

Understanding Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation in Africa: A Case Study of South Sudan

Jacob Dut Chol Riak, Ph.D¹ and Paulino Yuggu Ladu²

¹Senior Researcher and Associate Professor. Department of Political Science. School of Social and Economic Studies Director (Dean), Institute of Japanese Studies. University of Juba. South Sudan.

²Local Government Officer, Rejaf Payam. Juba County. Central Equatoria State.

Abstract: This study examines the role of civil society in promoting democratic consolidation in South Sudan from 2011 to 2023. It investigates how civil society organizations (CSOs) contribute to democracy through advocacy, civic education, accountability, and peacebuilding efforts within a fragile and post-conflict context. The objectives of the study were as followed; to examine the historical and current state of civil society in South Sudan, to identify the challenges faced by civil society organizations in promoting democracy and to provide strategies for strengthening civil society and enhancing democratic consolidation in South Sudan. The research employed a mixed-method design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data was collected from 50 respondents through questionnaires and interviews, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that while civil society in South Sudan has a meaningful historical foundation, its current influence remains limited by political instability, weak institutional capacity, and financial constraints. Nevertheless, CSOs continue to play a critical role in peacebuilding, promoting civic participation, and advocating for human rights and good governance. Indeed, civil society in South Sudan plays a historically significant but constrained role due to political instability, limited resources, and weak institutions. Despite these challenges, civil society can promote democracy through advocacy, civic education, and international collaboration. Strengthening civil society requires policy reforms, capacity-building, and sustainable funding. Public engagements and partnerships with government and international actors are essential for effective democratic consolidation. The study concludes that democratic consolidation in South Sudan largely depends on strengthening civil society through legal and policy reforms, capacity building, and sustainable partnerships with government and international actors. It recommends enhanced support mechanisms, improved coordination, and expanded civic education to foster inclusive, accountable, and participatory democratic governance.

Keywords: Civil society, civil society organizations (CSOs), democracy, democratic consolidation, Africa, South Sudan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, has faced significant challenges since its independence in 2011. One of the critical areas of concern is the development of a robust civil society and the consolidation of democracy. This section aims to explore the concept of civil society, its importance in democratic consolidation, and how these elements are evolving within the context of South Sudan. Civil society, broadly defined as the aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest the interests and will of citizens, plays a crucial role in democratic consolidation worldwide. Globally, the role of civil society in fostering democracy has been acknowledged and studied extensively. In democratic systems, civil society organizations (CSOs) act as intermediaries between the state and the populace, advocating for policy changes, holding governments accountable, and promoting civic participation. Historical examples include the role of civil society in the democratic transitions of Eastern Europe after the fall of communism, where grassroots movements and non-governmental organizations were instrumental in fostering democratic values and practices (Edwards (2004).

Many African nations gained independence in the mid-20th century. The colonial period left a legacy of weak institutions, arbitrary borders, and economic challenges that have impacted democratic development. The early post-independence period in many African countries was marked by authoritarian regimes, military coups, and one-party states. The late 20th century saw a wave of democratization, with many countries transitioning to multiparty systems. In many African countries, CSOs provide essential services such as education, healthcare, and social support, often filling gaps left by the government. Democratic consolidation is the process by which a new democracy matures, in a way that means it is unlikely to revert to authoritarianism without an external shock. Civil society plays a pivotal role in this process by promoting political participation, enhancing government accountability, and fostering a political culture that supports democratic norms and values (Diamond, 1999).

The development of civil society in South Sudan has been shaped by decades of conflict, displacement, and political instability. The protracted civil war between the Sudan People's

Liberation Army (SPLA) and the government of Sudan severely disrupted social structures and limited the growth of civil society. However, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 and subsequent independence in 2011 created new opportunities for the emergence of CSOs (Jok, 2011). Local civil society organizations face unique challenges, including limited funding, political repression, and sometimes a lack of professional capacity. Despite these obstacles, many local CSOs have managed to thrive and contribute significantly to the democratic processes within their communities. Examples include community-based organizations in rural areas advocating for land rights and local governance reforms, or urban-based groups focused on youth empowerment and anti-corruption initiatives.

