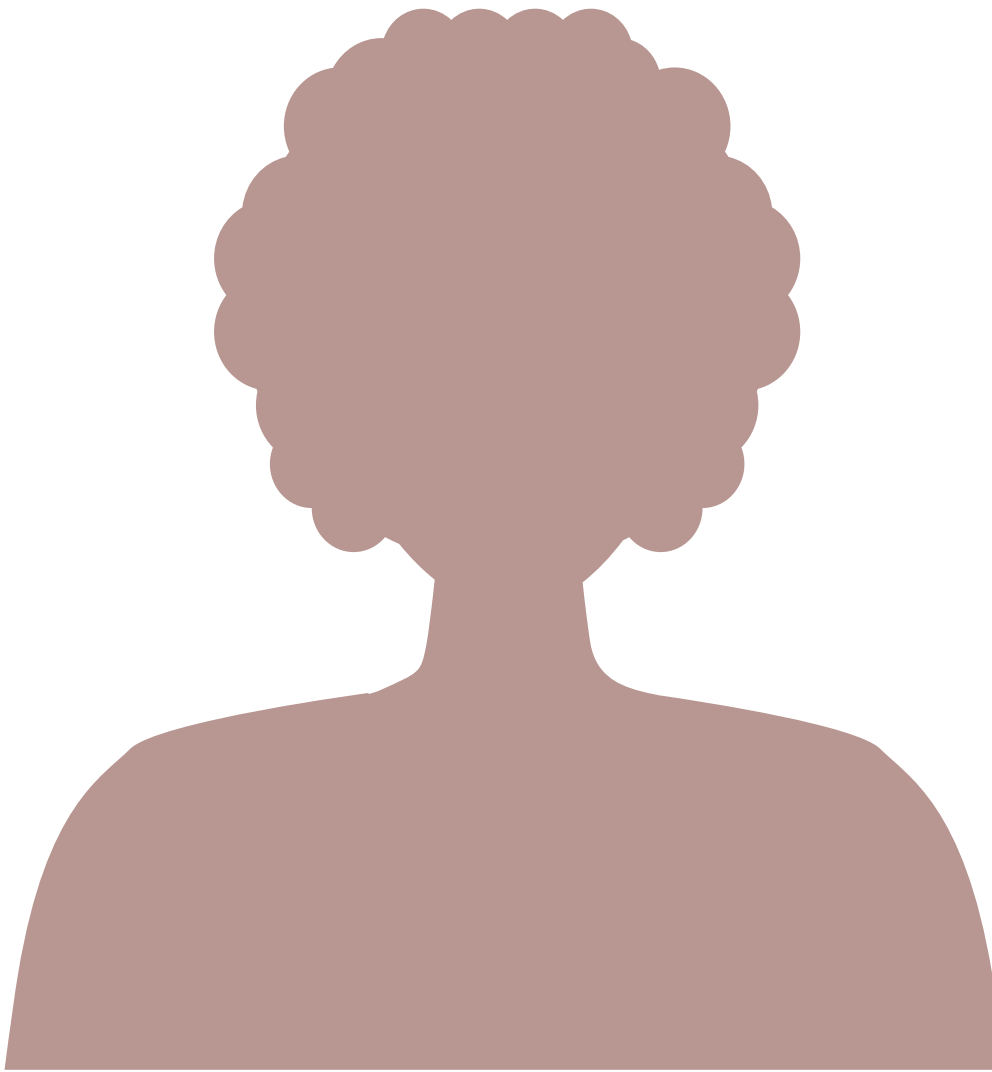
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## PREFACE

As we approached the 2024 elections in South Sudan, it was imperative to reflect on the progress and challenges faced by women in their pursuit of political participation. The National Transformational Leadership Institute (NTLI) at the University of Juba, in collaboration with the National Ministry of Gender, Child & Social Welfare (MGCSW) and the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), undertook a comprehensive survey to assess the level of women's preparedness for elections.

South Sudan's journey towards democracy has been fraught with obstacles, particularly for women historically marginalised in political processes. Despite legal provisions for gender equality, deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and the aftermath of prolonged conflict have hindered women's political representation. This report on the findings from the study sheds light on these challenges and provides actionable recommendations to enhance women's participation in elections.

The methodology employed in this study was robust, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather comprehensive data. Through a questionnaire, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews we captured the voices and experiences of women from diverse backgrounds across the ten states and three administrative areas. This inclusive approach ensures that the findings reflect women's realities in urban and rural settings.

The findings from this national survey of women, men, and youth reveal that women have a strong interest in politics, despite the numerous barriers they face. It is encouraging to see that many women are motivated by a desire to improve their communities and contribute to national development. The challenges that women highlighted include limited access to resources, cultural norms discouraging women from public leadership, and a lack of support from political parties and community leaders.

By implementing the recommendations made in this report, including empowering women through leadership training, advocating for supportive legal frameworks, and fostering a more inclusive political environment, we can pave the way for more women to participate in elections.

I extend my gratitude to all the participants, stakeholders, and partners who contributed to this study. Your insights and dedication are invaluable as we strive to create a more equitable and inclusive political landscape in South Sudan.



Dr. Angelina Bazugba  
Director, National Transformational Leadership Institute,  
University of Juba, 2025



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Transformational Leadership Institute (NTLI), as the sole national institution dedicated to women's leadership development in South Sudan, works to strengthen leadership competencies, advance gender equality in political representation, and inform policy through research and advisory services. In early 2024, as part of the preparations for the planned national elections, NTLI worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Child & Social Welfare (MGCSW) and the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) to carry out a national survey to assess women's readiness to participate in national elections as voters and candidates.

Before independence in 2011, elections were held in Southern Sudan in 2010; however, the 2013 civil war, prolonged conflict, political instability, and successive transitional arrangements have since rendered elections unviable. Governance has operated under transitional frameworks, notably the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), which prioritises peace and power-sharing over elections, resulting in repeated postponement of elections.

To date, key prerequisites for credible and inclusive elections remain unmet, including the adoption of a permanent constitution, security sector reform and unification of forces, a national census, voter registration, and electoral and legal reforms. Weak institutional capacity, inadequate funding, limited civic and voter education, political contestation,

and ongoing humanitarian and economic crises—marked by displacement, food insecurity, and climate shocks—continue to constrain political participation, disproportionately affecting women and other marginalised groups.

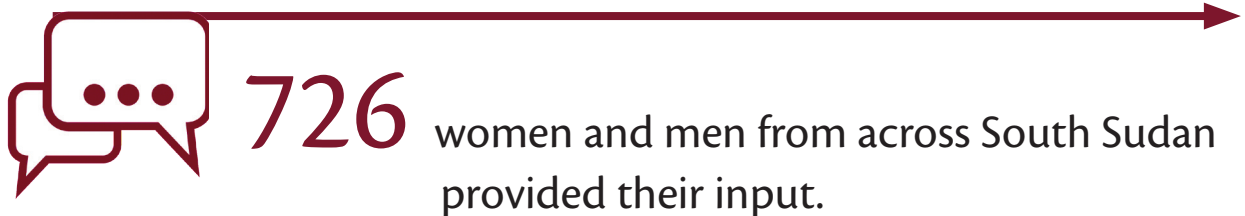
In September 2024, the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) once again postponed the national elections, citing the unmet preconditions necessary to ensure a fair, credible, and peaceful democratic process. While the delay reflects ongoing structural challenges, it also provides additional time for women to strengthen their level of engagement.

It is within this context that the ‘Preparedness of Women Survey’ was conducted. The investigation was designed to gather evidence and assess the current and relevant factors that enable or inhibit women’s participation in electoral processes as voters or candidates. This report provides the analysis and recommendations to improve women’s participation in elections.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and insights from all ten states and the three administrative areas (AAs). The research team completed a desk review, administered a questionnaire, conducted group discussions, and hosted one-on-one interviews.

Fieldwork was conducted in seven states—Unity, Central Equatoria, Upper Nile, Lakes, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Jonglei, and Western Equatoria—and included the capital cities and one rural community in each state. Participants from Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap, Eastern Equatoria, Greater Pibor Administrative Area, Abyei Administrative Area, and Ruweng Administrative Area were interviewed in Juba during NTLI workshops or by phone. The research team conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs), and administered the questionnaire.

A total of 726 people (467 women and 259 men) provided their perspectives, experiences, and recommendations. Respondents included women and men from urban and rural areas who are community and traditional leaders; representatives from civil society organisations and organised forces; youth leaders; people with disabilities; members of parliament; women in elected leadership positions; women aspirants; and women from political parties.



**726** women and men from across South Sudan provided their input.


The findings indicate that women are not prepared to participate fully in election processes. The main factors that contribute to women being unprepared include local socio-cultural conditions and national political conditions.

Traditional gender roles, cultural beliefs, and social norms require women to focus on household responsibilities rather than engaging in public or political leadership roles and discourage them from pursuing political careers. There is also a lack of public awareness, with only a few female role models in high political positions to demonstrate the importance of women's participation in politics—leading many women to believe that engaging in politics or taking on leadership roles are not options for them. Additionally, the political environment in South Sudan can be challenging, hostile, and sometimes violent, which deters women from participating.

At the national political level, many of the activities that are required by the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) for elections had not been conducted, including a population census; setting the permanent constitution; deploying unified forces; setting the electoral calendar that declares the dates of voter registration; civic and voter education campaigns; and establishing polling stations, among others.

At the same time, the inquiry reveals there is a strong interest in politics among women, indicating the potential for greater participation. The desire to improve lives and contribute to social development emerged as the key motivation for women who were considering running for a leadership position.

Despite the progressive legal frameworks, few women in South Sudan are elected or appointed to decision-making roles within the government, public institutions, the civil service, and institutions of higher learning. The empirical evidence supports a systematic approach to leveraging women's leadership potential.



Women in South Sudan are not prepared to participate fully in an election process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



### PROTECTION & SECURITY



### CIVIC EDUCATION



### MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

The following recommendations emerged from the analysis of the findings. NTLI supports a comprehensive approach to improve women's preparedness and increase the participation of women ahead of the planned 2026 elections and beyond. This requires the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) institutions, political parties, civil society, the media, and research institutions to work together. Each of these key actors has a particular role to play, and so we have organised the recommendations by sector.

#### RTGoNU AND OTHER GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

- 1. Finalise and disseminate key legal frameworks for the elections.** Four important legal frameworks include: 1) The Permanent Constitution of South Sudan; 2) the Anti-GBV Bill; 3) the Women's Empowerment Bill, which seeks to safeguard core gender provisions in the Peace Accord and Constitution; and 4) Gender Equality Authority Bill, which will provide oversight on the implementation of the gender equality agenda. When these are passed into law and enacted, they will protect women's rights, provide a legal response to the violence and intimidation that prevent women from engaging in politics, and create a safer environment for women's political representation and participation.
- 2. Establish a dedicated Gender Commission and Gender Equality Authority** to collect information systematically, monitor gender mainstreaming across all sectors, and oversee the implementation of gender quotas.
- 3. Expedite the drafting and enactment of the Family Bill.** This bill protects women's rights and promotes their participation in various sectors, including politics.
- 4. Harmonise statutory and customary laws.** Harmonised laws are needed to minimise the contradictions, complicated procedures, and delays in justice. While statutory laws are supreme, customary laws are often preferred as a quick fix to a problem. Continuous questioning and reform of customary laws are necessary to ensure justice, especially for women.
- 5. Finalise the training and deployment of Unified Forces.** This will guarantee the security and safety of women participating in all electoral processes.



### MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT



### PROTECTION & SECURITY



6. **Foster a supportive political environment.** Political parties should acknowledge publicly and formally within their manifestos a woman's right to participate in the political arena. Political parties should support all candidates in their political campaigns by raising awareness and engaging with constituents before, during, and after the elections.
7. **Ensure inclusive political party registration.** As the Political Parties Council (PCC) opens up for new registrations, it should be mandatory for parties to submit their appointment lists with both male and female members across the country and apply the 35 per cent gender quota. A review of the registered political parties' adherence to the 35 per cent women's representation at both the executive and membership levels is ongoing.
8. **Promote women's leadership within political parties.** Encourage parties to adopt internal quotas for women candidates and provide training and mentorship opportunities for women within party structures.
9. **Gender-sensitive electoral committees.** The National Election Commission (NEC) should ensure that women are adequately represented in electorate committees at national and state levels. The State High Electoral Committees (SHECs) and other structures responsible for registration, polling, observations, security, media, and training on civic and voter education need to focus on ensuring fair and inclusive decision-making, confidentiality in voting, and freedom from violence and intimidation.

#### MEDIA, ACADEMIA, AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS



#### CIVIC EDUCATION

10. **Document, promote, and support women leaders.** Feature women leaders during and after their campaigns to increase their visibility. The media should also provide equal airtime and fair coverage of women candidates and their campaigns.
11. **Conduct nationwide civic and voter education programmes.** The media can focus on engaging both men and women to raise awareness about women's political rights, the importance of their participation in the electoral processes, and the importance of voting and making informed choices.
12. **Build the capacity of the media in gender-sensitive reporting.** This will facilitate better communication and information sharing, and help guide the younger generation as they navigate the political landscape.
13. **Profile successful women role models in politics and leadership.** Showcase experienced role models and feature their stories and achievements through various media platforms.
14. **Support monitoring and evaluation.** Researchers can conduct studies on the number of women vying for positions during the elections, the number of women who hold political positions and participate in decision-making processes. Studies that examine the effectiveness and impact of policies, awareness campaigns, training programmes, and legal reforms that promote women's political participation would also be useful. Distribute the findings to inform programme design and implementation.

**WOMEN'S MACHINERIES** (formal government structures tasked with promoting gender equality and improving the status and rights of women such as the MGCSW.)



**15. Empower women through the provision of knowledge and skills.** Women need more skills in public speaking, negotiation, conflict resolution, and decision-making. Other critical skills include preparing a manifesto, campaign organising and management, fundraising and resource mobilisation, strategic planning, voter outreach, and media engagement.

**16. Women's machineries work together to finalise and disseminate key legal frameworks.** The MGCSW, Ministry of Justice, and parliament should work together to finalise the key legal documents that enhance women's participation in the elections.



**17. Promote women's rights and participation in the permanent constitution-making and electoral processes.** This will strengthen the role of women's organisations and networks.

**18. Facilitate the dissemination of relevant documents.** This includes the Women's Charter, which supports women's political participation.

**19. Allocate resources to support women candidates.** Women need financing for campaigns to ensure they can amplify their voices and support their specific needs.

#### CSOS, NGOS, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, AND DONORS



**20. Provide financial and technical support to enhance the capacity of women's organisations.** National and international NGOs (INGOs) can help women advocate for their rights and provide training and mentorship to aspiring women leaders. INGOs can also facilitate collaboration and networking among women's organisations to amplify their voice and influence.

**21. Raise awareness about the 35% Gender Quota.** Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to disseminate information about the 35 per cent quota for women in all public institutions and political establishments. This strategy should leverage various communication channels, including radio, social media, public gatherings, and community outreach programmes. Engage both men and women and emphasise the importance and benefits of women's representation.



**22. Amplify the stories of successful women role models in politics and leadership.** Showcase the stories and achievements of role models through various media outlets and platforms, and establish mentorship programmes to connect aspiring women leaders with experienced role models.

**23. Work with traditional and community leaders to change perceptions and attitudes about women in leadership.** Positive narratives about women's contributions to community development and decision-making can help address harmful cultural practices that limit women's opportunities. Encourage dialogue and engagement between women leaders and community members.



