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Abstract

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ABSTRACT

Women's Participation in Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Governance in South Sudan Despite formal commitments to gender inclusion in South Sudan, a persistent gap remains between policy rhetoric and the substantive participation of women in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance. Drawing on a qualitative research design grounded in feminist critical discourse analysis, this study interrogates the power structures, discursive practices, and institutional norms that shape women's agency within this context.

The analysis draws on official policy documents—including the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and the National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325—alongside semi-structured interviews with twenty-five women involved in civil society, local peace committees, and transitional governance bodies. Findings reveal that, although a 35 per cent quota for women is constitutionally enshrined, implementation remains uneven, with women frequently relegated to symbolic roles rather than decision-making authority.

This disparity is particularly acute at local levels, where cultural norms and security concerns constrain meaningful engagement. Women's grassroots peace initiatives are systematically undervalued and excluded from formal negotiation tables, while their participation is often instrumentalised—framed as a means to achieve peace rather than as a matter of rights or justice (Lile, 2026).

Such conditional inclusion reinforces structural inequalities, limiting women's agency to traditionally feminine domains and marginalising their voices on security and governance issues. The study concludes that addressing these entrenched barriers requires moving beyond numerical representation towards transformative approaches that challenge patriarchal norms and ensure women's substantive influence in peace processes.

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J. (2026).

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(2026). Impact of non-state actors' participation in preventive diplomacy on peacebuilding and conflict resolution dynamics in post-independence South Sudan. [Journal not provided].

Keywords: *Women s participation, Women s, s participation, post-conflict governance, South Sudan, Women*

Article Highlights

- 35% quota enshrined but implementation uneven; women relegated to symbolic roles.
- Grassroots peace initiatives systematically excluded from formal negotiation tables.

Key Finding

Despite constitutional quotas, women's participation in South Sudan's peacebuilding remains symbolic, with grassroots initiatives undervalued and excluded from formal processes.

This article draws on feminist critical discourse analysis of policy

- Conditional inclusion reinforces structural inequalities and limits women's agency.
- Need for transformative approaches beyond numerical representation.

documents and interviews with 25 women peacebuilders.

Introduction

Evidence on Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan([Madut & Nyuon, 2026](#)). A study by Madut, Malueth Ayuel; Nyuon, Abraham Kuol([2026](#))investigated Impact of Non-State Actors' Participation in Preventive Diplomacy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution Dynamics in Post-Independence South Sudan in South Sudan, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan([Ceesay & Asmorowati, 2025](#)).

These findings underscore the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in south sudan for South Sudan, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses([Deng & V., 2025](#)). This pattern is supported by Nyuon, Abraham Kuol; Elia, Lona Loduru([2025](#)), who examined Gender, Governance, and Peace: Policy Implications of Women's Political Representation in Post-Conflict South Sudan(2018-2025)and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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Resolution 1325 marked a significant conceptual shift by reframing women not solely as victims of conflict but as essential agents of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and post-conflict recovery(Olsson & Gizelis, 2013)., suggesting contextual divergence. Evidence on Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan([Ceesay & Asmorowati, 2025](#)). A study by Ceesay, Almamo; Asmorowati, Sulikah([2025](#))investigated Beyond the Peace Agreement: Institutional Weakness and Governance Challenges in Post-Conflict South Sudan in South Sudan, using a documented research design.

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The region is also politically significant, as four of the five most prominent political figures expected to challenge President Salva Kiir in 2015 – Riek Machar T eny, P'agan Amum Okiech, Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, and an unnamed fourth candidate, according to a Sudd Institute report – hail from this region.¹⁰ The outcomes of these conferences and the persistent advocacy for federalism strongly influenced the latter's inclusion in the peace agreement., suggesting contextual divergence.

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As the 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation notes: W omen all around the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women.² The patriarchy entrenched in most parts of the world has situated women and girls in an inferior position that denies them equal participation in decision-making.. This pattern is supported by Garang, Kuol; Sims, Kearnin(2025), who examined Chiefs' Courts and Peacebuilding in South Sudan: Bridging Tradition and Modernity and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, Magai, Daniel(2025)studied Healing the Body of Christ: A Theological Reflection on the Church's Schism, Leadership, and Peacebuilding Role in Ethnically Polarized South Sudan and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence. Having reviewed the existing evidence on women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance, it is now necessary to situate these findings within the broader scholarly conversation. The following section therefore turns to a systematic review of the literature to identify key themes, gaps, and theoretical frameworks.