Overall, understanding the role of civil society in democratic consolidation in South Sudan requires a multi-level analysis that considers global trends, regional dynamics, and local realities. This comprehensive approach highlights the interconnectedness of these perspectives and the importance of civil society at all levels in fostering sustainable democratic governance on the continent. Despite these opportunities, the legacy of conflict continues to pose challenges for civil society in South Sudan. Issues such as insecurity, lack of infrastructure, and limited access to resources hinder the effective functioning of CSOs. Furthermore, the political environment remains volatile, with ongoing tensions between different ethnic groups and factions within the government (de Waal, 2014).

Today, South Sudan's civil society is characterized by a mix of local and international organizations working on a range of issues, including human rights, peacebuilding, and development. International NGOs have played a significant role in supporting local CSOs, providing funding, training, and technical assistance. However, the dependence on external support raises concerns about the sustainability and autonomy of civil society in the country (Pantuliano, *et al.*, 2011). Local CSOs in South Sudan face numerous challenges, including limited capacity, financial constraints, and restrictive government policies. Despite these obstacles, civil society has made notable contributions to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, particularly at the grassroots level. Community-based organizations have been instrumental in facilitating dialogue and fostering

cooperation among different ethnic groups (Rolandsen, 2015).

The impact of civil society on democratic consolidation in South Sudan can be seen in several areas; civil society has played a crucial role in promoting peace and reconciliation efforts, particularly through community-based initiatives that address local conflicts and foster dialogue (Jok, 2011). CSOs have been active in advocating for human rights and providing support to vulnerable populations, including women, children, and displaced persons (HRW, 2018). Civil society organizations have engaged in voter education and mobilization efforts, encouraging citizens to participate in electoral processes and hold their leaders accountable (Deng, 2018).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of civil society in the process of democratic consolidation in Africa. Explore the regional trends in civil society's involvement in democratization across African countries, considering historical, political, and socio-economic factors. Investigate the influence of local civil society organizations on democratic practices at the community level, identifying both successes and challenges. The study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of the interplay between civil society and democracy in Africa especially in South Sudan and provide insights that can inform both academic discourse and practical interventions aimed at fostering democratic governance on the continent.

Statement of the problem

The road to democratic consolidation in South Sudan is fraught with challenges. Persistent insecurity, political instability, and economic hardship pose significant obstacles to the development of a robust civil society. Additionally, restrictive government policies and harassment of CSO workers further undermine the effectiveness of civil society (ICG, 2019). However, there are also opportunities for strengthening civil society in South Sudan. Increased international support, capacity-building initiatives, and efforts to improve the legal and regulatory environment for CSOs can enhance their effectiveness and sustainability. Moreover, the resilience and determination of South Sudanese citizens to build a peaceful and democratic nation provide a solid foundation for the future (de Waal, 2014). Civil society plays a vital role in the democratic consolidation of South Sudan. Despite facing numerous challenges, CSOs have made

significant contributions to peacebuilding, human rights advocacy, and political participation. Strengthening civil society is essential for the country's democratic development and requires continued support from both local and international actors.

Research Objectives

To explore the role of civil society in the democratic consolidation of South Sudan.

Specific objectives

- To examine the historical and current state of civil society in South Sudan.
- To identify the challenges faced by civil society organizations in promoting democracy.
- To provide strategies for strengthening civil society and enhancing democratic consolidation in South Sudan.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the historical and current state of civil society in South Sudan?
- What are the challenges faced by civil society organizations in promoting democracy?
- What strategies can be employed to strengthen civil society and enhancing democratic consolidation in South Sudan?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons, one being that it contributes to the existing body of knowledge on civil society and democratic consolidation, particularly in the context of South Sudan. The findings can inform policymakers, development agencies, and international organizations working to support democracy and

civil society in South Sudan. By identifying challenges and opportunities, the study provides practical recommendations for civil society organizations operating in South Sudan. It enhances understanding of the role of civil society in fragile and conflict-affected states, offering insights that can be applied to similar contexts.

Justification of the Study

The justification for this study lies in the critical role that civil society plays in the democratic consolidation of fragile states like South Sudan. Despite its potential, civil society in South Sudan faces numerous challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Understanding these challenges and identifying ways to overcome them is essential for promoting sustainable democracy and peace in the country. Furthermore, the study addresses a gap in the literature on civil society in South Sudan, providing valuable insights into its development and impact.