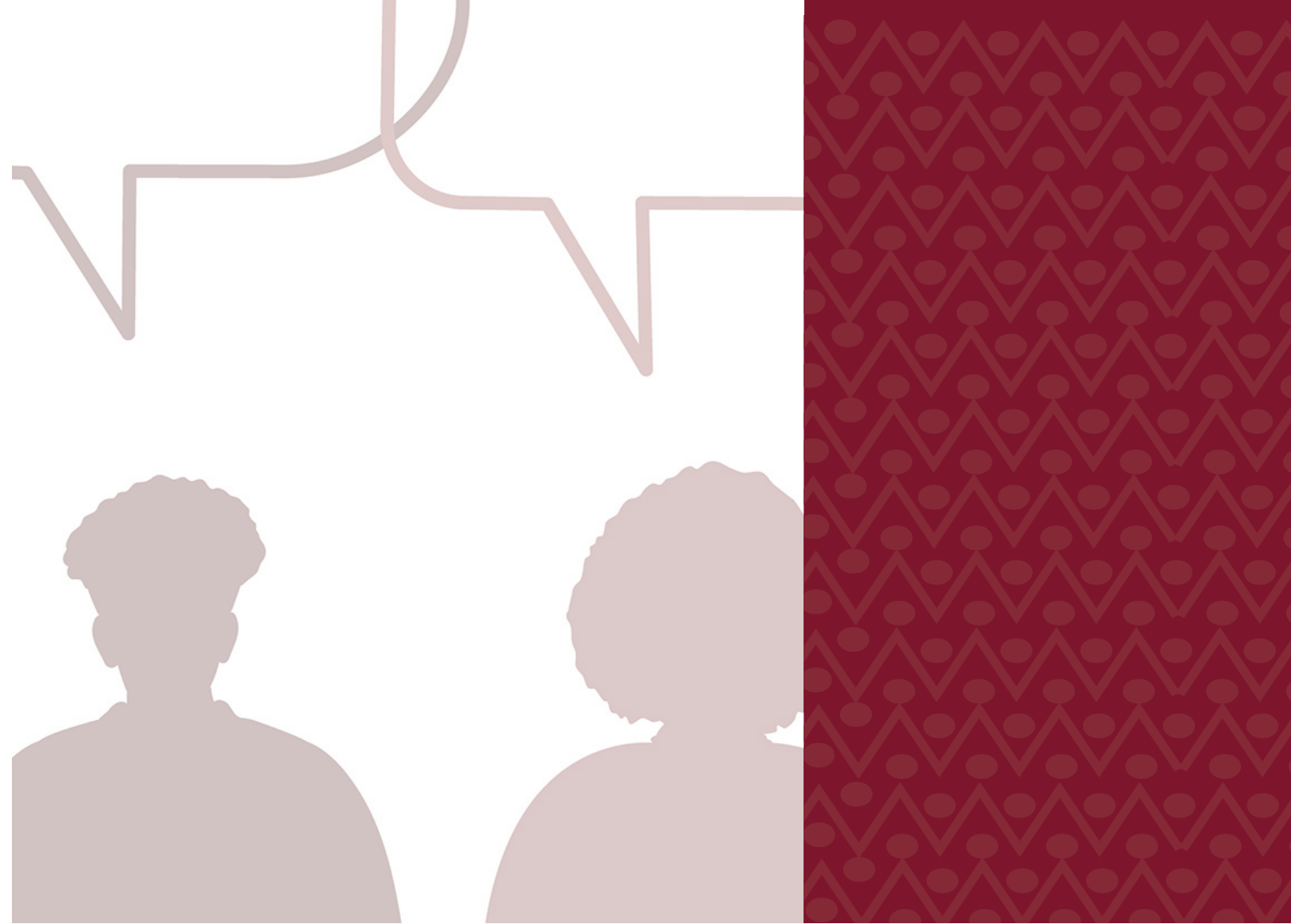
**PROTECTION  
& SECURITY**

- 24. Engage men as allies who will advocate for women’s political participation.** Conduct awareness campaigns targeting men to challenge traditional gender roles and promote the benefits of women’s leadership. Encourage men in positions of power to mentor and support women leaders.
  
- 25. Set up a women’s situation room.** NGOs and INGOs can help to establish a “situation room”—a safe place where women from all parts of the country, can seek advice and support, and document their challenges and develop strategies to overcome them.

---

## ACRONYMS

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| AU       | African Union  |
| BDPfA    | Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action                                |
| CEDAW    | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CRSV     | Conflict Related Sexual Violence   |
| COVID 19 | Coronavirus disease  |
| CSO      | Civil Society Organisations  |
| FGDs     | Focus Group Discussions  |
| GBV      | Gender-based violence  |
| GEPA     | Gender Equality in Public Administration                                   |
| GoSS     | Government of South Sudan  |
| ICAN     | International Civil Society Action Network                                 |
| INGO     | International non-governmental organisation                                |
| KIIs     | Key Informant Interviews   |
| MGCSW    | Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare                               |
| NAP      | National Action Plan   |
| NAS      | National Salvation Front   |
| NEC      | National Election Commission   |
| NGO      | Non-governmental organisation  |
| NTLI     | National Transformational Leadership Institute                             |
| PCC      | Political Parties Council  |
| R-ARCSS  | Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan         |
| R-JMEC   | Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission                   |
| RTGoNU   | Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity                      |
| SHECs    | State High Electoral Committees  |
| TCSS     | The Transitional Constitution of South Sudan                               |
| UN       | United Nations   |
| UoJ      | University of Juba   |
| UNSCR    | United Nations Security Council Resolution                                 |
| WHO      | World Health Organization  |



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

South Sudan's history of conflict and entrenched patriarchal norms have hindered women's political participation. Despite legal provisions for gender equality, women face numerous challenges in achieving political representation due to marginalisation and exclusion from decision-making processes. Traditional norms limit their opportunities for education, employment, and political leadership. While women have the potential to contribute significantly to national development, there is insufficient evidence of their impact.

The concept of women's rights in electoral politics is gaining global prominence, supported by international declarations like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action, and United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which emphasise the need to include women in decision-making processes at all levels.

However, very few South Sudanese women hold significant political leadership roles despite the presence of progressive legal frameworks. Addressing this underrepresentation requires empirical evidence and a systematic approach to leverage women's leadership potential. In this context, the NTLI, University of Juba, conducted a survey to assess women's preparedness for elections, aiming to gather insights and support mechanisms for their participation.

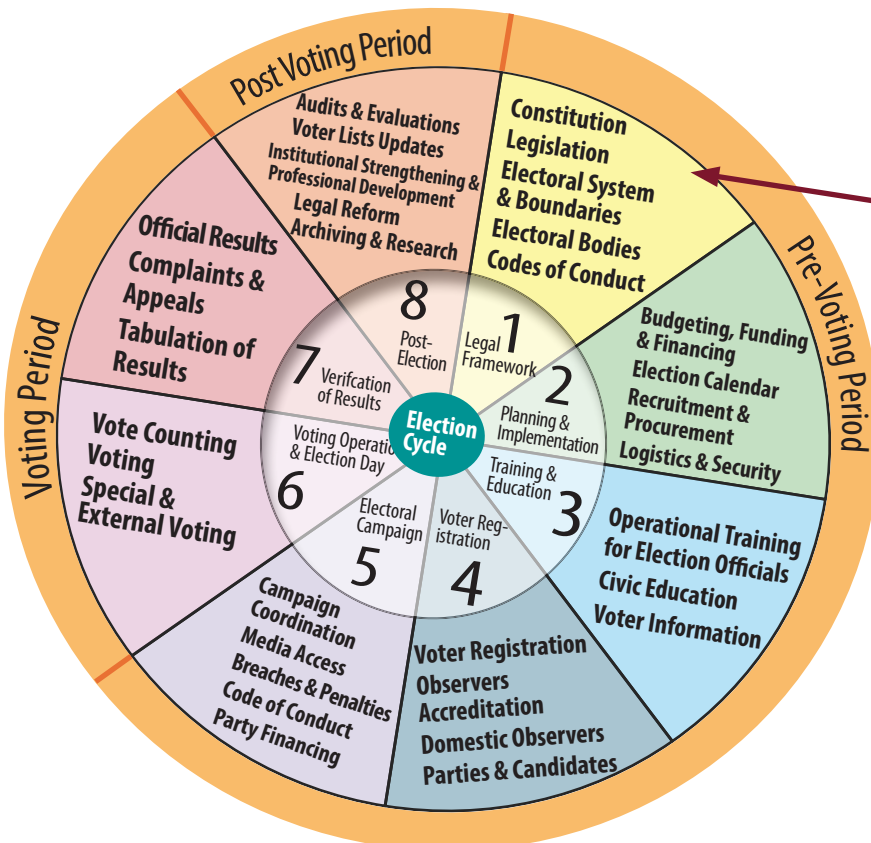
## 1.2 Existing Dilemmas

The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was signed in September 2018, with elections scheduled for December 2022. However, in August 2022, the parties agreed to extend the transitional period by 24 months—from February 2023 to February 2025, requiring South Sudan to hold elections by December 2024. By September 2024, the Political Parties Council (PPC) had awarded registration certificates to twenty-nine (29) political parties.

In early 2024, the National Elections Commission (NEC) announced that voting would take place on 22 December 2024. By the end of June 2024, however, several critical pre-elections tasks (see Figure 1) remained incomplete, including the release of the electoral calendar, the unification and redeployment of forces, the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) process, the drafting of the permanent constitution, voter registration, the delimitation of constituencies, and civic education. As a result, on the 18 September 2024 the parties requested a further 24-month extension of the transition period starting in February 2025 and ending February 2027. The new date for elections was then set for December 2026 (R-JMEC Quarterly Report, 2024).

The European Centre for Electoral Support developed “The Election Cycle “ in a collaborative effort to clarify the pre-electoral, electoral, and post-electoral phases and what is needed within each phase to ensure the results have come about through a democratic process—and not just on the day of elections. NTLI’s assessment of this Electoral Cycle shows that less than 15 per cent of the Electoral Cycle was complete.

As shown in **Figure 1**, South Sudan has yet to complete the activities needed to fulfill the Legal Framework phase, including a permanent Constitution, Legislation, Electoral System & Boundaries, Electoral Bodies, and some Codes of Conduct are still required.



**Figure 1: Election Cycle Periods**  
 (source <https://www.eces.eu/en/electoral-cycles-steps-training>)  
 In the pre-voting period and only within the Legal Framework category, have some activities been completed in South Sudan. (NTLI 2025 ).

In August 2024, the PPC formally passed the **Election Code of Conduct for Political Parties**, which binds all registered parties to agreed upon standards of behaviour during elections. This was followed by the NEC adopting three essential regulations related to the Code of Conduct:

1. **Regulation No. 1/2024 on the Use and Purpose of a Code of Conduct**, and the NEC Code of Conduct 2024, which governs the professional and ethical conduct of NEC commissioners and staff.
2. **Regulation No. 2/2024 on Observers, Media Representatives, Agents and Special Guests**, which sets out rules and codes of conduct for observers, media, party agents, and other approved guests involved in the electoral process.
3. **Regulation No. 3/2024 on Election Campaigns**, which provides the framework for how political parties and candidates should conduct their campaigns.

Three important Codes of Conduct are still needed to guide election processes:

- i. **A Code of Conduct for the Security Forces**, which is explicitly referenced in the R-ARCSS.
- ii. **A Code of Conduct addressing election-related GBV** during campaigns and voting, which is implied in the R-ARCSS. This Code should also include provisions for the protection of vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and people with disabilities.
- iii. **A Code of Conduct for social-media and online engagement** during the election period, which is increasingly important given the rise in the number of technology-facilitated GBV cases.

A general election requires preparation to ensure the administration of the elections is professional, credible, and transparent. The following is a summary of other critical conditions that need to be completed:

- > The electoral environment needs to be physically safe and secure, supported by security measures to allow freedom of expression so that political parties can convey their messages.
- > A guarantee of security and safety of voters and candidates is needed before, during, and after voter registration, when voters cast their ballots, and when election materials are moved.
- > The electoral register needs to be published at least six months before holding elections. This requires people to have national identification cards or other forms of identification.
- > The Elections Act provides for out-of-country voting in the 'Refugee Camps and Diaspora (Art 35 (4)); which requires the demarcation of boundaries.
- > Voters will elect candidates on many ballots including the presidency, governors, members of parliament at national and state levels, the Women's List, the Party List, the Geographical Constituency List, the Council of States, as well as local government positions such as County Commissioners, City Mayors, and Urban and Rural Councils.

Therefore, civic and voter education is needed to ensure women, youth, and people with disabilities in rural and urban areas can effectively exercise their constitutional rights. This education needs to take into consideration the low literacy rate (76% illiteracy) within the country (UNESCO, 2024).

- > Election campaigns and their associated costs are not widely known. Most women cannot afford to engage in a political campaign unless they are fully supported by a political party.

Despite these challenges, NTLI and its partners agree it is important to not only reveal the barriers to women's ability to participate in the election process but to ensure the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of women are integrated into the next steps in order to remove these barriers. The delay in the election process offers an opportunity to for women in South Sudan to engage and participate meaningfully in the process. Therefore, the process of inquiry and the voices of women who shared their experiences are relevant to informing election processes.

### 1.3 Objectives

The three objectives of the Preparedness of Women Survey:

- Assess voter preparedness as voters and candidates.
- Explore the perceptions of women's political participation.
- Identify the factors affecting women's involvement in the election process.



### 1.4 Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were employed.

Data was collected from a total of 726 respondents out of the anticipated 832 respondents.

**Desk Review:** Qualitative data was gathered from a desk review of policy briefs, the R-ARSS, peace implementation reports, national and international electoral guidelines and reports, the quarterly Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC) reports, and other relevant GoSS documents.

**Questionnaire:** A structured questionnaire with 56 questions was used to gather quantitative data from 726 respondents from all States and AAs. The data was collected in person or by phone through Kobo Collect.

**Key Informant Interviews (KII):** In total, 22 women participated in interviews. Twelve (12) KIIs were conducted with women leaders, aspirants, candidates, and people from within women's machineries, CSOs, NGOs, and political parties in Juba. Another ten (10) women, drawn from those who attended the "Women's Political Participation in Elections" training held in Juba, were also interviewed.

**Focus group discussions (FGDs):** Six (6) focus group discussions were held with a total of 120 participants comprising of 63 women (53%) and 57 men (48%).

The research team visited seven States including Unity, Central Equatoria, Upper Nile, Lakes State, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Jonglei, and Western Equatoria. They met with people from each State capital and travelled to one or more rural communities. Floods, insecurity, and lack of local resources limited travel to some parts of the country.

Researchers interacted with the study participants from Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap, Eastern Equatoria, Greater Pibor AA, Abyei AA, and Ruweng AA when they were in Juba for other activities, such as the training workshop.

Using a purposive sampling procedure, the team targeted knowledgeable women and men in leadership positions, including members of parliament.

## 1.5 Respondents

The respondents for the questionnaire included community leaders, CSO representatives, traditional leaders, women leaders, youth leaders, and organised forces (including the military, the police, security guards, and others in the security sector). Female respondents from CSOs and in leadership roles were well represented, while male respondents dominated traditional leadership and youth leadership roles.

The focus group discussions, in-person and phone Interviews also included youth representatives, community leaders, people with disabilities, women community leaders, and women in political parties from urban and rural areas.

To broaden the perspective, women who participated in the “Women’s Political Participation in Election Training,” co-sponsored by NTLI and UN Women, were also included in the KIIs. These women are from the law and the judiciary sector, parliament, the higher education sector, civil society, the media, and organised forces.

The demographic variables in this study include gender (female and male); marital status (married, unmarried); five age categories of youth (18–25), adult women and men (26–35) and (36–55), and older men and women (56–65) and (65+); the level of education attained (no school, primary school, secondary school, university); and rural versus urban locations.

Urban areas are defined as those places with a high population density and amenities such as healthcare facilities, secondary schools, and security. State capitals and large towns, including Bentiu (Unity State), Juba (Central Equatoria), Malakal (Upper Nile), Rumbek (Lakes State), Wau (Western Bahr el Ghazal), and Yambio (Western Equatoria), Aweil (Northern Bahr el Ghazal), Bor (Jonglei), Kuajok (Warrap), Torit (Eastern Equatoria), Pibor (Greater Pibor Administrative Area), Abyei (Abyei Administrative Area), and Pariang (Ruweng Administrative Area) are considered urban.

Rural areas in the context of this study included 41 towns with smaller populations, fewer amenities, and which rely on agricultural or natural resources for income. A sample of these remote rural locations include Anyidi, Pakeer, Pariak, Abar-kou Boma, Malek Agok, Wanyjok, Gok-Machar, Lekuangole, Chede, Luchuk, Akotweng, Amoulesap, Jedid, Akorogbodi, Mameze, Tindoka, Terekeka, Mijak, Alabek, Lelo, and Ogot.

## 1.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis process included the results from both qualitative and quantitative methods, using concurrent triangulation to control the process of data collection and data interpretation. The research team used the Kobo statistical package to generate tables, graphs, and percentages.

The data collected provides evidence for the analysis of the level of inclusion of women in political processes and is the basis for the recommendations.

A team leader from NTLI supervised the team and coordinated the design, training, and data collection processes. Ethical considerations included obtaining consent and ensuring participants understood the significance of the study objectives.





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## 2. FINDINGS

The analysis is organised into ten sections. Data from the questionnaire, interviews, and group discussions are presented by theme. A summary of the demographic variables that include gender, age, marital status, level of education, and location are also included in each section. The voices of women who shared their experiences are also featured—the selected quotes represent the views of the many women who participated in the interviews and discussions.