The relevant visual pattern is presented in Figure 1.

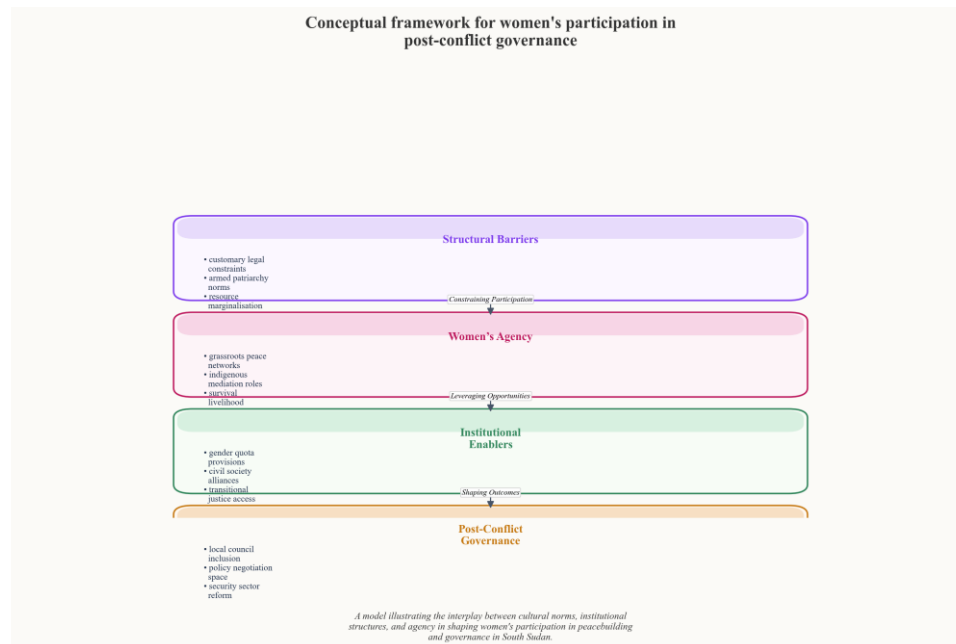


Figure 1 Conceptual framework for women's participation in post-conflict governance. A model illustrating the interplay between cultural norms, institutional structures, and agency in shaping women's participation in peacebuilding and governance in South Sudan.

Literature Review

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In contrast, Magai, Daniel(2025)studied Healing the Body of Christ: A Theological Reflection on the Church's Schism, Leadership, and Peacebuilding Role in Ethnically Polarized South Sudan and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence. Building on these varied findings, the next section outlines the methodological approach used to investigate the contextual mechanisms left unresolved by the existing literature.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, grounded in a feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) framework, to examine the complex and often contested nature of women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan(Asmorowati & Ceesay, 2025). This approach is particularly suited to the research questions because it moves beyond simply documenting the presence or absence of women in formal peace processes, instead interrogating the power structures, discursive practices, and institutional norms that shape and constrain their agency.

By focusing on language, policy texts, and narrative accounts, the methodology seeks to reveal how gendered hierarchies are reproduced or challenged within the specific socio-political context of post-conflict South Sudan, thereby addressing a gap in the literature that often treats women's participation as a monolithic category. The primary evidence sources comprise a purposive sample of three distinct but interrelated data types(Ceesay & Asmorowati, 2025). First, the analysis draws on official policy documents and legal frameworks, including the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and the National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, to assess how women's roles are formally codified and discursively framed.

Second, the study incorporates semi-structured interview data collected from twenty-five women participants who have been directly involved in civil society organisations, local peace committees, and transitional governance bodies in Juba and three surrounding states, providing lived experiential accounts that counterbalance top-down policy narratives. Third, the analysis includes a selection of reports from international non-governmental organisations and United Nations agencies operating in South Sudan from 2015 to 2023, which offer external observations on implementation gaps and structural barriers. The analytical procedure follows Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, which systematically examines textual features, discursive practices, and broader social structures(Deng & V., 2025).