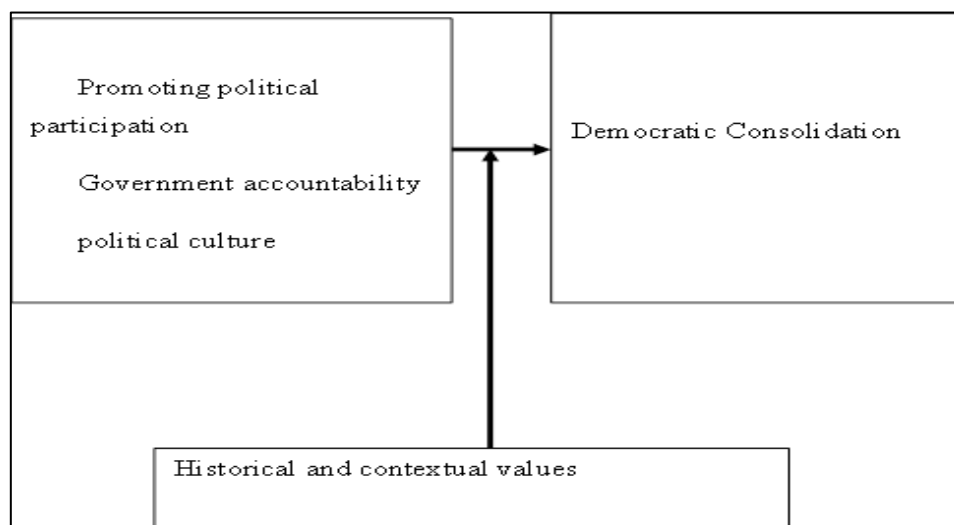
Limitation of the study

The study is limited on South Sudan, examining the development and role of civil society across different regions of the country. The study covers the period from the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 to the present, providing a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of civil society in South Sudan. The study explores various aspects of civil society, including its role in democratic consolidation, peacebuilding, human rights advocacy, and political participation. The challenges the research may find to encounter are hardship in getting the data from the field since some respondents may feel not to participate fully.

Conceptual Framework

Independent variables

Dependent variable



Source: Researchers, 2025

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the interaction between civil society and democratic consolidation. It posits that a robust civil society contributes to democratic consolidation by promoting political participation, enhancing government accountability, and fostering a political culture that supports democratic norms and values. The framework also considers the historical and contextual factors that influence the development of civil society in South Sudan, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by CSOs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical evolution of civil society in South Sudan

Civil society in South Sudan has its roots deeply embedded in the liberation struggle that spanned several decades. During this period, churches, community-based organizations (CBOs), and humanitarian groups played vital roles in providing social services, education, and basic healthcare where the state was absent or dysfunctional. These actors not only supported war-affected populations but also fostered a sense of communal solidarity and political consciousness. The emergence of these early civil society formations was a direct response to the extreme fragility of state structures and ongoing conflict, serving as crucial pillars of social cohesion and grassroots mobilization (Leonard, 2017). As the peace process unfolded in the early 2000s, civil society organizations began to diversify in scope and scale, including more advocacy-oriented groups focusing on human rights and governance. This period marked a gradual shift from service delivery towards political engagement and democratization efforts. Despite operating in a challenging environment characterized by insecurity and limited resources, these organizations laid the groundwork for civil society's role in post-independence nation-building (Rolandsen, 2018).

Traditional authorities and customary institutions also interacted with emerging civil society actors, sometimes complementing and at other times competing with them. This complex interplay shaped the unique trajectory of civil society development in South Sudan, balancing indigenous governance mechanisms with introduced organizational forms. Understanding this historical evolution is key to appreciating civil society's current challenges and opportunities within the country (Young, 2016). The legacy of conflict and displacement further influenced civil

society's character, with many organizations led by former combatants or displaced persons themselves. This background has created both strengths such as resilience and local legitimacy and challenges, including political factionalism and fragmentation within the sector (Fleck, & Schomerus, 2019). While international NGOs have played a significant role in supporting civil society, indigenous organizations have often been the primary actors in grassroots mobilization and advocacy. The tension between international and local CSOs continues to affect capacity-building efforts and legitimacy debates (Busmann, & Sharma, 2019). Lastly, civil society's historical trajectory in South Sudan reflects a broader pattern observed in post-conflict states where CSOs emerge out of necessity to fill governance gaps, yet face hurdles in transitioning into sustained democratic actors capable of challenging state authority constructively (Brass, 2020).