The data collected from all sources of inquiry reveals that, in general, South Sudanese women face many significant challenges in their pursuit of political participation. The study reveals that women are not prepared to engage in an election process as candidates because the Permanent Constitution process has not been finalised, and important legal frameworks such as the Women's Empowerment Bill have not been passed into law. As voters, many women who would be voting for the first time do not know their rights, the number of votes they would need to cast, or which parties are running in their States.

Despite these obstacles, there results show a strong interest in politics among women, indicating a potential for greater participation. The desire to improve lives and contribute to social development emerged as two key motivations for those women considering running for leadership positions.

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## 2.1 THE PREPAREDNESS OF WOMEN VOTERS FOR ELECTIONS

The majority of women supported holding elections, but they also agreed that important steps needed to be completed for fair elections, notably the census and the passing of the Permanent Constitution.

During the discussions about how prepared women were as voters, women shared their views on the process, security, and freedom of expression.

Women expressed concern about national security, saying:



*"... the core thing is that there is not yet a completed security arrangement. The country has different [military/police] forces, how are we going to make it if anything happens during or after elections?"*

There was also a real concern for individual and collective safety in communities because of the level of insecurity and the different factions in the country.

One respondent in Wonduruba said, *"How will they vote? The forces of the NAS (National Salvation Front) are there. If I want to stand, I have to go there but these are constituencies with insecurity."*

Others stated: *"I fear for women to stand for elections because of the fear of security."*

*"Who will protect my campaign?"*

*"South Sudan was in crisis for a long time, and the transition is also taking a long time. We need a roadmap."*

The respondents also revealed that, in their experience, there is a shrinking civil and political space with no freedom of expression and a lack of freedom of assembly. The respondents agreed that freedom of assembly needs to become a constitutional right, with the freedom to discuss things in the media.

*"If you say something, you will be detained."*

*"At present, there is a lack of civic and political space."*

*"To come to this meeting, I needed a security pass."*

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## 2.2 INTEREST IN POLITICS

The survey results reveal a considerable level of interest in politics among both men and women, with 35 per cent of men and 31 per cent of women expressing a “strong interest” in politics. This is compared to 33 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men who expressed “no interest” in holding any political office.



**31% of women expressed a strong interest in politics.**

During the KIIs held in Juba, the responses to the level of interest in politics revealed that while the women were interested in politics, they were also concerned about the process.



Women expressed doubt that elections would be held.

*“Elections might be delayed because the census remains outstanding.”*

*“Women are not fully prepared. Now it’s March 2024 and we have not yet started campaigning.”*

*“The country is in a state of disbelief that the elections will happen.”*

*“On personal preparedness... they are ready. But the work has not started.”*

*“The election is so challenging [but it is] important for it to happen... How long can it stay like this?”*

One respondent explained that in her experience, women in government positions were in their jobs based on appointments and, as a result, *“...you can’t air out your views confidently because you might be trying to protect something.”* Meaning, that if there is a motion or an issue to raise that affects the people who made the appointment or were assigned the job *“...you can be thrown out.”*

And to follow, *“Once the election is held, the community would have a say over you.”*

*“Right now, no, they are not prepared for elections. MPs are reserved, doing their best, but there is a lot of fear.”*

**Location (Rural vs Urban):** The survey reveals that men and women living in urban areas had more interest in politics than those living in rural areas.

Urban men, at 38 per cent, and urban women, at 37 per cent, expressed more interest compared to their rural counterparts at 28 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively.

Ruweng AA had the highest number of respondents **who expressed interest in politics**, followed by Northern Bahr el Ghazal State and Central Equatoria. The States with the highest number of respondents who **are not interested** in politics were Upper Nile, Eastern Equatoria, and Western Bahr Ghazal State.



**30% of youth (women & men) expressed a strong interest in politics.**

In both urban and rural settings, men reported slightly higher interest in politics when compared to women. Men also expressed that they felt the country “is not prepared” for elections. Men and women shared their views:



*“It is fragile because you don’t want to touch on issues that will take us back [to civil war].”*

*“We grew up in refugee places, we’re tired.”*

*“So many things are not yet achieved... the electoral commission has just been formed but has not started working since there is no funding.”*

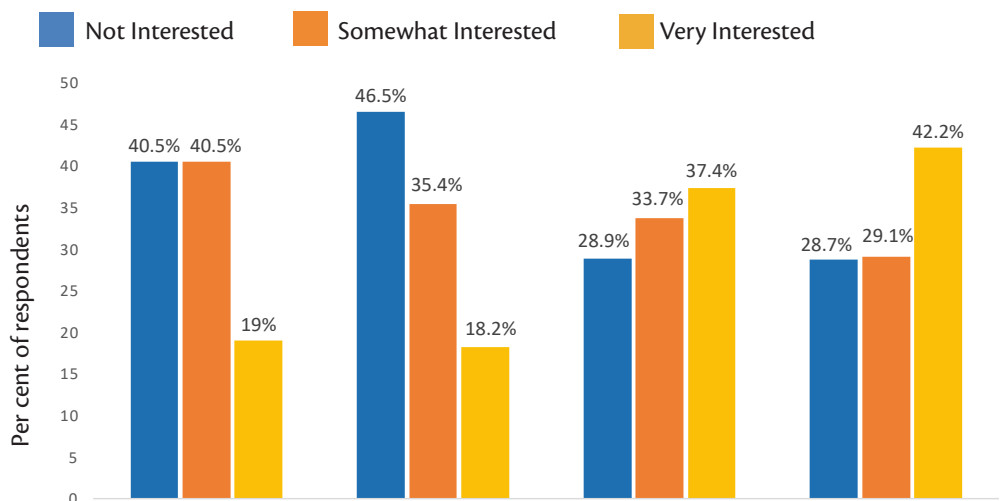
*“Yes, people want the elections but they are also hungry. A hungry man is an angry man.”*

**Gender:** Both unmarried women and men expressed more interest in politics than married women and men. Widows and widowers expressed a low interest in politics.

**Age:** The age group that had the most interest in politics were those aged 36 to 55 (34.7%) and those aged 56 to 65 years (34.4%). Younger respondents, 30 per cent in both the 18-25 and 26-35 age categories also expressed a “strong interest” in political positions.

**Education:** The survey revealed that those with the highest education were more interested in politics compared with those who had the least amount of education. This is consistent with the well-documented global trend, where people with a higher education engage more in politics and the election process. One explanation is that those with more education are more likely to have access to the institutions and mechanisms that encourage and support political engagement, while those with a lower education have less access and less capacity to engage.

**Figure 2: Interest in politics by level of education**



**Position of interest:** The study found that while the level of interest in politics was high, most people are interested in holding a political position; 40 per cent of women and 39 per cent of men had “no interest” in holding any political position. Among those who were interested, both men and women, they had a “high interest” in State MP positions (12.5%) and were “interested in” positions within a political party (6.3%). The number of uneducated respondents who were “interested in” the presidency was equal to those who had completed higher education.

The most common reasons why women respondents said they “have no interest” in holding political positions were related to a lack of access to financial resources and the restrictions of the prevailing social and cultural norms.

The economic constraints include a lack of access to the financial resources women need to campaign or participate effectively in politics.

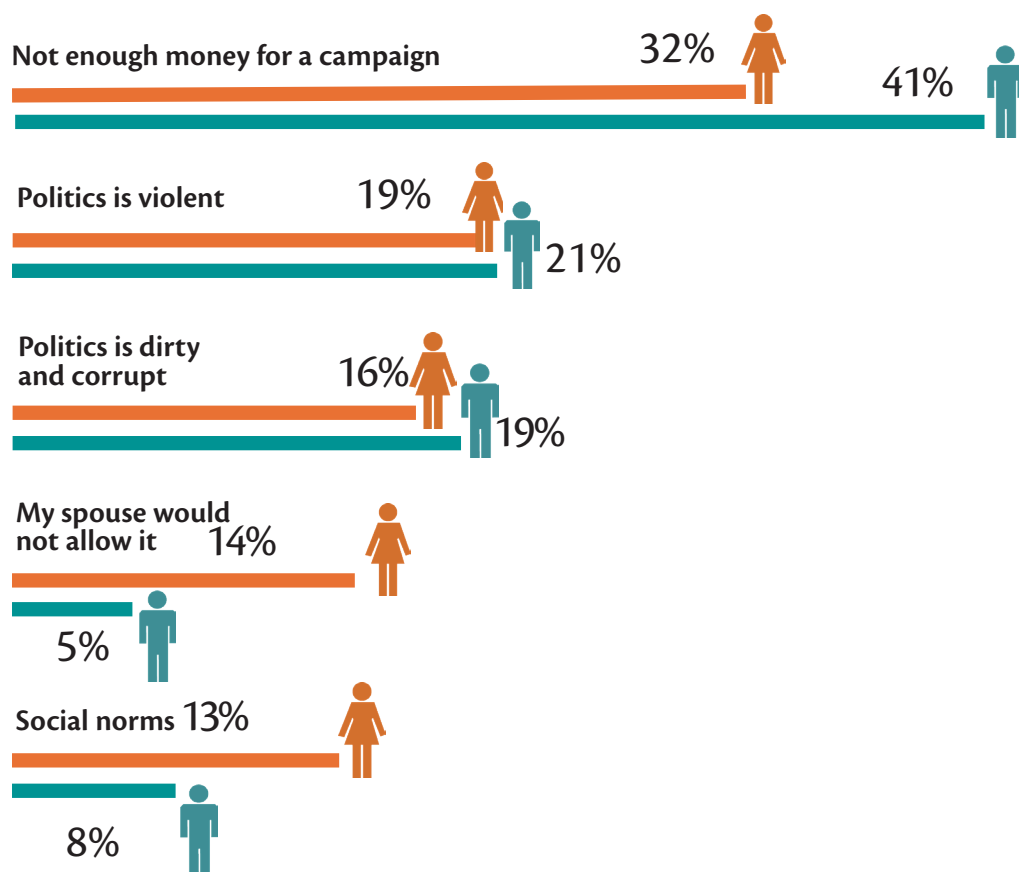
Education barriers were also significant, as women with lower educational levels felt less confident or qualified to pursue political positions.

Traditional gender roles often dictate that women should focus on household responsibilities rather than political roles. The lack of social support and limited public awareness about the importance of women’s participation in politics discourages women from pursuing political careers.

The political environment in South Sudan can also be aggressive and, at times, violent. This, combined with only a few female role models in high political positions, deters women from participating.

**Figure 3: Reasons for not having an interest in holding a political position**

The reasons women and men gave for having ‘no interest’ in politics



## 2.3 CONSIDERATION AND LIKELIHOOD OF ACCEPTING AN OPPORTUNITY TO RUN DURING ELECTIONS

A substantial portion of all respondents indicated they ‘have an interest’ in politics (31% F, 35% M). At the same time, a notable number of individuals said they were “**not interested**” in holding any political office (40% F, 39% M). Yet most respondents indicated they would ‘**likely accept the opportunity**’ to run for a position during elections (41% F, 42% M).

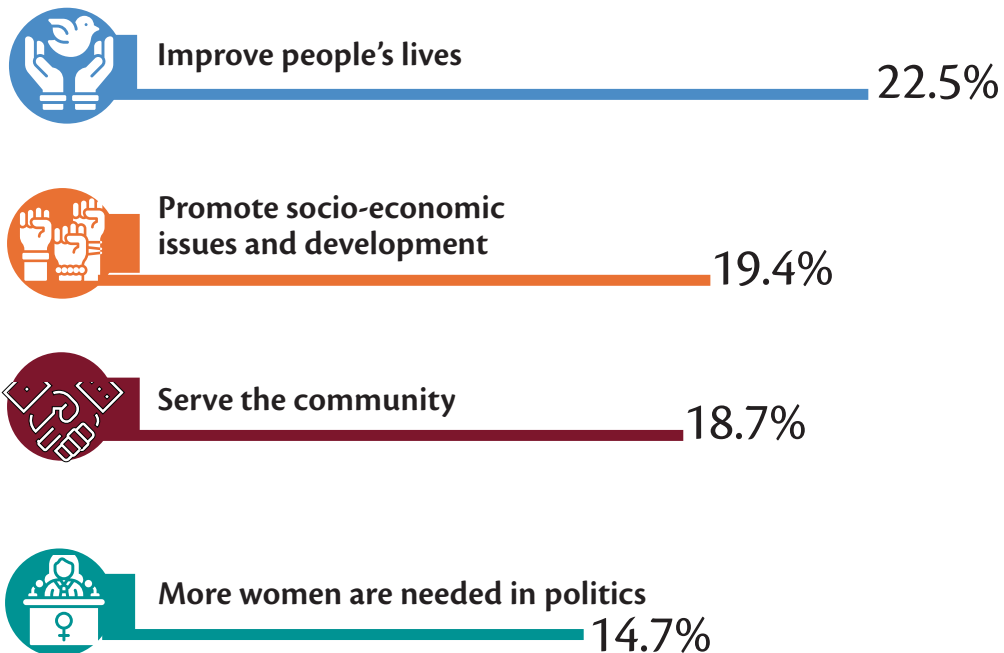
These contradictions can be interpreted as a positive indicator—when supported and encouraged to participate, women will run for political office. At the same time, they are cautious, knowing the significant challenges they face.

### 2.3.1 Reason to Run for Office

The respondents were asked to consider why they would run for office, the top four reasons are listed below with only a slight difference between men and women. The ‘other’ reasons include wanting to change legislation and policy, longstanding involvement in country’s political struggle, and having the right qualifications.

Figure 4: Reasons to run for office

Among both women and men, the top four reasons to run for office:





During the interviews, women voiced support for those who wanted to participate in the election process and expressed some of the challenges:

*"Let them be equal so they will participate like men. "*

*"Give them the opportunity to campaign...[and] not be intimidated."*

Name-calling is a problem.

*"...you're just a woman you shouldn't be participating."*

Meetings are a problem.

*"They put the meetings at unfavourable hours, we leave work to take care of our kids. It's done intentionally so women are left out."*

Women are not as economically empowered.

*"There is no money to campaign."*

*"Men support each other. If you're a man, your male colleagues will support you, give you loans. Women don't stand for each other economically, Why? Because they don't have money and Pull Her Down Syndrome."*



*The lack of both resources and encouragement leads many women to believe that participating in politics and vying for leadership is not an option.*

## 2.4 PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The results from the survey reveal a contradiction between acknowledging that women are capable of holding political office (most respondents agreed) versus actively encouraging their participation in electoral politics (most respondents did not support/or actively encourage).

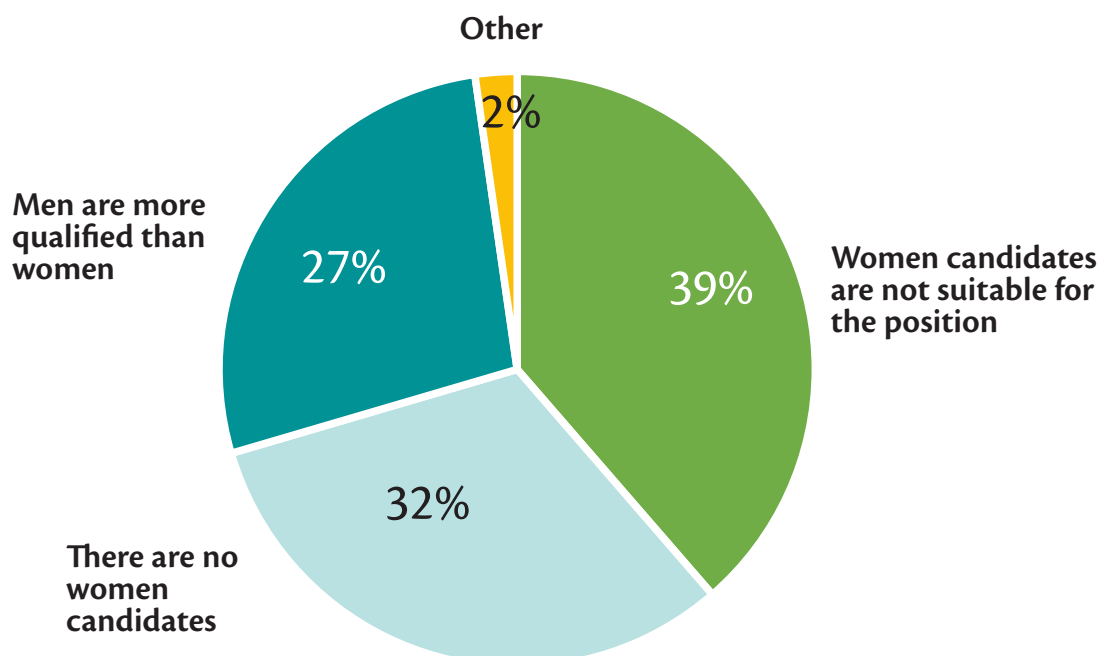
Overall, the respondents had a positive attitude towards women participating in politics, with 94 per cent of women and men agreeing that a woman can become president, a governor, or an MP in South Sudan. This positive attitude may be a result of the number of women (32% of government officials) appointed to those positions, including the vice-president Mama Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, during the first transition period (2018-2022). These women are seen as role models, and therefore many people think it is possible for women to be in leadership positions.