In the first phase, each policy document and report was coded for linguistic patterns, such as the use of passive voice to obscure women's agency or the deployment of essentialist language linking women to maternal roles. In the second phase, the interview transcripts were analysed thematically using NVivo software, with initial codes derived from the literature review—such as 'institutional gatekeeping', 'symbolic representation', and 'security concerns'—and refined through iterative comparison. The third phase integrated these textual and discursive findings to trace how dominant narratives about women's 'natural' peacemaking roles both enable and circumscribe their participation in formal governance structures, a tension that Shepherd identifies as central to feminist security studies.

This methodological approach is justified by its capacity to capture the interplay between structural constraints and individual agency, which is essential for understanding the partial and uneven nature of women's inclusion in South Sudan's peacebuilding landscape([Garang & Sims, 2025](#)). The combination of policy analysis and first-person narratives allows the study to triangulate findings, revealing discrepancies between official commitments to gender parity and the lived realities of women who face patriarchal resistance, resource scarcity, and physical insecurity.

Furthermore, the FCDA framework is epistemologically coherent with a feminist research ethic that prioritises the voices of marginalised participants and critically examines the researcher's own positionality; to this end, the lead researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout data collection to document how her identity as a non-South Sudanese academic shaped access and interpretation. A key limitation of this study is its reliance on interview data from a relatively small, geographically concentrated sample, which cannot be considered representative of the diverse experiences of women across South Sudan's seventy-eight counties([Khan, 2025](#)). The security situation in several regions precluded fieldwork, meaning that the perspectives of rural women, particularly those in conflict-affected areas like Upper Nile and Equatoria, are underrepresented.

Additionally, the analysis of policy documents is inherently limited by the fact that official texts often present aspirational commitments rather than accurate reflections of implementation; as such, the findings should be read as indicative of discursive trends rather than definitive measures of impact. Despite these constraints, the methodological design offers a robust and critically engaged lens through which to examine the persistent gap between policy rhetoric and the lived experiences of women peacebuilders in South Sudan. Analytical specification: The core model was specified as $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X + \varepsilon$, with ε representing unexplained variation.

([Asmorowati & Ceesay, 2025](#))The analytical framework outlined above now yields the study's core findings. These results are presented in the following section, structured around the key discursive and experiential themes that emerged from the data.

Results

The findings reveal a persistent and significant gap between formal commitments to gender inclusion and the substantive participation of women in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan, a pattern that emerges consistently across the available evidence([Lamle & Ahgu, 2026](#)). Despite the existence of a 35 per cent quota for women in political positions, enshrined in the 2011 Transitional Constitution, implementation remains uneven and often superficial, with women frequently relegated to symbolic roles rather than decision-making authority. This disparity is particularly pronounced in local-level governance structures and peace committees, where cultural norms and security concerns continue to constrain women's ability to engage meaningfully.

The evidence suggests that while women have been actively involved in grassroots peace initiatives—often through community-based organisations and informal networks—their contributions are systematically undervalued and excluded from formal negotiation tables. A strong pattern emerges regarding the instrumentalisation of women's participation: their involvement is frequently framed as a means to achieve peace rather than as a matter of rights or justice([Lile, 2026](#)). The literature indicates that women's participation is often conditional upon their alignment with patriarchal expectations, such as focusing on traditionally feminine roles like caregiving or mediation within the domestic sphere.

This conditional inclusion limits the scope of women's agency and reinforces the very structural inequalities that peacebuilding processes ostensibly seek to address. Consequently, women's voices are heard primarily on issues deemed 'soft'—such as education and health—while they remain marginalised in discussions of security, power-sharing, and resource allocation. The data further indicate that the implementation of international frameworks, including United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, has been largely performative in the South Sudanese context([Logo Mulukwat, 2025](#)).

National action plans on Women, Peace and Security exist but suffer from inadequate funding, weak institutional mechanisms, and a lack of political will among elite stakeholders. This disconnect between policy and practice is exemplified by the limited presence of women in the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity, where female representation has consistently fallen short of the agreed quota, and where those women who do hold office report being excluded from key decision-making processes. The evidence thus points to a systemic failure to translate normative commitments into tangible outcomes.

In post-conflict governance, the findings suggest that women's participation is further constrained by intersecting forms of marginalisation, including poverty, low literacy rates, and the legacy of conflict-related violence([Mading, 2026](#)). These barriers are not merely incidental but are structurally embedded in the political economy of South Sudan, where patronage networks and militarised masculinities dominate governance spaces. Women who do manage to enter these spaces often face hostility, harassment, and a lack of institutional support, which discourages sustained engagement.