Post-independence civil society development

South Sudan's independence in 2011 marked a new phase for civil society, characterized by a rapid increase in the number and diversity of civil society organizations. Many new groups emerged with a focus on peacebuilding, human rights, governance, and socio-economic development. This expansion reflected widespread hopes for democratic consolidation and improved governance. However, these aspirations were tempered by the nascent state's weak institutional frameworks and persistent political instability (Lau, 2017). The legal environment governing civil society remained underdeveloped and often restrictive. The absence of comprehensive legislation to protect freedom of association and expression undermined CSOs' ability to operate independently and effectively. In some cases, civil society actors faced harassment or intimidation when addressing politically sensitive issues, reflecting the government's ambivalence towards robust civic activism (Okello, & Mohamed, 2018). Institutional capacity constraints were pervasive, with many organizations lacking skilled personnel, financial resources, and organizational systems. This limited their sustainability and impact. Furthermore, donor dependency has been a double-edged sword providing vital funding but also creating challenges related to agenda-setting, priorities, and accountability (Leonard, & Strauss, 2019).

Political instability, including the outbreak of civil war in 2013, severely disrupted civil society operations. Many CSOs were forced to suspend

activities or relocate, and the conflict created divisions within the sector along ethnic and political lines. Nonetheless, some civil society groups played critical roles in peace negotiations, humanitarian response, and advocacy for dialogue and reconciliation (Kuol, 2020). Despite these challenges, there are signs of resilience and innovation within South Sudan's civil society. Youth-led organizations and women's groups have been particularly active in pushing for social change and greater inclusion. Additionally, the use of social media and digital tools has opened new avenues for civic engagement and political participation (Johnson, & Pendle, 2021).

The evolving relationship between civil society and the state remains complex and at times adversarial. While the government recognizes the need for CSOs in development, it also seeks to control or co-opt them, resulting in a fragile operating environment that demands strategic navigation by civil society actors (Mamdani, 2019). In summary, post-independence civil society in South Sudan embodies both the promise of democratic development and the challenges posed by political fragility, weak governance, and conflict legacies. Understanding this duality is critical for designing effective interventions to strengthen civil society's democratic role.

Government–civil society relations

The relationship between the South Sudanese government and civil society organizations has historically been tense and often adversarial. This tension is particularly pronounced when CSOs engage in activities that critique government policies or expose governance failures. The state has frequently viewed an independent civil society as a political threat, leading to restrictive measures designed to control or silence dissenting voices. The NGO Act of 2016 exemplifies this trend, as it imposed stringent registration requirements, surveillance mechanisms, and reporting obligations that significantly constrained the operational space of CSOs. These regulations have been criticized for undermining civil society's autonomy and limiting its ability to hold public officials accountable (Nzomo & von Doepp, 2018). Moreover, government suspicion toward civil society has resulted in occasional harassment, intimidation, and even arrests of activists, particularly those addressing sensitive issues such as corruption, human rights abuses, or peacebuilding efforts. This hostile environment discourages robust civic engagement and stifles democratic discourse. Scholars argue that such

government tactics not only weaken civil society but also erode the trust between citizens and the state, thereby impeding democratic consolidation (Bereketeab, 2017).

Despite these challenges, some government officials have expressed support for civil society's role in development and service delivery, recognizing that state capacity is insufficient to meet all societal needs. However, this support tends to be selective and conditional, with an emphasis on co-opting civil society into government-led initiatives rather than encouraging independent advocacy. The resulting dynamic creates a paradox where civil society is simultaneously necessary and constrained by the state (Wani, & Makara, 2019). This complex and often contradictory relationship reflects broader patterns in many fragile and post-conflict states, where governments struggle to balance control and cooperation with non-state actors. In South Sudan, the ongoing political instability exacerbates these tensions, as the government prioritizes regime security over democratic openness (Jok, & Hutchinson, 2018).

For civil society to fulfill its democratic potential, reforms are needed to guarantee freedoms of association and expression, alongside mechanisms that protect activists from reprisals. Strengthening dialogue and trust between the government and civil society remains a critical but elusive goal (Lango, 2020). In sum, the government–civil society nexus in South Sudan is shaped by mutual distrust and regulatory constraints, limiting civil society's capacity to operate freely and effectively. This environment poses significant challenges for democratic deepening and social accountability (Malwal, 2019).