A concerning finding, however, was that a significant proportion of men and women (25.5%) also agreed that men make better political leaders than women, further reinforcing existing gender disparities in leadership. Interestingly, while a majority acknowledged that women are capable of holding a high political office, only a small number of respondents (7%) "actively support women" who are vying for leadership in elections.

The reasons that contribute to the lack of support for women candidates, as selected by the respondents, included the perception of women's suitability for political positions, beliefs that men are more qualified than women, and the scarcity of women candidates. There was little to no difference between men's and women's selections.

**Figure 5: Reasons for the lack of support for women candidates in political positions**

*Totals from all respondents*



**Gender:** The survey findings reveal that a majority of the women, at 62 per cent, “do not belong” to any political party compared to their male counterparts, where only 53 per cent of men “do not belong” to a political party.

Political parties are important vehicles for women to get access to leadership. However, at the time of the survey, there was limited information about the number of parties registered and their manifestos, even though many meetings were held with political parties to advocate for women to stand as candidates or to work within the party.

**Location (Rural vs Urban):** There was a higher proportion of women (39%) who belonged to political parties in urban areas compared to those in rural areas (37%). A similar trend appeared with men, more men in urban areas (55%) belonged to political parties compared with men in rural areas (31%).

**Location (By State):** The States with more than 50 per cent of the respondents who said they belonged to political parties are Warrap, Lake, Unity, and Ruweng AA. The States with over 70 per cent of respondents who said they did not belong to any political parties are Upper Nile, Jonglei, Western Bahr el Ghazal and Central Equatoria.

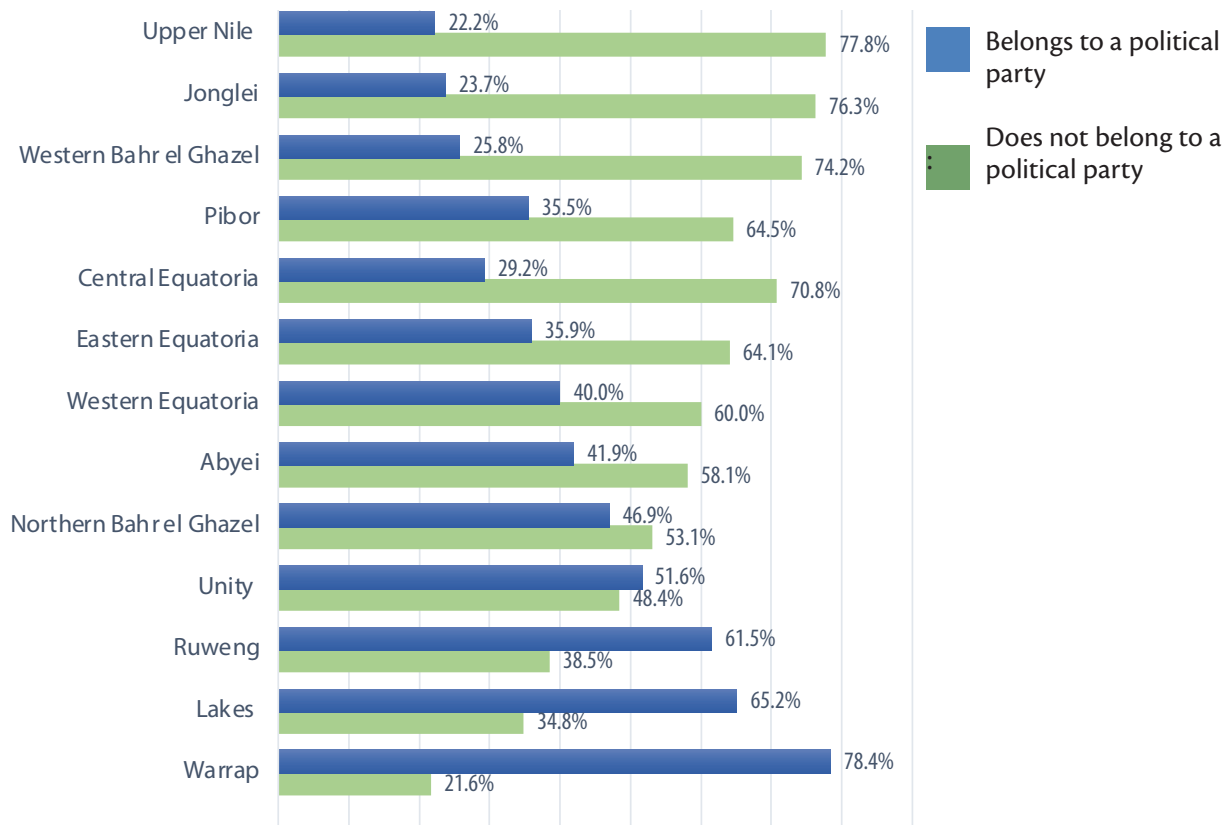
**Age:** The highest number of respondents who belonged to political parties were aged between 36 and 55 years, followed by those aged between 56 and 65 years. Those in the 65+ age category had the least number of people who belonged to a political party.

**Education:** The majority of respondents with a university education (48%) belonged to political parties. Those with secondary school education were the second highest category to belong to a political party (44%).

As expected, respondents with primary school level education (68%) and respondents with no education (67%) were ranked the highest for not belonging to a political party. Since illiteracy stands at 76 per cent (UNESCO, 2024) in South Sudan, we can infer that the majority of women, especially in rural areas, would be in this category.

Together, these findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address these perceptions and promote a more supportive environment for women’s engagement with political parties.

**Figure 6: Characteristics of those who belonged to a political party**

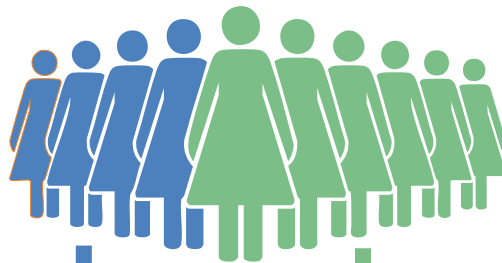


**47.5%**  
of men "belong to"  
a political party



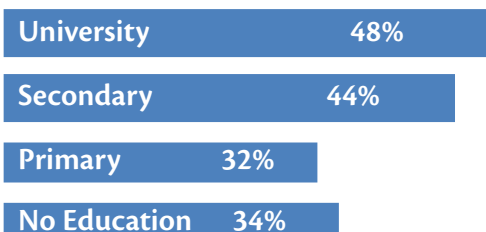
**52.5%**  
of men "do not belong"  
to a political party

**37.4%**  
of women "belong to"  
a political party

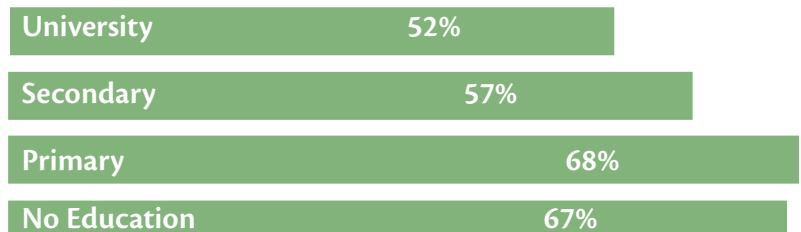


**62.1%**  
of women "do not belong"  
to a political party

**Of those who belong to a political party their level of education was:**



**Of those who don't belong to a political party their level of education was:**





From the FGDs and interviews women had this to say about their participation in political parties. These observations were shared by activists, parliamentarians, academia, women from peace mechanisms, and women from NGOs, INGOs, and civil society.

*"Women are not there in political parties."*

If a woman holds a position in a political party, "...the party leaders are not bringing women to the decision-making level."

*"Many of the women in the office are cleaners or secretaries, and so women are not 'at the table'."*

*"We wrote a position paper about the need for the inclusion of women in an effort to bring them to the table and to increase the chances of their voices being incorporated into the policymaking process."*

*"Voices of women have not been incorporated in the constitutional review commission. The meetings require us to stay overnight. This is a challenge because when women are outside [of the home] at night, it brings conflict with the spouse and the family."*

*"We need to have grassroots meetings to shape what kind of governing system we want."*

*"We need a strategy to empower female MPs."*

*"There is a chance to do the constitution-making in 24 months but nothing much has happened yet."*

*"The process started last November [2023], a little more than a year before the elections. I hope there is sufficient time given for the process because what we shape today will determine our future for ten years."*

Female MPs also shared their experience of watching others being scolded, fired, or replaced. As a result, they are afraid to raise motions, speak up, or discuss sensitive issues during party meetings or formal sessions.

*"If [such a person] raises a sensitive motion, tomorrow you will hear she is revoked from parliament."*

*"There is no space to raise a motion, if you start a motion on a difficult issue another government official will come to you and say something like, 'My daughter you're still young, you don't know. We know the issues.' So, female MPs have a hard time raising difficult issues. "*

*"We are protecting our seat [jobs], and therefore protecting our family. We are just there. I don't feel good about this."*

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## 2.5 PUBLIC INFLUENCE ON GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING

From the data gathered, it is evident that men had more influence compared to women on decision-making processes within the government. We attribute this to social norms, customs, and cultural practices that enforce the idea that the women's sphere is the private spaces of the family and specific community activities, and not in public spheres such as governance. Therefore, their ability to interact with the public on civic affairs may be constrained.

The concept of public influence includes affecting someone in a position of authority or within the government by changing their opinion or contributing to the outcome of a decision. In the context of this survey, it also includes the perception of the freedom to choose who to vote for and whether you have been encouraged or discouraged from participating in the election process.

### 2.5.1 Influence On Government Decision Making

**Gender:** Respondents were asked how much influence they thought they had over government decisions. The majority of men (33%) reported that they had "a lot of influence" compared to women (26%). Men (37%) reported that they had "some influence" compared to women (29%). A majority of women (45%) indicated that they had "no influence" compared to men (30%).

**Location (Rural vs Urban):** The responses indicated that people living in urban areas thought they "have more influence" on government decision-making compared to those in rural areas. Specifically, in rural areas, 23 per cent of people felt they "have a lot of influence", 37 per cent "have some influence", and 41 per cent "have no influence".

In contrast, in urban areas, 33 per cent of people felt they "have a lot of influence", 28 per cent "have some influence", and 39 per cent "have no influence". This trend was consistent among both men and women.

**Location (By State):** Warrap and Northern Bahr el Ghazal had the highest percentage of people who felt they "have a lot of influence" on government decision-making.

In contrast, Central Equatoria and Upper Nile had the highest percentage of people who felt they "have no influence". The data shows a varied distribution of influence across different States; some States had a significant portion of their population feeling they had "some influence", while others had a higher percentage of people feeling they had 'no influence'. This variation was seen in the data among both men and women across these locations.

**Gender:** Men in the 65+ age category said they had the most influence on government decision-making, while middle-aged individuals had less influence compared to youth in the 18-25 age category. Specifically, 31 per cent of those 18 to 25 years old felt they "have a lot of influence", while 41 per cent felt they "have no influence".

Youth use technology and social media to influence government decisions through criticism and comments. The trend of younger people using online media to exert influence is observed not only in South Sudan but also in many other countries around the world.

The data underscores the significant role youth play in influencing government decisions through digital platforms.

### 2.5.2 Freedom To Choose Whom To Vote For

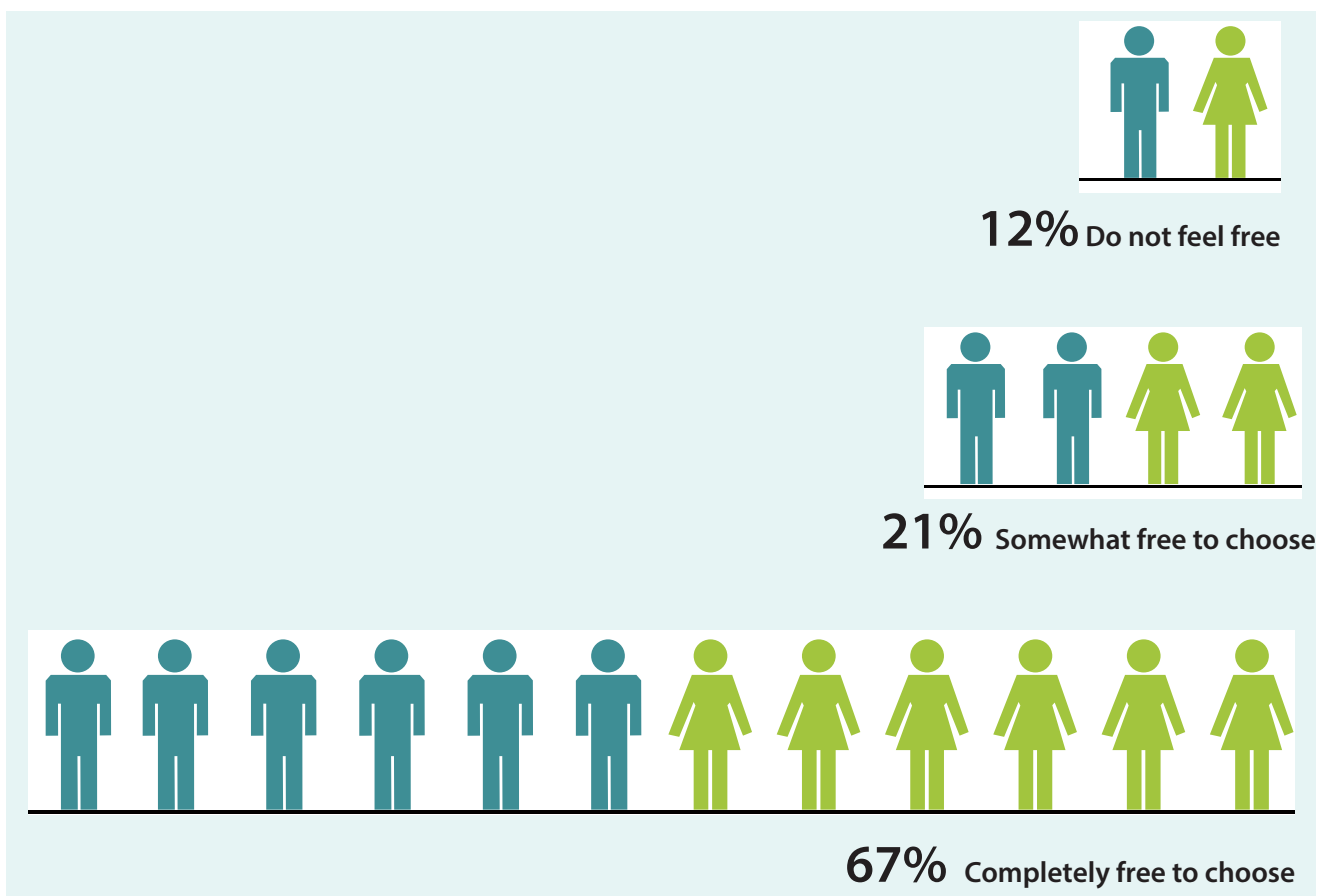
Related to the feelings about influence over decision-making processes is the perception of your freedom to choose the candidate you want to vote for during an election.

**Gender:** There was a consensus across genders regarding perceived voting freedom. Specifically, 67 per cent of both men and women felt “completely free” to choose their preferred candidates, 21 per cent felt “somewhat free”, and 12 per cent felt “not free at all”.



Most women and men feel completely free to make their own choices in elections.

Figure 7: Perception of voting freedom among women and men



**Location (By State):** The data shows significant regional disparities in perceived voting freedom, with Upper Nile showing the most pronounced lack of freedom. Fifty-four (54) per cent of respondents in Upper Nile indicated they “do not feel free”. For women in Upper Nile, 66 per cent indicated they “do not feel free” to choose who to vote for. free”.