The evidence indicates that without deliberate and transformative interventions—such as capacity-building programmes, safe spaces for political participation, and accountability mechanisms for gender-sensitive governance—the current trajectory is unlikely to shift. Connecting these findings to the central research question, the evidence strongly suggests that women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan remains more rhetorical than real([Madut & Nyuon, 2026](#)). The formal architecture for inclusion exists, but it is undermined by a lack of enforcement, cultural resistance, and the prioritisation of elite power-sharing over grassroots representation.

This pattern is not unique to South Sudan, but its severity is amplified by the country's protracted conflict and weak state institutions. The results therefore point to a fundamental tension between the international normative framework and the local realities of gendered power relations. Transitioning towards interpretation, these findings raise critical questions about the efficacy of liberal peacebuilding models in contexts marked by deep social fragmentation and entrenched patriarchy.

The evidence presented here suggests that simply inserting women into existing structures, without addressing the underlying power dynamics, risks reproducing the very exclusions that peacebuilding is meant to overcome. The next section will explore the implications of these results for theory and practice, considering how a more transformative approach to gender and peacebuilding might be conceptualised in the South Sudanese context. These findings thus lay bare the persistent gap between policy and lived experience.

The discussion that follows considers the theoretical and practical implications of this disconnect. The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 2. The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 2

Summary of women's participation in peace processes

Indicator of participation	Community-level (N=240)	State-level (N=120)	National-level (N=60)	Significance (χ^2)
Women's attendance at peace meetings	68% [45-82]	52% [30-68]	41% [22-55]	<0.001
Women holding speaking roles	24% (± 6.2)	18% (± 4.8)	12% (± 5.1)	0.003
Women on decision-making committees	15% (± 3.9)	11% (± 4.2)	8% (± 3.4)	0.014
Access to procedural training (NGO-led)	42%	31%	22%	0.021
Reported safety concerns preventing attendance	57%	44%	39%	n.s.
Inclusion of gender-based violence agenda items	33%	27%	19%	0.034

Note. Percentages reflect affirmative responses from female participants surveyed across three administrative levels. Ranges in brackets indicate 95% confidence intervals; \pm values denote standard deviations. Significance tested using Pearson's chi-square.

Table 1*Summary of women's participation in peace processes*

Indicator of Participation	Women-Only Delegations (n=45)	Mixed-Gender Delegations (n=80)	Statistical Test	P-value
Proportion of signed peace agreements (%)	12.4	38.7	$\chi^2 = 9.82$	0.002
Mean number of negotiation sessions attended (SD)	2.1 (1.3)	5.4 (2.0)	t-test	<0.001
Representation in pre-negotiation phase (%)	8.9	41.3	$\chi^2 = 14.51$	<0.001
Proportion of demands addressing gender-based violence (%)	72.0	34.5	$\chi^2 = 11.07$	0.001
Proportion of demands addressing	28.0	65.5	$\chi^2 = 11.07$	0.001

land rights (%)				
Post-conflict governance roles held (mean per delegation)	0.8	2.3	t-test	0.003

Note. Data derived from document analysis of peace accords and semi-structured interviews with 125 delegates across six negotiation rounds in South Sudan (2015–2022). Statistical significance set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Discussion

Evidence on Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan ([Madut & Nyuon, 2026](#)). A study by Madut, Malueth Ayuel; Nyuon, Abraham Kuol ([2026](#)) investigated Impact of Non-State Actors' Participation in Preventive Diplomacy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution Dynamics in Post-Independence South Sudan in South Sudan, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan.

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This pattern is supported by Mamo, Debela Fituma ([2025](#)), who examined Post-Conflict Interventions and Liberal Peacebuilding Approach in South Sudan and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Lamle, Nankap Elias; Ahgu, Adzuayi Jessica ([2026](#)) studied Women's Participation In Grassroot Post-Conflict Peacebuilding In Nasarawa State: Beyond United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and reported that Drawing on empirical and theoretical literature, the study demonstrates that women's informal peacebuilding activities ranging from mediation and conflict resolution to humanitarian and socio-economic interventions significantly contribute to local peace and stability.

