

Conflict in South Sudan

Research Repository Guide

This Research Repository has been compiled by the CSRF to assist donors and aid workers in South Sudan to better understand the context in which they work. The repository is searchable by key words, and is also organised into eight categories to enable easier exploration of specific topics. The CSRF has conducted a meta-analysis for each of the eight categories, analysing a selection of relevant, key literature and extracting some of the most salient questions for donor-funded programming.

Understanding the Literature

The literature on conflict in South Sudan published before independence tends to focus on the causes and dynamics of the second civil war (1983-2005) and post-2005 local level conflicts, such as those between communities along the contested border between Sudan and South Sudan or intra- and inter-communal conflict for instance between pastoralist communities. Uprisings that erupted after the elections of 2010 and independence in 2011 and the clashes at the border between Sudan and South Sudan have been discussed in academic as well as policy-related publications. Literature from the post-2013 crisis focuses on the dynamics of the ongoing armed conflict. Local level politics and grievances feed into and relate to the current national level armed conflict, however, research in conflict-affected areas is challenging. As a result, literature on and understanding of current local level politics and the related conflict and dynamics is limited. The questions below were developed with the aim of linking current conflict dynamics with those of previous armed conflicts and post-2005 politics and better understanding the underlying issues of the ongoing armed conflicts.

Go to the source

De Vries, Lotje & Schomerus, Mareike (2017). [South Sudan's Civil War will not end with a Peace Deal.](#)

Rolandsen, Øystein. H. & Kindersley, Nicki (2017). [South Sudan: A Political Economy Analysis.](#)

Sudd Institute (2014). [South Sudan's Crisis: Its Drivers, Key Players, and post-conflict Prospects.](#)

1. **How does the ongoing armed conflict relate to previous civil wars?**
2. **What unites conflicts in different regions of the country, and what are the divergences?**
3. **How is the conflict today (in 2018) different from that of 2013-2014?**
4. **How significant are arms flows in contributing to the conflicts in South Sudan?**

1. How does the ongoing armed conflict relate to previous civil wars?

The current violent conflict in South Sudan has important similarities to and links with previous armed conflicts, particularly the second Sudanese civil war (1983-2005). Many of the groups fighting today can trace their lineage to the patchwork of militias that were pervasive in Southern Sudan prior to 2006, most

of whom were theoretically integrated in the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), but who quickly defected once armed conflict resumed. Much of the initial violence in late 2013 and early 2014 centred on control of the oil fields, and production in Unity State was quickly crippled by the violence. Khartoum's control of Southern oil fields was crucial to its ability to maintain the conflict until 2005.

Go to the source

Kindersley, Nicki, & Rolandsen, Øystein H. (2017). [Civil War on a Shoestring: Rebellion in South Sudan's Equatoria Region.](#)
Young, John (2006). [The South Sudan Defence Forces in the Wake of the Juba Declaration. Small Arms Survey.](#)

In the second phase of the current civil war, following the violence in Juba in July 2016, new violence occurred throughout the Equatorias. Many of the groups active in Equatoria have invoked the narrative of marginalisation and exclusion from political power in Juba, the same narrative that the SPLA and Anyanya movements had once raised against Khartoum. The periodic dismissal of political figures such as governors also has parallels in the past interference of a distant central government in the local affairs of the

state.

2. What unites conflicts in different regions of the country, and what are the divergences?

Violence in opposition to the government is in part motivated by concerns over poor governance and political and economic exclusion or more localized conflicts and not solely related to grievances about prior violence. At the same time, it is difficult to argue that all violence has a common cause, and therefore a common solution. Local grievances and inter-communal tensions are easily instrumentalised in such a polarised environment. The normative claims made by the leadership representing combatants should be weighed carefully, as they may be fighting for entirely different agendas.

Go to the source

Saferworld (2017). [Informal Armies: Community Defence Groups in South Sudan's Civil War.](#)

3. How is the conflict today (in 2018) different from that of 2013-2014?

The conflict in 2018 is different in several important dimensions. The theatre of military operations has expanded southwards, from Greater Upper Nile into the Equatorias, drawing in a range of different actors. While some of these actors proclaim a national agenda, many are motivated by local concerns rather than questions of national political leadership or vengeance for atrocities in 2013 or 2014. Violence is now increasingly rural, rather than focussed on big towns such as Bor or Malakal. These clashes might lead to tensions and potentially violence between different ethnic groups, including from Equatoria. Unlike the male-dominated conflicts of the past, some localised conflict has increasing numbers of women fighting with opposition forces especially among Arrow Boys in Western Equatoria state. The August 2015 peace agreement's provisions on cantonment incentivised some conflict actors to recruit and mobilise new forces to then be cantoned, in a perversion of the agreement's intent. However, with the outbreak of violence in July 2016, these same actors use their recruits to pursue their agenda of fighting each other.

The deteriorating economic situation and the rapid devaluation of the South Sudanese pound have changed the economic incentives for fighters, with some soldiers defecting to higher bidders.

4. How significant are arms flows in contributing to the conflicts in South Sudan?

Go to the source

LeBrun, Emile (2016). [Small Arms and Armed Violence in Sudan and South Sudan: An Assessment of Empirical Research Undertaken since 2005.](#)

Van de Vondervoort, Luuk (2016). [Prospects for a UN Arms Embargo on South Sudan: A Response to HSBA Issue Brief 24.](#)

Millions of small arms circulate in South Sudan. Most violence is perpetrated by small arms, rather than sophisticated weapons, and so it does not follow that a limitation on further arms imports would significantly lessen the conflict. However, as a former member of the UN Panel of Experts argues, “The recent [July 2016] fighting in the capital, Juba, saw the use of Mi-24 attack helicopters, tanks, armoured personnel carriers, and other heavy weapons. The continued availability of these weapons has significantly encouraged those who seek a military solution at the expense

of political compromise. An embargo is likely to have its greatest impact on these heavy weapons systems...as they are the easiest to track and monitor, including by satellite, as has been already demonstrated by the UN Panel of Experts for South Sudan” (Van de Vondervoort 2016).

[Further publications on conflict in South Sudan are available in the CSRF repository](#)