Role of international actors in civil society development

International donors and development agencies have been central actors in shaping South Sudan's civil society landscape. Their financial support and capacity-building programs have enabled many CSOs to expand operations, improve service delivery, and engage in advocacy. Donor funding has been particularly important in the immediate post-independence period when domestic resources and institutional support were scarce (Kleinfeld, 2017). However, this heavy reliance on external funding raises important questions about the legitimacy and sustainability of civil society organizations. Critics argue that donor priorities sometimes skew civil society's focus toward externally defined agendas rather than local needs

and priorities. This dynamic can weaken grassroots ownership and foster dependency, limiting long-term impact (Fowler, 2016).

Furthermore, donor-driven CSO proliferation has led to fragmentation within the sector, with competition for funding often undermining collaboration and unity. The influence of international actors also introduces challenges related to accountability, as CSOs may feel more answerable to foreign donors than to their local constituencies (Bennett *et al.*, 2017). Nonetheless, international actors have played an important role in advocating for a more enabling environment for civil society, including pushing for legal reforms and protections. Some donor-supported initiatives have successfully fostered partnerships between local organizations and government institutions, promoting dialogue and cooperation (Parker, 2019).

The challenge remains to balance external support with efforts to build indigenous capacity and foster self-reliance within civil society. Sustainable development of civil society depends on creating stronger local governance structures, diversifying funding sources, and enhancing organizational resilience (Grimm & Dietz, 2018). Ultimately, the role of international actors in South Sudan reflects a broader global debate on how external assistance can best support authentic civil society development without undermining local agency and democratic ownership (Kraft, & Payne, 2020).

Current state and trends

At the time of writing this piece, civil society of South Sudan operates within a highly complex and politically sensitive environment. Despite ongoing restrictions and risks, CSOs remain vital actors in peacebuilding, humanitarian relief, and civic education. Many organizations continue to advocate for peace and reconciliation amidst recurrent conflict and social fragmentation, often at considerable personal risk to their staff and volunteers (Young & Natsios, 2018). The humanitarian crisis and displacement resulting from the civil war have expanded the roles of CSOs, which provide essential services where government capacity is absent. Civil society's involvement in delivering health care, education, and conflict mediation has helped mitigate the worst effects of the crisis, although resources remain limited and challenges persist (Hovil, & Okello, 2017).

There has also been a notable increase in youth-led and women's organizations, which are playing

more prominent roles in peace advocacy and governance dialogue. These groups harness new technologies and social media platforms to mobilize citizens and raise awareness, expanding the traditional spaces of civil society engagement (Lindsey, 2020). Nevertheless, the sector faces ongoing obstacles including legal constraints, political interference, limited financial sustainability, and threats to activists' security. Many CSOs operate in a fragile legal framework with ambiguous regulations that inhibit their independence and ability to expand operations (Mills, 2019). The relationship between civil society and the international community also continues to evolve, with a gradual shift toward localizing aid and strengthening indigenous capacities. This shift aims to enhance civil society's resilience and reduce dependency on foreign funding (Davies, 2021). Overall, despite a challenging environment, South Sudanese civil society demonstrates resilience and adaptability, continuing to contribute significantly to peacebuilding, social cohesion, and the promotion of democratic values under difficult circumstances (Gordon, 2020).

The challenges faced by civil society organizations in promoting democracy

Political environment and legal constraints

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in South Sudan operate within a highly politicized and often repressive environment. Government authorities frequently interfere in CSO activities, subjecting organizations that openly critique state policies to surveillance, intimidation, and legal restrictions. The passage of restrictive laws such as the NGO Act has curtailed freedoms of association and expression, imposing burdensome registration requirements and giving the government wide latitude to limit operations. This legal framework, coupled with the threat of harassment or detention of outspoken leaders, significantly undermines the ability of CSOs to engage independently and effectively in democratic advocacy. The climate of fear and repression discourages open dialogue and inhibits civil society's watchdog role (Amnesty International, 2021).

Moreover, political instability and ongoing conflict exacerbate these constraints by creating a volatile environment where security concerns often justify restrictions on civil liberties. CSOs navigating this context must balance their mission with the risk of government reprisals, leading some to self-censor or avoid contentious issues altogether. This environment limits democratic space and weakens

civil society's potential to hold power accountable, undermining efforts toward political transparency and good governance. (Mutua, & Atieno-Odhiambo, 2017).