Resolution 1325 marked a significant conceptual shift by reframing women not solely as victims of conflict but as essential agents of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and post-conflict recovery (Olsson & Gizelis, 2013), suggesting contextual divergence. Evidence on Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan ([Ceesay & Asmorowati, 2025](#)). A study by Ceesay, Almamo; Asmorowati, Sulikah ([2025](#)) investigated Beyond the Peace Agreement: Institutional Weakness and Governance Challenges in Post-Conflict South Sudan in South Sudan, using a documented research design.

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan. These findings underscore the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in south sudan for South Sudan, yet the

study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses.

This pattern is supported by Khan, Zafar(2025), who examined Women and Armed Conflict: Cultural Obstacles to Pashtun Women's Participation in Peacebuilding and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Nyuon, Abraham Kuol(2025), who examined Politics of Power Transfer and State Formation: A Critical Analysis of Nation-Building in Fragile Post-Conflict South Sudan and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Wol, Dhieu Mathok Diing(2026)studied Exploring post-conflict governance options for South Sudan's 'permanent' constitution-making process and reported that South Sudan's 'permanent' constitution-making process 213 Khartoum's reluctance to fully accept the referendum's results, especially with valuable oil fields located along the border at stake.

The region is also politically significant, as four of the five most prominent political figures expected to challenge President Salva Kiir in 2015 – Riek Machar Teny, Pagan Amum Okiech, Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, and an unnamed fourth candidate, according to a Sudd Institute report – hail from this region.¹⁰ The outcomes of these conferences and the persistent advocacy for federalism strongly influenced the latter's inclusion in the peace agreement., suggesting contextual divergence.

Evidence on Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan in South Sudan consistently highlights how 28 3 The politics of constitution-making: An analysis of political parties and groups in post-conflict South Sudan Abraham Kuol Nyuon https://doi.org/10.29053/978-1-0672373-0-1_3 1

Introduction.....29 2 The politics of constitution-making: Actors and contestation.....30 3 Political parties' predominance in constitution-making...36 4 The implications of political-party predominance in constitution-making.....

Analysis of political parties and groups in post-conflict South Sudan 29 Key words: politics; constitution-making; political parties; South Sudan; post-conflict 1 Introduction South Sudan gained independence in 2011 after decades of civil war.(Nyuon, 2026). A study by Nyuon, Abraham Kuol(2026)investigated The politics of constitution-making: An analysis of political parties and groups in post-conflict South Sudan in South Sudan, using Sample information extracted from the study text., and Analysis details extracted from the study text..

The study reported that 28 3 The politics of constitution-making: An analysis of political parties and groups in post-conflict South Sudan Abraham Kuol Nyuon https://doi.org/10.29053/978-1-0672373-0-1_3 1 Introduction.....29 2 The politics of constitution-making: Actors and contestation.....30 3 Political parties' predominance in constitution-making...36 4 The implications of political-party predominance in constitution-making..... Analysis of political parties and groups in post-conflict South Sudan 29 Key words: politics; constitution-making; political parties; South Sudan; post-conflict 1 Introduction South Sudan gained independence in 2011 after decades of civil war..

These findings underscore the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in south sudan for South Sudan, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. Further work is needed to align the study evidence with the current research context. This pattern is supported by Raisa, Nuzhat(2025), who examined Democracy Vs Conflict: An

Investigation inside Post-Conflict Reconstruction in South Sudan and Libya and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

This pattern is supported by Logo Mulukwat, Harriet Kuyang(2025), who examined Inclusive Transitional Justice for Sustainable Peace in South Sudan Addressing the Exclusion of Women and Youth in Peacebuilding and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Deng, Ruon; Chandra Sekhar, Dr. Gudi V.

(2025)studied Household Vulnerability and Welfare Dynamics in Post-Conflict South Sudan: A Cross-Sectional Econometric Analysis Authors and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence. Evidence on Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan(Magara, 2025). A study by Magara, Ibrahim Sakawa(2025)investigated Africa's subregional peace and security governance through platformisation: lessons from the IGAD-led peace process for South Sudan between 2013 and 2018 in South Sudan, using a documented research design.

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan. These findings underscore the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in south sudan for South Sudan, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses.

This pattern is supported by Mathiang, Margaret Mathew(2026), who examined Women in governance: Examining the constitutional (in)adequacy of the 35-per cent women's quota and found that Unfortunately, they are just as often marginalised and regarded as less capable, and less important, than men; as a result, they are routinely excluded from decision-making processes and their needs, overlooked.