Western Equatoria followed with 26 per cent of all the respondents and 24 per cent of women who said they “do not feel free” to choose their candidates during an election. And in Jonglei, it was 22 per cent of the total respondents and 15 per cent of women who felt they were “not free to choose” who to vote for.

**Gender and Location (Rural vs Urban):** More women in rural areas felt “completely free” to choose who they wanted to vote for compared to women in urban areas. Overall, however, people in urban areas had more freedom to choose their candidates than those in rural areas. This perception of more freedom in urban areas is attributed to higher literacy and civic education.

This suggests that education initiatives and awareness programmes in urban areas may contribute to a stronger sense of voting freedom.

**Age:** Those in the 26–35 and 36–55 age categories experienced more constraints in their freedom to choose whom to vote for in elections. This suggests that middle-aged individuals may face unique challenges or pressures that limit their electoral freedom.

In contrast, those in the 18–25 and 65+ age categories reported feeling completely free in making their voting choices (80% and 87%). This suggests that youth and elders felt more empowered to vote according to their preferences.

This mirrored the trend related to the perception of influence in decision-making processes.

**Education:** The data shows that a higher level of education has a positive influence on the perception of freedom to choose whom to vote for in elections. As the level of education attained rises, the number of individuals who feel restricted in their voting choices decreases. This trend is evident among both men and women.

### **2.5.3 Is Running In An Election A Man’s Job?**

When asked to consider who should participate in elections, 16 per cent of respondents (15% F, 19% M) indicated that “it is a man’s job”. More respondents in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Eastern Equatoria, and Unity held this belief. More people in rural areas and more women compared to men indicated that running in an election “is a man’s job”.

**Age:** The respondents in the youth age categories (18-25 and 25-35) did not think running in an election “is a man’s job”, while the older population tended to hold a conservative view, aligning with traditional practices where men are seen as the rulers.

### **2.5.4 Encouraging Or Discouraging Yourself Or Women Not To Run In Elections**

**Gender:** About 19 per cent of respondents (18% F, 20% M) had told themselves or had told a woman not to run for an elected leadership position. Men were generally more likely to discourage women from running for office.

**State:** The States with 20 per cent or more of women who indicated “I have told myself or a woman that she should not run for an elected position” included (in order of least to most) Warrap (21%), Lakes (22%), Abyei AA (23%), Eastern Equatoria (24%), Northern Bahr el Ghazal (29.2%), and Ruweng AA (50%).

The States with 20 per cent or more of men who indicated “I have told myself or a woman that she should not run for an elected position” include Upper Nile (21.1%), Ruweng AA (26.7%), Jonglei (27.8%), Eastern Equatoria (31.8%), Abyei AA (33.3%), and Northern Bahr el Ghazal (44.0%).

**Age:** Those in the youth category (aged 18 to 25) were the most likely (79%) to encourage women to run for an elected positions compared to older people.

For example, only 20 per cent of women aged 18 to 25 “have told myself or a woman that she should not run for elected position”, compared to 50 per cent of women in the 65+ age category.

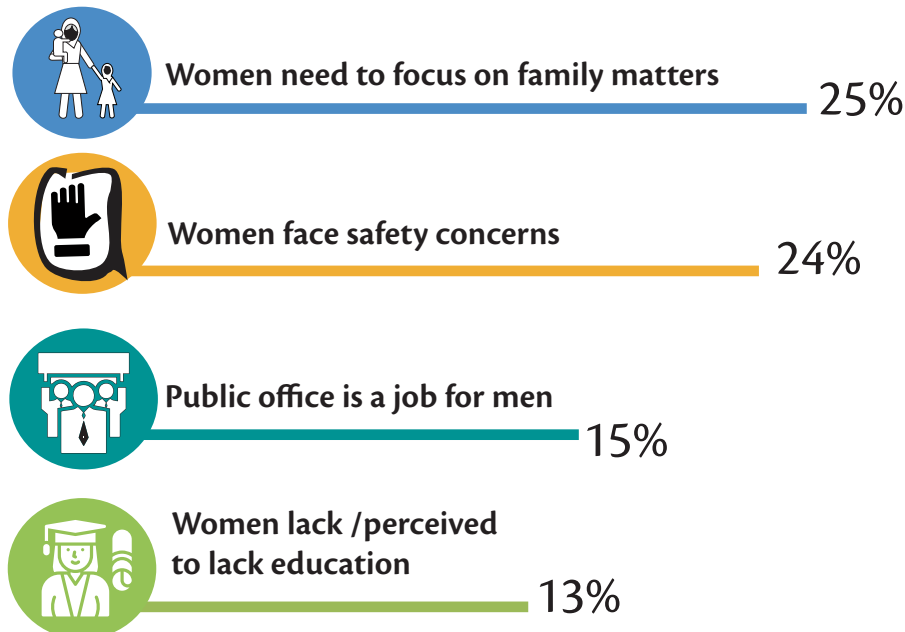
Similarly, only 22 per cent of men aged 18 to 25 “have told myself or a woman that she should not run for elected position”, compared to 47 per cent of men in the 56 to 65 age category who have discouraged women from vying for a leadership role.

**Education:** Individuals who received an education were more likely to encourage women to run for elected positions compared to those respondents who did not receive an education, with this trend being true for both men and women.

### 2.5.5 Reasons Why Women Are Discouraged From Vying For Elected Positions

The reasons given for why women were discouraged from vying for leadership were consistent among both men and women respondents. The reasons are listed in **Figure 8**.

Figure 8: Reasons women are discouraged from vying for leadership



### 2.5.6 Factors To Consider When Deciding Whom To Vote For

The respondents rated the following characteristics as important to consider when voting. The rating was similar among men and women, across urban and rural areas, in different age groups, marital status, and education levels.

The characteristics included:

- > Honesty of the candidate (26%)
- > The plans of the candidate after being elected (22%)
- > Experience in politics (19%)
- > The political party they represent (9%)
- > Age (7%)
- > Financial status (7%)
- > Gender (4%)
- > Religion (2%)
- > Others (2%)
- > Tribe (1%)

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## 2.6 PERCEPTION OF THE LEVEL OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS

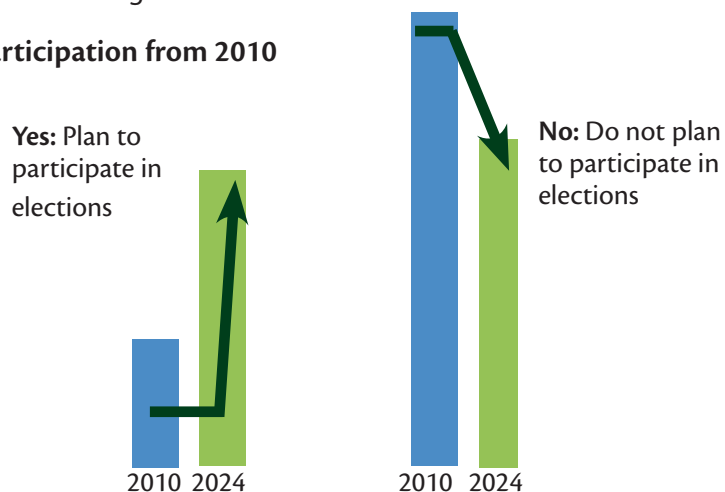
The data in this section presents how the respondents perceived the level of participation among women in the 2010 elections and for future elections. The findings reveal a significant improvement in women's intention to participate in elections as voters, candidates, and electoral officials.

### 2.6.1 Level of Participation

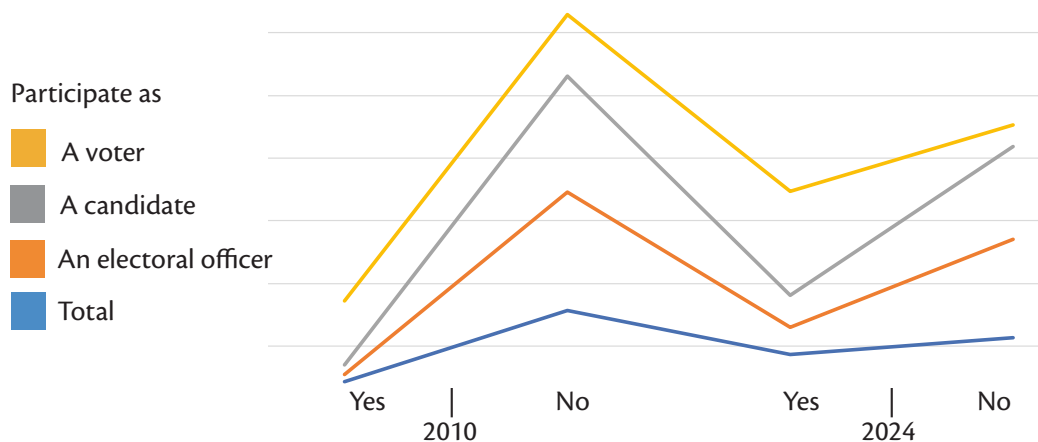
The level of participation in elections is expected to increase significantly. Those who intend to vote showed a 58 per cent increase over those respondents who voted in 2010, with women intending to vote showing an increase of 64 per cent and men by 49 per cent.

Over half the respondents (51% F, 56% M) voted in 2010. 83 per cent of women and 83 per cent of men said they intended to vote. Participation as candidates and electoral officers is also expected to increase for both genders.

**Figure 9a: Change in participation from 2010**



**Figure 9b: Change in participation from 2010**



## 2.7 ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT ELECTIONS

The respondents were asked about their access to electoral information, which included knowing the electoral calendar, how to register, when to vote, and which candidates were running. They were also asked how they accessed this information and which media channels they used or could access, such as TV, radio, social media, and phones.

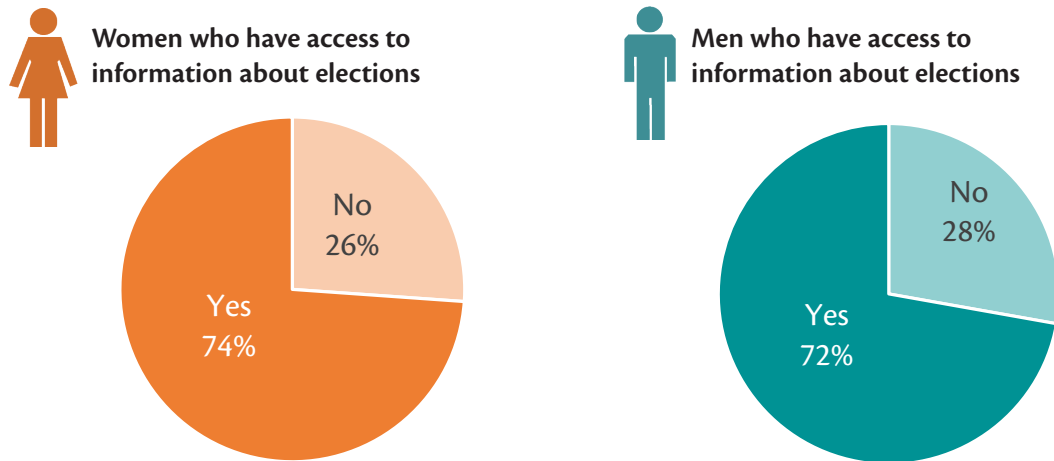
### 2.7.1 Access To Information

The data shows that access to electoral information remained a challenge, particularly in rural areas and among those with low education. Radio, social gatherings, and public rallies were the most effective means of disseminating electoral information, highlighting the need for targeted efforts to improve access and awareness, especially in underserved regions.

Overall, only 9.2 per cent of the respondents were unaware of elections planned for December 2024. Of all respondents, 27 per cent indicated they “did not have access” to information about elections. Among women, this was 26 per cent.

**Location (State):** The data from Abyei AA, Eastern Equatoria, Northern Bahr el Ghazel, Upper Nile, Ruweng AA, and Western Bahr el Ghazel showed they had “sufficient access” to electoral information. Unity stood out as the location with the most women (68%) and men (46%) who “do not have access” to electoral information. Western Equatoria also had limited access to electoral information.

Figure 10: Level of access to information about elections



**Location (Rural vs. Urban):** Rural areas had less access to electoral information than urban areas. The responses from the rural areas also showed that 35 per cent of women “have no access” to electoral information. Whereas in urban areas, only 19.7 per cent of women indicated they “have no access”.

**Education:** Those with some level of education, for both men and women, had more access to information. University (73%), Secondary (77%), Primary (76%), and No education (66%). Thirty-three per cent (33%) of those in the ‘No education’ category indicated they had “no access to information”.

### 2.7.2 Means Of Access To Information

The respondents reported they accessed electoral information through the radio, social gatherings, public rallies, social media, phone calls or phone messages, mobile (vehicle) announcers, TV, and print media—these were in order of the most to the least common.

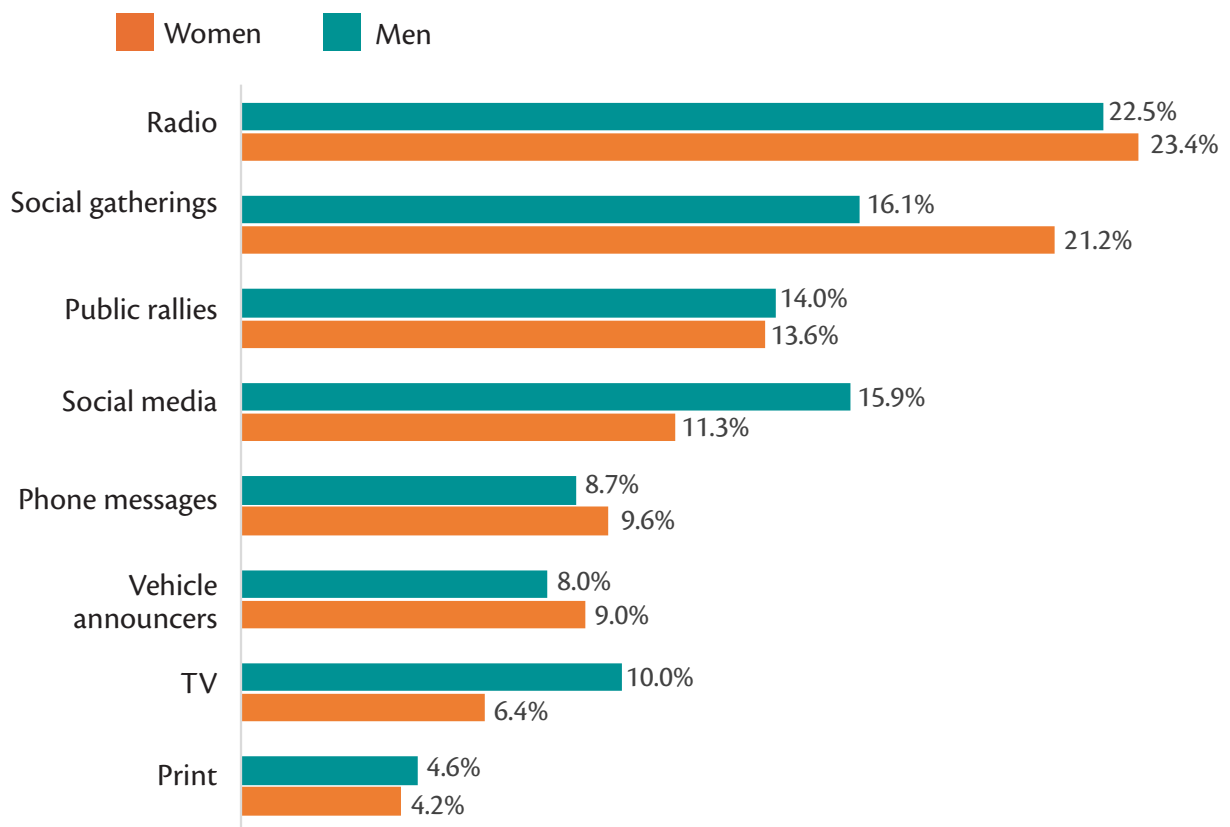
**Gender:** Men said they accessed radio, social gatherings, social media, public rallies, and TV most often. Women indicated they used radio, social gatherings, public rallies, social media, phone messages, and mobile vehicles most often. Women used TV and print media less than other channels.

**Location (Rural vs Urban):** Radio and social gatherings were also the main sources of information in both rural and urban areas.

**Age:** Radio, social gatherings, and social media were accessed the most among all age groups. Youth (18-25) accessed social media and print more often than social gatherings, and the older age groups preferred social gatherings over rallies and print.

**Education:** Those with lower education chose social gatherings, and the more educated chose to access radio programmes for electoral information.

Figure 11: Media used to access electoral information



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## 2.8 THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

This section uncovers the status of women's participation in community governance and their views on the level of political support for women's development and rights. We also explore some reasons why women were not considered for leadership positions in 2010 elections.

### 2.8.1 Local Leaders Working For Women

The study found that 91 per cent of women and 92 per cent of men said women "do not have a role" in community governance in their respective communities. Social norms that favour men prevent women from being included in community governance. At the same time, 58 per cent of all respondents believed their current community leaders were not working for women's development and rights.

**Location (Rural vs Urban):** Rural women felt more supported by their leaders (54%) compared to urban women (60.2%) who indicated "community leaders are not working for women's rights and development".

Conversely, urban men were more likely to feel that "leaders do not support women's development" (61%) compared to rural men (48%). More respondents in Jonglei, Lakes, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Western Bahr el Ghazal, and Western Equatoria perceived the leaders in these States as "not supporting women's development".

### 2.8.2 Choosing a Candidate

**Gender:** A total of 76 per cent of women believed they should decide for themselves who to vote for without a man's advice, while 17 per cent of women thought men should advise them.

Among men, 63 per cent believed women should decide for themselves, while 31 per cent thought men should advise them.

**Location (Rural vs Urban):** Rural women were slightly more inclined to seek men's advice compared to urban women, and rural men were more conservative, with a higher percentage believing they should advise women compared to urban men.

### 2.8.3 Reasons Why More Women Were Not Elected In 2010

The reasons women were not elected in 2010 included traditional practices, household responsibilities, and perceptions of women as weak or a poor choice for representation. Women cited traditional practices as the major hindrance, while men pointed to women not being a good choice to represent their communities.

**Age:** Across different age groups the main reasons for not voting for women in 2010 included tradition, household activities, and perceptions of women as poor representatives.

#### 2.8.4 Electing Women In Elections

Respondents provided their opinions about electing women candidates.

**Location (By State):** A high percentage of women in Northern Bahr el Ghazal (38%), Western Equatoria (31%), and Ruweng AA (21%) would not vote for female candidates.

Men showed a higher percentage of “not supporting female candidates” in elections in Jonglei (33%), Abyei AA (22%), Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Ruweng AA (20%).

The reasons respondents selected for not planning to vote for women were similar to the reasons given for not voting for women candidates in 2010. These included “women are not suitable for public positions” (42%), and “men are more qualified” (29%). Some believed there would be no female candidates to vote for (27%), and a small percentage had “other” reasons (2%).

#### 2.8.5 Factors To Consider About The Candidate To Vote For In Elections

Both women and men prioritised candidates who would be committed to working on these issues, ranked in this order:

- > Work to reduce violence against women (19%)
- > Help women get better decision-making opportunities (19%)
- > Provide help to war widows (17%)
- > Reduce sexual harassment (17%)
- > Improve access to health services for women (11%)
- > Increase access to rights and justice for women (9%)
- > Support women to own resources, like land and finances (8%)



**13%** of all respondents (11% F, 15% M) **would not vote for female candidates** in elections.

### 2.8.6 Actions To Consider To Increase Women's Participation In Elections

Both men and women agreed on the actions that could help increase women's participation in elections, with only slight variations in their prioritisation.



#### To increase women's participation in the elections:

- > **Involve women in decision-making processes** (24%)
- > **Raise awareness among women through political programmes** (23%)
- > **Establish women's wings in all political parties** (19%)
- > **Enact and enforce laws to punish violence and harassment of women during elections** (14%)

**Location (Rural vs Urban):** The ranking of the actions to increase women's participation varied by location. In rural areas, women prioritised "political programmes to raise awareness", while in urban areas women emphasised "including women in decision-making processes".

**Education:** Women with no education and women with primary school education considered that awareness programmes among women were the key to increasing their participation, whereas women with secondary school and university education considered the inclusion of women in the decision-making process during elections to be key to increasing participation.

### 2.8.7 Problems Women Are Likely To Encounter In Elections

Women said they expected to face several challenges during elections, as shown in the table below. Both men and women agreed on these problems, with only slight variations in their perceptions.

**Location (State):** Each State had its unique set of challenges, reflecting the diverse political and social landscapes in South Sudan. The respondents from each State ranked the issues differently, for example, Abyei AA faced a significant lack of resources (35%) and insecurity (27%), whereas Central Equatoria had a balanced distribution of problems, with the lack of opportunities from political parties (20%) and cultural barriers (19%) being prominent.

The chart below, **Figure 12**, includes the leading problem in each state, as identified by the respondents.

**Figure 12: Leading problems women will face during elections**

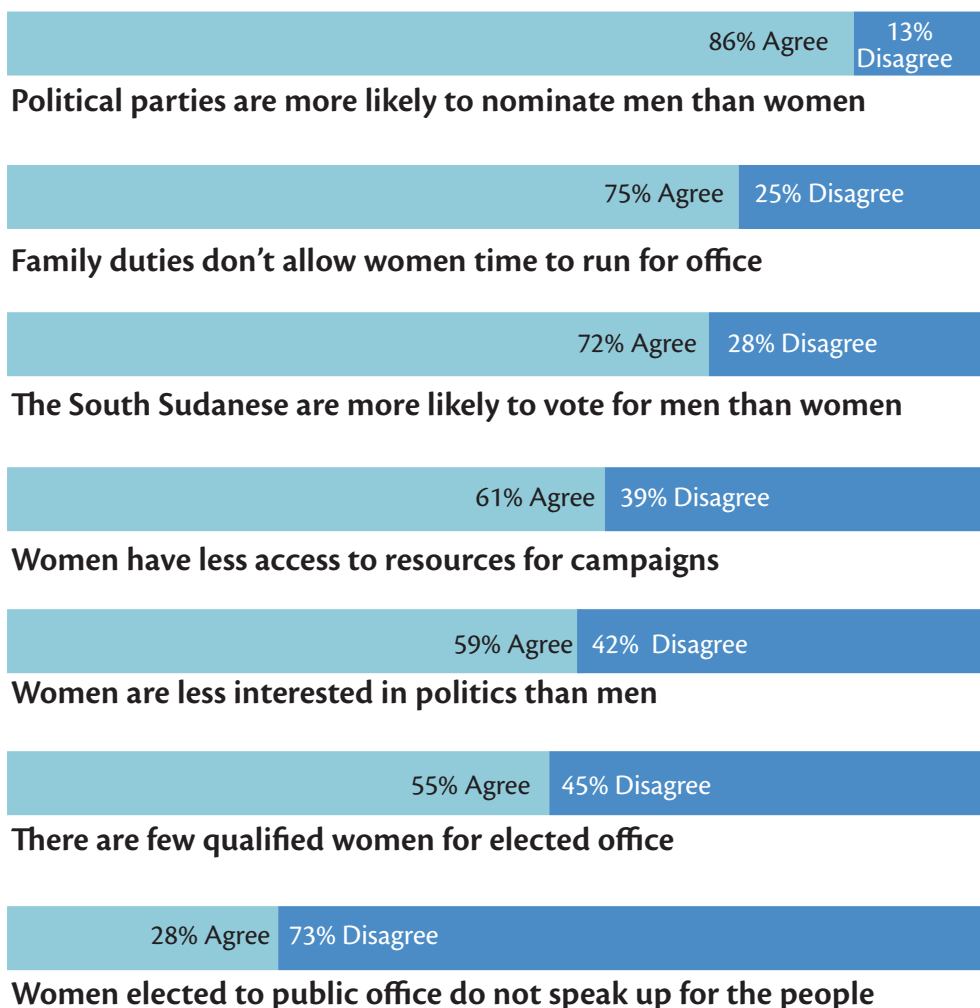
| Problems Women Are Likely To Face            | Women | Men   | Problem Ranked by State  |
|--|-------|-------|--|
| Lack of Resources                            | 20.5% | 19.9% | Abyei AA<br>Eastern Equatoria<br>Pibor AA<br>Lakes<br>Western Bahr el Ghazel |
| Insecurity                                   | 19.3% | 19.8% | Pibor AA<br>Western Equatoria  |
| Misinformation Against Women                 | 16.4% | 16.3% | Jonglei<br>Warrap  |
| Lack of Opportunities From Political Parties | 14.1% | 14.7% | Central Equatoria<br>Ruweng AA<br>Upper Nile                                 |
| Hate Speech Against Women                    | 14.3% | 14.0% | Northern Bahr el Ghazel  |
| Cultural Barriers                            | 13.9% | 14.7% | All states selected this but it did not emerge as the biggest problem.       |

**Gender:** The survey findings reveals that a significant number of respondents (79% F, 68% M) agreed that “political parties are more likely to nominate men than women.”

The data highlights a gender bias in political nominations and supports the observation that the lack of opportunities in political parties was a problem for women. This is further confirmed by the observation made during the early ‘transitional period’ when a significant number of women leaders were removed from their leadership positions, which they secured in 2010, and were replaced by men in ministerial and governorship positions.<sup>2</sup>

Respondents were asked to “agree” or “disagree” with the reasons women would encounter problems and which influenced their level of participation. The answers were consistent with the reasons women gave for not having an interest in holding a political position; why women were discouraged from vying for elected positions; and the problems they would encounter. Throughout the survey findings, the data shows a clear and consistent pattern in these issues.

**Figure 13: Reasons women would encounter problems during elections**





During the FGDs and interviews, women shared their thoughts about some of the barriers face by women in South Sudan. These quotes and observations were given by activists, parliamentarians, academia, women from peace mechanisms, and women from NGOs, INGOs, and civil society.

*“The recent series of political appointments indicate that when women are removed from their positions, they are replaced by men with the claim that there are no women in political parties. This can only be remedied by encouraging women to join political parties and showcasing women by creating a database of women’s profiles and their qualifications.”*—Hon. Lona Elia James. Deputy Chair of Political Parties Council.

*“Women are the most affected”*

*“We are being put down, not promoted in offices”.*

*“Right now, 99 per cent of South Sudanese women don’t have the capacity to go for campaigns. Some are afraid, they think ‘if I go and vie for a position against a male counterpart maybe they’ll take the position by force.’ ”*

*“A woman who won the governorship election, but one way or another a person announced the man.”*

*“Based on cultural beliefs, women cannot be in higher government positions.”*

*“It’s really sad, making women fear.”*

*“We need training that will empower and build confidence... Funding is the main issue, funds are needed for transportation to go around to campaign and talk to people.”*

*“Gender-based violence, in public and at home, is a problem. Sometimes a husband will not let his wife campaign and won’t support with finances.”*

*“Men need to be educated on how to treat sisters and wives for them to progress. If it’s only women who change, there will be conflict.”*

Women respondents also shared their concerns about security:

*“Let’s say somebody is elected out. We’re not sure if they are already trained on how to calm fears when someone takes over. They may try to sabotage. They believe they fought for this country”.*

Some women are afraid if they are not re-elected *“...they will come and grab me and accuse me of certain things.”*

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## 2.9 AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR THE 35% GENDER QUOTA

This section evaluates the level of awareness of and the amount of support for the '35% Gender Quota' provided for in the R-ARCSS, which mandates that women hold at least 35 per cent of decision-making positions within public institutions and political establishments.

The findings related to the 35% Gender Quota are useful when formulating policy and developing intervention programmes related to gender equality.

### 2.9.1 Level Of Awareness

The study found that 20 per cent of women and 21 per cent of men were not aware of the 35% Gender Quota provided by the R-ARCSS.

**Location (State) and Gender:** The States had varying degrees of awareness about the 35 per cent gender quota. In Eastern Equatoria, 36 per cent of women were unaware of the quota; in Western Equatoria it was 33 per cent of women; followed by 32 per cent of women in Unity; and finally in Northern Bahr el Ghazal where 29 per cent of women were unaware of the quota.

Pibor AA had the highest number of men who were unaware at 59 per cent, followed by Eastern Equatoria at 55 per cent, and Abyei AA at 33 per cent.

**Location (Rural vs Urban):** In rural areas, 23 per cent of women and 29 per cent of men were not aware of the 35% Gender Quota. In urban areas, only 18 per cent of women and 21 per cent of men were not aware of the quota.

Together, this suggests that urban residents had better access to information about the 35% Gender Quota compared to their rural counterparts, and therefore, those at the grass-roots level were not as prepared for future elections as those in urban areas.

**Age:** Young people were more aware of the 35% Gender Quota. Among women in the 18-25 year category, 79 per cent were aware, compared to only 50 per cent of women in the 65+ age category. Similarly, younger men showed higher awareness levels compared to older men.

**Education Level:** The study shows that among women with no formal education 29 per cent were not aware of the gender quota. The level of awareness increased as the level of education increased. Eighteen (18) per cent of women with primary school education had some awareness, followed by 19 per cent of women with secondary school education, and among those with a university education, only 13 per cent were unaware.

For men, 50 per cent of those with no education were unaware, followed by primary school at 41 per cent, then secondary school at 19 per cent, and only 12 per cent of men with a university education were unaware.

These findings support the recommendation for targeted awareness programmes, especially in rural areas and among older and less educated populations, to ensure broader understanding and support for the 35% Gender Quota in South Sudan.

### 2.9.2 Satisfaction With The Current Level Of Women's Representation

The study reveals that 64 per cent of respondents were not satisfied with the current level of women's representation. This dissatisfaction was higher among women (68%) compared to men (55%), in both rural and urban areas.

Dissatisfaction with women's representation was highest among older women (88% in the 65+ age category), those with secondary school (76%), and those with a university education (76%). Among men, dissatisfaction was highest among the youth age group (69%, 18-25 years) and those with secondary school education (58%).



**64% of respondents were not satisfied with the level of women's representation.**



Respondents shared their experiences of representation within the government, past and present... and their hopes for the future.

*"Women fear men, but women need to know their rights. The elections are for both men and women. There is no need to fear."*

*"Some fear their husband... some traditional women are not allowed to stand in front of men and talk."*

*"I am a member of SPLM IO and my husband is the chair of a different political party (the NDF). I feel that secretly my husband does not want me to participate in politics. He usually capitalises on issues such as our children's sickness to make me feel guilty about participating in my political party. I advise all the young women here to seize all the available opportunities they get from the families they come from. What if your husband marries five wives, which wife will he give the opportunity?"*

### 2.9.3 Support For The Gender Quota

The majority of respondents supported the 35% Gender Quota, with 80 per cent of women and 79 per cent of men in favour. Only a small percentage of women (6%) and men (5%) did not support the quota, and only 14 per cent "didn't know enough about it" to decide. The respondents selected the reasons why they supported the quota.



**Reasons to support the 35% Gender Quota:**

- > **Women can represent women's needs better** (19%)
- > **Women have a right to political participation** (18%)
- > **Women are less corrupt** (17%)
- > **Women will reduce violence in politics** (16%)
- > **Women are peacemakers** (11%)



Respondents shared their reflections on the 35% Gender Quota.

*“Women struggled in the civil wars, and the 35 per cent quota is not for nothing...women did their work in the war.” “Ninety per cent of women really fought.” “They took care of the injured, carried ammunition and food.”*

*“Thirty-five per cent is not implemented in good faith. The political parties say women should wait because they can’t to do the work. Some say leadership is dangerous. The question is how long shall women be denied their rights to participate in leadership?”*

#### **2.9.4 The Party In Power Does Not Matter Or Affect Our Lives**

About 57 per cent of respondents believed that the party in power did not affect their lives, with similar percentages among women (58%) and men (57%). This indicates a general disillusionment with the impact of political parties on daily life. In States like Abyei AA (91% F, 89% M) and Lakes (78% F, 63% M), a high proportion of respondents believed the party in power does not matter. This sentiment was also prevalent among rural residents (59% F, 45% M) and those with primary education (66% F, 64% M).

#### **2.9.5 Women Should Have The Same Chances Of Being Elected As Men**

The study shows that 83 per cent of women and 76 per cent of men agreed that women should have the same chances of being elected as men.

**Location (State):** This sentiment was strong across various states, with notable support in Abyei AA (100% F, 56% M), Pibor AA (100% F, 100% M), Central Equatoria (94% F, 76% M), Unity (94% F, 66% M), and Western Bahr el Ghazal (96% F, 90% M). However, some states showed lower agreement levels, such as Eastern Equatoria (45% F, 50% M) and Northern Bahr el Ghazal (54% F, 44% M).

**Location (Rural vs Urban), Age, Education:** Support for the equal chance for women to be elected was high across many of the study’s demographics. Rural and urban residents and individuals with different levels of education agreed on this issue. Youth respondents, in the 18-25 age category and those with primary education, showed slightly lower support compared to other groups.