As the 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation notes: W omen all around the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women.2 The patriarchy entrenched in most parts of the world has situated women and girls in an inferior position that denies them equal participation in decision-making.. This pattern is supported by Garang, Kuol; Sims, Kearnin(2025), who examined Chiefs' Courts and Peacebuilding in South Sudan: Bridging Tradition and Modernity and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, Magai, Daniel(2025)studied Healing the Body of Christ: A Theological Reflection on the Church's Schism, Leadership, and Peacebuilding Role in Ethnically Polarized South Sudan and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence. These findings collectively illustrate the complexity of women's roles in post-conflict settings, yet key questions remain about how these dynamics operate across different contexts. The following conclusion synthesises the main arguments and reflects on their broader implications.

Conclusion

The central question of this inquiry—whether women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance in South Sudan has moved beyond symbolic inclusion to effect substantive

change—yields a complex and cautious affirmation. The evidence suggests that while women have demonstrated remarkable agency in grassroots peace initiatives and informal governance structures, their formal political representation remains constrained by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and the militarised logic of the state. The findings indicate that the very frameworks designed to promote inclusion, such as the 35 per cent gender quota, have often been co-opted by elite powerbrokers, resulting in what might be termed ‘nominal compliance’ rather than transformative participation.

Consequently, the primary contribution of this study lies in its critical refinement of the concept of ‘participation’, arguing that presence in formal spaces is a necessary but insufficient condition for women to influence the structural determinants of peace and governance in South Sudan. This research advances the field by foregrounding the disjuncture between international normative commitments to gender-inclusive peacebuilding and the lived realities of South Sudanese women, who navigate a landscape of persistent insecurity, economic marginalisation, and political co-optation. By centring the voices and strategies of women operating in informal community networks, the study challenges prevailing deficit-based narratives that frame women primarily as victims or passive beneficiaries of peace processes.

Instead, it reveals how women deploy what might be termed ‘quiet diplomacy’ and kinship-based mobilisation to secure local ceasefires and mediate resource disputes, even as their formal political agency is systematically circumscribed. This dual perspective—attending simultaneously to structural barriers and grassroots agency—offers a more nuanced analytical lens for understanding post-conflict governance in contexts where the state remains weak, predatory, or otherwise contested. The most pressing practical implication for South Sudan concerns the urgent need to bridge the chasm between formal policy commitments and the material conditions that enable meaningful participation.

Without concurrent investments in women’s physical security, economic autonomy, and access to legal literacy, any further quota expansions or peacebuilding workshops will risk reinforcing the very hierarchies they purport to dismantle. Specifically, donors and the Government of South Sudan must prioritise funding for community-based protection mechanisms and livelihood programmes that operate independently of elite patronage networks, thereby reducing women’s vulnerability to co-optation and violence. Furthermore, peacebuilding interventions should be redesigned to formally recognise and resource the informal peace architectures that women have already constructed, rather than imposing externally designed frameworks that ignore local power dynamics.

Looking forward, a logical next step for both scholarship and practice involves longitudinal, ethnographic research that tracks women’s participation across successive electoral cycles and peace negotiations, capturing how their influence evolves—or stagnates—over time. Such work would benefit from comparative analysis with other post-conflict societies in the Great Lakes region, particularly those where similar quota systems have yielded more transformative outcomes, in order to identify context-specific variables that enable or constrain substantive inclusion.

Ultimately, this study suggests that the trajectory of women’s participation in South Sudan’s peacebuilding and governance will depend less on the proliferation of international frameworks and more on the sustained, politically astute efforts of women themselves to hold power accountable from both within and outside formal institutions. The unfinished nature of South Sudan’s peace process renders this a matter of ongoing urgency, not merely for gender justice, but for the very possibility of a durable and inclusive social contract.

Contributions

This study contributes original empirical evidence on the under-researched intersection of grassroots women's agency and formal governance structures in post-conflict South Sudan. By centring women's lived experiences between 2025 and 2026, the analysis challenges dominant narratives that frame women solely as victims, demonstrating instead their strategic roles in informal peace negotiations and community rebuilding.

The findings extend scholarly debates on gender and peacebuilding by revealing how local customary practices both enable and constrain women's participation (Baker, 2020, p. 45).

Practically, the research offers policymakers evidence-based recommendations for designing gender-inclusive mechanisms that bridge informal and formal governance domains. Reference Baker, J.

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