The data was supported by the reflections of women parliamentarians and those involved in politics. During the interviews, they shared:

*“Worldwide, women in parliament are married to men from other countries and it’s not a cause for concern. Women are free to vie for any position as long as they live in their constituency. However, in South Sudan women are victimised / prevented from vying for a position because they marry someone from a different community.”*

*“We young parliamentarians are striving hard to get rid of these exclusionary practices because they are a major hindrance to women’s participation in politics. We need a clause stating that a woman can contest for election regardless of her place of marriage to be integrated into the constitution.”*

### 2.9.6 Men Make Better Political Leaders Than Women And Should Be Elected, Rather Than Women

About 26 per cent of respondents believed that men make better political leaders than women. This belief was more prevalent in states like Eastern Equatoria (43% F, 55% M). Interestingly, a significant number of men in Abyei AA (55%) and Eastern Equatoria (55%) also held this view, indicating a persistent gender bias in political leadership perceptions.

### 2.9.7 Should There Be Laws To Increase Women's Participation In Electoral Processes?

The majority of respondents (95.7% F, 92.7% M) agreed that “there should be laws” to increase women’s participation in electoral processes. However, in Eastern Equatoria, more respondents, especially among men (19% F, 55% M), believed there should be no such laws, reflecting strong traditional beliefs against women’s participation in public affairs.

These findings highlight the ongoing challenges and varying perceptions regarding the participation of women in politics, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to promote gender equality in electoral processes.

Some of the women interviewed attested to the fact that when male allies are involved and there is political will, supportive policies that uphold women’s rights are more likely to be enacted:



*“Hon. Moro Jenasio during his tenure as the Minister of Local Government (CES) stated that he created a gender ministry because he realised that working conditions at the local government level were not conducive for women. He always ensured the female officers were deployed to Juba as opposed to the outskirts.”*

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## 2.10 WOMEN'S CONCERNS AND DEMANDS

### 2.10.1 Key Informant Interviews

During the one-to-one interviews, women shared their experiences, expressed their concerns and fears, and discussed their expectations of political leaders during and after elections. The issues they raised can inform future policies and programmes.

This section provides the input from women in five essential areas including security and protection of women's rights, economic empowerment, education and health, the election process, and the constitution-making process.



#### SECURITY AND PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

- > **Women's Safety During War:** Women are often the first victims in conflicts, and face significant discrimination and violence.
- > **Education About Women's Rights:** Many women are unaware of their rights, such as those outlined in the Maputo Protocol. Providing clear information to women about their rights through trusted sources will help them to participate actively in elections. There is a concern about the emotional and psychological impact on women who are unaware of their rights.
- > **Security:** Despite the unification of military forces, significant gaps in the security sector remain leading to ongoing security issues.

Examples provided by respondents included:

- Unification exists only on paper, with zero implementation.
  - The police force is militarised and aligned with ethnic and tribal lines, with many militias in the country.
  - Women in police sectors are not adequately protected.
  - There is a fear that candidates might be arrested.
  - The security sector needs to be prepared to protect women.
  - Address concerns about harassment by security forces.
- > **Violence Against Women:** Preventing violence against women during an election process was a significant issue and needs to be addressed.

Examples provided by respondents included:

- The distance between polling centres raises security concerns, making it unsafe for women to vote.
- The fear of sexual harassment and rape, which is intended to discourage women from voting.
- Gender-based violence at the family level. When husbands do not allow their wives to campaign, punish them for being away from home, or do not support them in their efforts financially. Men need to be educated on how to support their wives and enable progress.



## ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

> **Supporting Women in Business.** Women receive less financial assistance to start a business and are awarded fewer contracts, which are typically given to men. Women need assets to secure contracts. Empowerment begins within the community and family to address women's issues on a national level.

Examples provided by the respondents included:

- Women often remain at home and become dependent.
  - Women often lack sufficient financing for their livelihoods and well-being. If their husbands do not provide, women must go to the market to earn money, leaving them unsure about their children's well-being. Sometimes, mothers take their children to the market, where young girls may be tasked with serving tea and can be exploited. If there is enough money, children can attend school.
  - Women do not receive loans, preventing them from establishing themselves economically.
  - Men have financial resources and use their power to restrict and deprive women, making it difficult for women to support their children.
  - Many women lack sources of livelihood and live hand-to-mouth, which prevents them from thinking beyond immediate food security.
  - Approximately one-quarter of all South Sudanese women are the head of the household, due to the many men who were killed in the war.
  - Economic deficits also hinder the emergence of female political candidates, as many cannot afford the fifty-dollar registration fee.
  - Political parties could help by making special considerations and allocating quotas for women.
- > **Empowerment Initiatives** need to reach the grassroots level, particularly in rural States, because, often, only a select group of women in Juba benefit from these programmes.
- > **Expedite the enactment of the Women Enterprise Development Fund and the Youth Enterprise Development Fund.** These would go a long way in enabling women and youth participation in the electoral processes.



## EDUCATION AND HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE

- > **Lack of Health Facilities.** Remote areas lack health facilities and maternity wards, making prenatal and maternal care difficult to access. Maternal mortality remains high, with many women dying during childbirth. There are no site services, and women often give birth at home. There is a lack of education on reproductive rights.
- > **Women with Disabilities Lack Funds.** Women with disabilities need funds to visit hospitals and those who do go to a hospital face name-calling and neglect. There is no special care for people with disabilities, and they may be ignored in hospitals.
- > **Education for Girls.** Young girls need to attend school, as education provides power through information. Currently, most girls who attend schools do not receive quality education, which is exacerbated by a lack of hygiene products. It is important that girls are not only enrolled in school but that they also complete their education.

- > **Improve Adult Literacy.** The literacy rate among women is low. Most women have not had access to formal education and struggle to read. Without literacy skills, they are less likely to be aware of their rights.
- > **Child Marriage Should be Illegal.** The new constitution should set a minimum age for marriage, at 18 or older. Child marriage is widespread in areas like Jonglei and Lake States. Children are often married to much older men with multiple wives. High maternal death rates are linked to child marriages because young girls are forced into marriage by their families for economic reasons and then lack access to health facilities when they become pregnant.



## PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS

- > **Candidate Preparation.** Women often lack the financial resources needed for campaign expenses. There is uncertainty about whether the government will fund political parties. Women need to present their manifestos and build networks. They also need to improve their public speaking skills and confidence.
- > **Political Participation.** Women face significant challenges in preparing for elections.

The respondents shared their experiences:

- Women are often marginalised and not promoted into political positions.
- Nearly all South Sudanese women lack the capacity to campaign, with some fearing that male counterparts might forcibly take their positions.
- Training and funding are needed to empower women and build their confidence.
- Elections involve both men and women, so there is no need for fear.
- Despite the cultural belief that women cannot hold high positions within the government, women played significant roles in the war for independence. The 25% Gender Quota in the first constitution in 2010 is a recognition of their contribution. More than 25 per cent of seats were won by women during the 2010 elections—a testament to their ability to participate.
- Intensify advocacy for the 35% Gender Quota during campaigns, as it has not yet been achieved.



- > **Financial Resources.** Elections are highly monetised, making it difficult to win without financial resources. Women need financial resources to campaign at the grassroots level. They are frustrated by the lack of allocated funds, while men have the money to campaign. Without financial support, women may choose not to participate in politics. Advocacy is needed to secure a percentage of election funds allocated to women.

Enacting both the Women Enterprise Development Fund and the Youth Enterprise Development Fund in time for the 2026 elections would go a long way in alleviating some of these challenges.

- > **Cultural Barriers.** Women face significant social and cultural barriers that prevent them from participating fully in election processes.

The respondents shared their experiences:

- Marital status and residency should not affect voting rights, which are sometimes tied to marriage or birthplace.
  - GBV is linked to cultural norms.
  - Some women fear their husbands, and traditional norms prevent them from speaking in front of men.
  - There is a cultural / social belief that women cannot hold high positions within the government.
- > **Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.** Women face workplace issues, including sexual harassment and sex for promotions. There is a need for both women and girls to learn how to defend themselves.
  - > **Promotions.** Women with existing careers must choose between getting paid or entering politics and foregoing a secure salary.
  - > **Women with Disabilities** are often overlooked in political participation. They should be considered and given a percentage in the revised laws to ensure their inclusion.
  - > **Justice System.** The justice system is currently paralysed, with no departments to address women's concerns regarding violence. While there is a GBV court at the state level, a national-level court is also needed. Mobile courts could be implemented during election processes to address these issues.
  - > **Electoral Observers.** Women are needed to act as observers during elections. Previous experiences, such as during the referendum, showed that a lack of women observers at polling stations led to harassment and intimidation. In the past, the voting process lacked confidentiality because voters faced threats about who to vote for and were made to cast a ballot in separate voting booths for candidates.
  - > **National-Level Training.** Women can benefit from civic and voter education programmes. Women can learn what to expect during campaigns and voting days, and act as champions to spread key messages.
  - > **Engage Men.** Men are needed as champions to contribute to the progress of women's rights and participation in elections. As men dominate all aspects of social and political life, male allies are essential.



## WOMEN'S DEMANDS IN THE CONSTITUTION-MAKING PROCESS

- > **Women's Empowerment and Well-Being.** Women respondents shared their ideas around empowerment:
  - Marital rape should be recognised in the constitution, despite opposition.
  - Property inheritance rights for women need to be included in the constitution to prevent disinheritance upon a husband's death, ensuring women and children receive support. Currently, women lack security in land and property ownership.
  - The constitution should protect women and children. Women lack rights over their children and cannot travel with them without the consent or presence of a male relative. Only men or male relatives can obtain IDs for children. Children born from rape often lack identity if no male relative supports them. For example, a woman in a Ugandan refugee camp, raped by six men, had a child but could not return to South Sudan due to lack of male support.
- > **Corruption:** While corruption cannot be fought effectively now, enshrining anti-corruption measures in the constitution could enable future efforts to combat it.

### 2.10.2 Focus Group Discussion Insights

The qualitative data gathered through the FGDs provide valuable insights into the challenges and potential solutions for enhancing women's political participation. The reflections shared during the FGDs mirror the results from the questionnaire and the interviews.

Women's responses during the FGDs highlighted the need for more political space for women, comprehensive civic education, and community peace dialogues to foster a more conducive environment for women's engagement in election processes.

Their recommendations highlight the need for a multi-faceted approach involving **legal and policy reforms, capacity building initiatives, and awareness campaigns** to address the existing barriers and empower women to participate meaningfully in the political sphere.



MEANINGFUL  
ENGAGEMENT

### PREPARE FOR ELECTIONS

To prepare for elections, and to ensure a fair electoral process:

- Expand political space.
- Provide civic education.
- Facilitate community peace dialogues.
- Register political parties.
- Conduct a population and housing census.
- Establish a permanent constitution.
- Build the capacity of civil society organisations.
- Create inclusive participation strategies for nominations.
- Register voters.



## **PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS**

To encourage more women and youth to participate in elections:

- Conduct consultations with women.
- Build the capacity of aspirants.
- Nominate and include women in political processes.
- Provide financial resources.
- Ensure freedom for women to engage in politics.



## **GARNER MORE SUPPORT**

To garner more support for women from political parties, local government leaders, FBOS, CBOS, NGOS, and the community in general:

- Promote political transparency.
- Eliminate /reduce women's political party membership fees.
- Establish monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of the 35% Gender Quota.
- Ensure a secure political environment for women.
- Form women's groups.
- Increase women's representation in public affairs.
- Advocate and raise awareness about women's right to participate in the election process.
- Empower community leaders to support women's participation in political spheres.



## **CREATE A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT**

The government and development partners should create a more conducive environment to increase the number of women in politics:

- Create more platforms for women.
- Build the capacity of women through political programmes.
- Provide an enabling environment.
- Support women's full participation to challenge cultural norms.
- Mainstream gender equality.
- Strengthen the judiciary to enforce inclusive laws.
- Protect women from harassment during the election.
- Implement the 35% Gender Quota for women.

## CHALLENGES



The challenges that will limit women's participation in elections:

- Limited resources for political activities.
- High registration fees for women leading political parties.
- Lack of women's social protection and insecurity.
- Restricted political space.
- Low capacity of women to engage in national politics.
- Traditional norms and cultural barriers.
- Lack of national IDs.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE PARTICIPATION

Some important opportunities to enhance women's participation in elections include:

- Use the existing political platforms created for women.
- Use the existing 35% Gender Quota to support participation.
- Improving literacy rates.
- People are more aware of women's rights.
- Incorporation of lessons learned from past elections.



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## 3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3.1 CONCLUSION

The survey findings paint a clear picture of the challenges that South Sudanese women face in their pursuit of political participation. Deeply rooted social and cultural norms coupled with a lack of resources and support continue to contribute to a political landscape that often excludes women. Limited awareness of legal provisions, such as the 35% Gender Quota, plus limited and restricted access to information exacerbate these challenges during the extended transition period leading to the 2026 elections.

Generally, women are not prepared to participate in the election process and are largely unaware of their civic responsibility and voter rights. Candidates and aspirants have not joined political parties. Some are not sure which political parties were legally registered and which ones have attractive manifestos to follow. The electoral calendar is not known, especially in rural areas. As most women and men would be voting for the first time, more information is needed about the number of votes they need to cast, how to register, and where to go to vote. Civic education campaigns are yet to start, but when they do, they will need to accommodate the low literacy rate.

The permanent constitution-making process has not been finalised , which means women candidates have faced issues such as determining which Region or State to run in, where to register as a candidate (such as in the case of when a woman is married to a man who is not from the region where she was born). Other legal frameworks are yet to be passed, including the Women’s Empowerment Bill, the Anti GBV Bill, and the Women Enterprise Fund Bill, all of which safeguard the gender provisions in the R-ARCSS and constitution.

Despite these obstacles, the survey reveals that women are interested in politics, telling us there is potential for greater participation among women in elections. The desire to improve lives and contribute to social development emerged as the motivation for women who were considering running for office. This underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the existing barriers and empower women to actively participate in the upcoming elections and beyond.

# WOMEN IN SOUTH SUDAN NEED



More Political Space



Civic Education



A Conducive Environment

To empower women to participate meaningfully in the political sphere requires



legal and policy reforms



capacity building initiatives



awareness campaigns

## 3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the survey findings, NTLI recommends a comprehensive approach involving key stakeholders working together to enhance women's political participation during the transition period and the election process.

### RTGoNU AND OTHER GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

- 1. Finalise and disseminate key legal frameworks for elections.** Four important legal frameworks include: 1) The Permanent Constitution of South Sudan; 2) the Anti-GBV Bill; 3) the Women's Empowerment Bill, which seeks to safeguard core gender provisions in the Peace Accord and Constitution; and 4) Gender Equality Authority Bill, which will provide oversight on the implementation of the gender equality agenda.

When these are passed into law and enacted, they will protect women's rights, provide a legal response to the violence and intimidation that prevent women from engaging in politics, and create a safer environment for women's political representation and participation.

- 2. Establish a dedicated Gender Commission and Gender Equality Authority** to collect information systematically, monitor gender mainstreaming across all sectors, and oversee the implementation of gender quotas.

3. **Expedite the drafting and enactment of the Family Bill.** This bill protects women's rights and promotes their participation in various sectors, including politics.
4. **Harmonise statutory and customary laws.** Harmonised laws are needed to minimise the contradictions, complicated procedures, and delays in justice. While statutory laws are supreme, customary laws are often preferred as a quick fix to a problem. Continuous questioning and reform of customary laws are necessary to ensure justice, especially for women.
5. **Finalise the training and deployment of Unified Forces.** This will guarantee the security and safety of women who participate in all electoral processes.
6. **Foster a supportive political environment.** Political parties should acknowledge publicly and formally within their manifestos a woman's right to participate in the political arena. Political parties should support all candidates in their political campaigns by raising awareness and engaging with constituents before, during, and after elections.
7. **Ensure inclusive political party registration.** As the Political Party Council (PCC) opens up for new registrations, it should be mandatory for parties to submit their appointment lists with both male and female members across the country and apply the 35% Gender Quota. A review of the registered political parties' adherence to the 35 per cent women's representation at both the executive and membership levels is ongoing.
8. **Promote women's leadership within political parties.** Encourage parties to adopt internal quotas for women candidates and provide training and mentorship opportunities for women within party structures.
9. **Gender-sensitive electoral committees.** The National Election Commission (NEC) should ensure that women are adequately represented in electorate committees at national and state levels. The State High Electoral Committees (SHECs) and other structures responsible for registration, polling, observations, security, media, and training on civic and voter education should focus on ensuring fair and inclusive decision-making, confidentiality in voting, and freedom from violence and intimidation.

## THE MEDIA, ACADEMIA, AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

- 10. Document, promote, and support women leaders.** Feature women leaders during and after campaigns to increase their visibility. The media should also provide equal airtime and fair coverage to women candidates.
- 11. Conduct nationwide civic and voter education programmes.** The media can focus on engaging both men and women to raise awareness about women's political rights, the importance of their participation in the electoral processes, and the importance of voting and making informed choices.
- 12. Build the capacity of the media in gender-sensitive reporting.** This will facilitate better communication and information sharing, and can help guide the younger generation as they navigate the political landscape.
- 13. Profile successful women role models in politics and leadership.** Showcase experienced role models and feature their stories and achievements through various media platforms.
- 14. Support monitoring and evaluation.** Researchers can conduct studies on the number of women vying for positions during elections, the number of women who hold political positions and participate in decision-making processes, along with studies that examine the effectiveness and impact of: policies, awareness campaigns, training programmes, and legal reforms that promote women's political participation. Distribute the findings to inform programme design and implementation.

**WOMEN'S MACHINERIES** *(formal government structures tasked with promoting gender equality and improving the status and rights of women such as the MGCSW.)*

- 15. Empower women through the provision of knowledge and skills.** Women need more skills in public speaking, negotiation, conflict resolution, and decision-making. Other critical skills include preparing a manifesto, campaign organising and management, fundraising and resource mobilisation, strategic planning, voter outreach, and media engagement.
- 16. Women's machineries work together to finalise and disseminate key legal frameworks.** The MGCSW, Ministry of Justice, and parliament should work together to finalise the key legal documents that will enhance women's participation in elections.
- 17. Promote women's rights and participation in the permanent constitution-making and electoral processes.** This will strengthen the role of women's organisations and networks.
- 18. Facilitate the dissemination of relevant documents.** This includes the Women's Charter, which supports women's political participation.
- 19. Allocate resources to support women candidates.** Women need financing during their campaigns to ensure they can amplify their voices and influence.

## CSOS, NGOS, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, AND DONORS

- 20. Provide financial and technical support to enhance the capacity of women's organisations.** National and international NGOs (INGOs) can help women advocate for their rights and provide training and mentorship to aspiring women leaders. INGOs can also facilitate collaboration and networking among women's organisations to amplify their influence.
- 21. Raise awareness about the 35 per cent gender quota.** Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to disseminate information about the 35 per cent quota for women in all public institutions and political establishments. This strategy should leverage various communication channels, including radio, social media, public gatherings, and community outreach programmes. Engage both men and women and emphasise the importance and benefits of women's representation.
- 22. Amplify the stories of successful women role models in politics and leadership.** Showcase the stories and achievements of role models through various media outlets and platforms, and establish mentorship programmes to connect aspiring women leaders with experienced role models.
- 23. Work with traditional and community leaders to change perceptions and attitudes about women in leadership.** Positive narratives about women's contributions to community development and decision-making can help address harmful cultural practices that limit women's opportunities. Encourage dialogue between women leaders and community members.
- 24. Engage men as allies who will advocate for women's political participation.** Conduct awareness campaigns targeting men to challenge traditional gender roles and promote the benefits of women's leadership. Encourage men in positions of power to mentor and support women leaders.
- 25. Set up a women's situation room.** To provide support to women candidates in all parts of the country, NGOs and INGOs can help to establish a "situation room"—a safe place where women can seek advice and support, document their challenges and develop strategies to overcome them.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NTRI extends its sincere gratitude to the research team and enumerators for their dedication and hard work. Their diligence in engaging with communities, collecting reliable data, and navigating challenging conditions ensured the integrity and richness of the information gathered.

Special thanks go to **Atem Bul**, the lead statistician, for his critical contributions to data analysis. We also acknowledge **Deborah Adol Job, Joseph Tombura, Igale Consolata Monoja, Awut Benjamin Baak, Musoke Richard, and Matela Viola** for their dedication and teamwork, which formed the backbone of this research endeavor. This report would not have been possible without their collective efforts.

## Appendix 1

### QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE PREPAREDNESS OF WOMEN ELECTIONS IN SOUTH SUDAN

The National Transformational Leadership Institute (NTLI) at the University of Juba in collaboration with The International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) and the National Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare are conducting a survey on women's preparedness for the elections in South Sudan.

The survey will assess and analyse factors enabling or inhibiting women's effective participation in elective politics. The findings will be used for the planning and programming of electoral processes to improve women's participation.

| SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION |  |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                            |                            |                          |            |                          |         |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|---------|
| A1                             | Consent: We would like you to participate in this survey? (Tick) |                          |                          |                          |                          | Yes                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | No                         | <input type="checkbox"/>   |                          |            |                          |         |
| A2                             | Name of the interviewer (Enumerator)                             |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                            |                            |                          |            |                          |         |
| A3                             | Name of the State/Administrative Area                            |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                            |                            |                          |            |                          |         |
| A4                             | Name of the Town   |                          |                          |                          | A5                       | Date of Interview        |                          |                            |                            |                          |            |                          |         |
| A6                             | Location   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rural Area               | <input type="checkbox"/> | Urban Area               |                          |                          |                            |                            |                          |            |                          |         |
| A7                             | Name of the Respondent   |                          |                          |                          | A8                       | Respondent's Gender      |                          | M <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |            |                          |         |
| A9                             | Age of the Respondent (Years)                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | 18 – 23                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 24 – 29                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 30 – 35                  | <input type="checkbox"/>   | 36 – 41                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | 42 – 47    | <input type="checkbox"/> | 48 – 53 |
|                                |  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 54 – 59                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 60 – 65                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 66 – 71                  | <input type="checkbox"/>   | 72 – 77                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | 78 – Above |                          |         |
| A10                            | Respondent's Marital Status                                      |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Single                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Married                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Separated                  | <input type="checkbox"/>   | Widow                    |            |                          |         |
| A11                            | Highest Level of Education attained                              |                          |                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | No education             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Primary                  | <input type="checkbox"/>   | Secondary                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | University |                          |         |
| A12                            | Respondent's Telephone Number                                    |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                            |                            |                          |            |                          |         |

**SECTION B: EXPERIENCE AND PREPAREDNESS OF WOMEN VOTERS FOR THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS.**

|     |   |  |  |   |
|-----|---|--|--|---|
| B1  | Do you have an interest in politics ?   | <input type="radio"/> Not interested   | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat interested              | <input type="radio"/> Very interested         |
| B2  | Have you held a political position before?  | <input type="radio"/> Yes  |  | <input type="radio"/> No                      |
| B3  | What political position do you have interest in standing for?   | <input type="radio"/> Presidential   | <input type="radio"/> Governorship                     | <input type="radio"/> National MP             |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> National Ministerial   | <input type="radio"/> State Ministerial                |   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> State MP   | <input type="radio"/> Party Position                   | <input type="radio"/> Payam Administrator     |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> County Commissionership  | <input type="radio"/> Others                           | <input type="radio"/> No interest             |
| B4  | Have you considered running for election and are likely to accept an opportunity to run?  | <input type="radio"/> I have considered  | <input type="radio"/> Likely to accept the opportunity |   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Not interested in running  |  |   |
| B5  | What reasons would you consider running for office?   | <input type="radio"/> Improving the lives of my people   |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> I feel the responsibility to serve the community                             |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Promoting socio-economic issues and development                              |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Changing legislation and policy for the country                              |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Need more women to be represented in politics                                |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> I have the right qualifications  |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> I have been involved in the political struggle of my country for a long time |  |   |
| B6  | Do you have an interest in women contesting in an election?   | <input type="radio"/> Yes  |  | <input type="radio"/> No                      |
| B7  | Do you think voting for women in elections is good?   | <input type="radio"/> Yes  |  | <input type="radio"/> No                      |
| B8  | Do you think there are more women taking part in elections than men?  | <input type="radio"/> Equal  |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Less men   | <input type="radio"/> Less women                       | <input type="radio"/> More men                |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> More women   |  |   |
| B9  | Do you think a woman should become President, Governor or MP in South Sudan?  | <input type="radio"/> Yes  |  | <input type="radio"/> No                      |
| B10 | Do you belong to a political party?   | <input type="radio"/> Yes, I do  | <input type="radio"/> No, I don't                      | <input type="radio"/> I don't see a reason to |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> I don't know   |  |   |
| B11 | Do you think women should be part of decision-making processes in a political party?  | <input type="radio"/> Yes  |  | <input type="radio"/> No                      |
| B12 | How much influence do you think you have concerning government decision making?   | <input type="radio"/> A lot of influence   | <input type="radio"/> No influence                     | <input type="radio"/> Some influence          |
| B13 | Do you feel free to choose whom you vote for?   | <input type="radio"/> Completely free  | <input type="radio"/> Somewhat free                    | <input type="radio"/> Not free                |
| B14 | Do you think standing for election is a man's job?  | <input type="radio"/> Yes  |  | <input type="radio"/> No                      |
| B15 | When deciding which candidate to vote for in elections, what would you want to see in the person? (Tick all that are applicable). | <input type="checkbox"/> Honesty of the candidate  |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Experience in politics  |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Their religion  |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Their age   |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Others  |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Their plans after being elected   |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="checkbox"/> The political party they represent  |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Their financial status  |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Their tribe   |  |   |
|     |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Their gender  |  |   |

|     |   |   |   |
|-----|---|---|---|
| B16 | Have you ever told yourself or a woman that she should not run for an elected position?           | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes  | <input type="radio"/> No  |
| B17 | If YES, why did you tell her not to run for election?   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> I thought she should focus on her family     |   |
|     | <input type="radio"/> Because I don't think women should run for office                           | <input type="radio"/> She was a family member and I was scared for her safety | <input type="radio"/> She was a family member and I was scared for the family |
|     | <input type="radio"/> She was a family member and it is not right for a women in my family to run | <input type="radio"/> I don't think she has the education to run              | <input type="radio"/> Others  |

### SECTION C: PERCEPTION OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION.

|     |   |  |  |
|-----|---|--|--|
| C1  | Did you participate in the 2010 election?   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes   | <input type="radio"/> No   |
| C2  | In the 2010 election, female candidates were not voted for, what do you think is the problem?     | <input type="radio"/> Because it is against tradition  |  |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Because they are weak  | <input type="radio"/> Because their job is to take care of the home                          |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Because they do not represent well   | <input type="radio"/> Others   |
| C3  | Are you aware that there is an election in December 2024?   | <input type="radio"/> Yes  | <input type="radio"/> No   |
| C4  | Do you have access to information for the upcoming election ?                                     | <input type="radio"/> Yes  | <input type="radio"/> No   |
| C5  | Do females have a role in your community governance?  | <input type="radio"/> Yes  | <input type="radio"/> No   |
| C6  | Is your community leader working for women's development and their rights?                        | <input type="radio"/> Yes  | <input type="radio"/> No   |
| C7  | Do you believe women should decide for themselves without seeking advice from men when voting?    | <input type="radio"/> Women should decide for themselves   | <input type="radio"/> Men should advice them   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> I don't know   |  |
| C8  | Would you vote for a candidate advancing the following issues? (Tick all appropriate answers)     | <input type="radio"/> Working to reduce violence against women   | <input type="radio"/> Working to reduce sexual harassment in the public                      |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Providing more help to war widows  | <input type="radio"/> Helping women get better decision making opportunities                 |
| C9  | Would you vote for a woman candidate?   | <input type="radio"/> Yes  | <input type="radio"/> No   |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> I don't know   |  |
| C10 | If NO, what are your reasons for not supporting a woman candidate?                                | <input type="radio"/> There are no women candidates  | <input type="radio"/> Women candidates are not suitable for the position                     |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Men are more qualified than women  | <input type="radio"/> Others   |
| C11 | What are the main obstacles to you if you are contesting in elected office?                       | <input type="radio"/> My spouse would not allow it   | <input type="radio"/> The social norms do not allow me to contest                            |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> I don't have enough money  | <input type="radio"/> Politics in violent  |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Politics is dirty and corrupt  |  |
| C12 | In your opinion, what decisions should be taken for women to increase participation in elections? | <input type="radio"/> Include women in decision making processes on election                           | <input type="radio"/> Have a women's wing in all political parties                           |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> Legalize laws to punish any violence or harassment against women during election | <input type="radio"/> Political programmed to raise awareness among women should be arranged |
|     |   | <input type="radio"/> All the above  | <input type="radio"/> Others   |

|     |  |  |  |                                     |   |   |  |                                 |
|-----|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|---------------------------------|
| C13 | What are the problems women are likely to face in participating in the upcoming elections? | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural barriers | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Insecurity | <input type="checkbox"/> Misinformation against women | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of opportunities from political parties | <input type="checkbox"/> Hate speech against women | <input type="checkbox"/> Others |
| C14 | Political parties are more likely to nominate men than women?                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |                                     |   |   |  |                                 |
| C15 | Family duties don't allow women time to run for office                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |                                     |   |   |  |                                 |
| C16 | The South Sudanese are more likely to vote for men than women                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |                                     |   |   |  |                                 |
| C17 | Women have less access to resources to campaign  | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |                                     |   |   |  |                                 |
| C18 | Women are less interested in politics than men   | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |                                     |   |   |  |                                 |
| C19 | There are not enough qualified women for elected office                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |                                     |   |   |  |                                 |
| C20 | Women elected to public office do not speak up for the people                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree          |                                     |   |   |  |                                 |

| SECTION D: EXISTING STRUCTURES THAT CONSTRAINS OR PROMOTE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION. |   |  |   |   |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| D1   | Are you aware of the 35% quota provided for women in all public institutions and political establishment? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I heard about it                         | <input type="checkbox"/> No, I have not heard it                    | <input type="checkbox"/> I have worked on activities promoting it |
| D2   | Are you satisfied with the current women's representation?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes   | <input type="checkbox"/> No   |   |
| D3   | Do you support the women's quota of 35%?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support it                             | <input type="checkbox"/> No, I do not support it                    | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know enough about it to decide   |
| D4   | What are your reasons for supporting the women's quota? (Tick all that are applicable).                   |  |   |   |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Women represent women's need better  | <input type="checkbox"/> Women will make political life less corrupt   | <input type="checkbox"/> Women will lessen the violence in politics |   |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Women have a right to political participation                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Women will strengthen social welfare politics | <input type="checkbox"/> Others                                     |   |
| D5   | It doesn't really matter which party is in power, because it does not affect our lives                    | <input type="checkbox"/> I agree                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> I disagree                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure                                 |
| D6   | Women should have the same chances of being elected as men?   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/>   | No <input type="checkbox"/>   |   |
| D7   | Men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women                      | Yes <input type="checkbox"/>   | No <input type="checkbox"/>   |   |
| D8   | There should be more laws to increase the participation of women in the electoral process                 | Yes <input type="checkbox"/>   | No <input type="checkbox"/>   |   |
| Thank you, this is the end of the interview                                      |   |  |   |   |

## Appendix 2

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The National Transformational Leadership Institute (NTLI) at the University of Juba in collaboration with The International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) and the National Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare are conducting a survey on women's preparedness for elections in South Sudan.

The survey will assess and analyse factors enabling or inhibiting women's effective participation in elective politics. The findings will be used for planning and programming of electoral processes to improve women participation.

| 1   | State   | Number of participants | Male | Female |
|---|---|------------------------|------|--------|
| 2   | Categories of participants  |                        |      |        |
|   | Community Leaders   |                        |      |        |
|   | Women Leaders   |                        |      |        |
|   | CSO   |                        |      |        |
|   | Youth Leaders   |                        |      |        |
|   | Traditional Leaders   |                        |      |        |
|   | Others  |                        |      |        |
| 3   | You have heard that the elections will be conducted in December, 2024. What have you done so far to prepare it?   |                        |      |        |
| 4   | Participation of women is provided for in the Interim Constitution and the Elections Act. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What activities are currently taking place to prepare women?</li> <li>• Are women willing to come forward and vie in various positions?</li> <li>• What could be done to encourage young women to come forward?</li> </ul> |                        |      |        |
| 5   | What could be done to gain more support for women from political parties, local government leaders, faith based organizations and the community in general?   |                        |      |        |
| 6   | Do you think it will be good to have more women in leadership positions e.g. Vice President, Ministers, President, Governor or MP?  |                        |      |        |
| 7   | What measures should be put in place by government and partners to create a conducive environment for increasing the number of women in politics?   |                        |      |        |
| Thank you, this is the end of the interview |   |                        |      |        |