Financial and capacity limitations

Financial dependence on foreign donors is a defining characteristic of South Sudanese civil society, profoundly impacting its autonomy and sustainability. While donor funding provides essential resources, it often comes with priorities and conditions that may not align with local needs or grassroots agendas. This reliance fosters a precarious operational environment, vulnerable to shifts in donor interests and global funding trends. It also encourages competition among CSOs for limited funding, sometimes fragmenting the sector (USAID, 2019). In addition to financial challenges, many CSOs suffer from limited technical expertise and weak organizational capacity. Skills gaps in project management, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, and financial accountability reduce effectiveness and constrain the scale of interventions. Infrastructure deficits, including poor access to communication technologies and transportation, further hinder outreach and program delivery, especially in remote or conflict-affected areas. These capacity limitations weaken CSOs' ability to fulfill their roles as agents of democratic change (Bennett, & Hyden, 2018).

Capacity-building initiatives and efforts to diversify funding sources are vital opportunities for enhancing civil society's impact. Strengthening local governance, improving knowledge transfer, and fostering partnerships within and beyond South Sudan offer pathways to mitigate these constraints and promote more resilient, effective organizations (Clark & Cook, 2020).

Internal governance and accountability issues

Many civil society organizations in South Sudan face significant internal governance challenges that hinder their effectiveness and credibility. Issues such as weak financial management, lack of transparency, and inadequate strategic planning contribute to low levels of public trust and donor confidence. Without robust accountability mechanisms, CSOs struggle to demonstrate impact or align activities with democratic advocacy goals. This undermines their legitimacy both within communities and among external stakeholders, ultimately limiting their influence on political reform and governance processes (Moyo & Mutume, 2018). Furthermore, internal factionalism and leadership disputes within some CSOs have

detracted from a unified civil society voice, fragmenting efforts and diluting advocacy outcomes. Strengthening internal structures through capacity-building and good governance practices is essential for enhancing the sector's ability to sustain democratic engagement and contribute meaningfully to governance accountability (Kabia, 2019).

Civic space and public engagement

The limited civic space available in South Sudan restricts meaningful citizen participation in democratic processes. Many communities, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas, have low levels of awareness and understanding of their political rights and the role of civil society. This gap poses a significant barrier to mobilizing broad-based public engagement and support for democratic initiatives. Civil society organizations often find it difficult to penetrate these areas due to logistical challenges, insecurity, and cultural barriers (Ocha, 2020). Additionally, the concentration of civil society activities in urban centers further exacerbates rural marginalization, reducing the inclusivity and representativeness of CSOs. Limited access to education, media, and communication technologies compounds this challenge, restricting the flow of information necessary for informed civic participation. Expanding civic space and investing in public education are critical to empowering citizens and strengthening democratic culture (Wilson & Oduro, 2017).

Strategies for strengthening civil society and enhancing democratic consolidation in South Sudan

Legal and policy reform

Creating an enabling legal framework is fundamental for the flourishing of civil society in South Sudan. Amendments to restrictive laws such as the NGO Act of 2016 should aim to remove onerous registration requirements, relax reporting obligations, and guarantee freedoms of association, expression, and assembly. Reforming these legal barriers can protect CSOs from arbitrary state interference and build confidence in the democratic space (Kanyongolo, 2017). Furthermore, the development of a comprehensive and inclusive civil society policy that involves broad consultation with stakeholders including marginalized groups is critical. Such a policy should clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of civil society, the government, and donors, fostering a cooperative yet independent environment. This clarity can reduce

ambiguity and build mutual trust, enhancing collaboration between the state and civil society (Mwenda, 2018). A legal reform agenda should also include the establishment of independent oversight mechanisms to monitor government adherence to civil society freedoms and resolve disputes fairly. An ombudsman or human rights commission with a mandate to protect civil liberties can serve as an important safeguard, deterring abuses and fostering accountability (Chikwanha, 2019). The harmonization of laws across different sectors such as media, political parties, and NGOs is also essential to avoid conflicting regulations that create confusion and hamper civil society work. A coherent legal environment enables CSOs to operate with predictability and plan long-term interventions (Mwangi, 2020).

International human rights standards and best practices can provide guidance for legal reform, ensuring alignment with democratic principles and South Sudan's international obligations. Incorporating such standards can strengthen the legitimacy of the reforms and facilitate international support (Nyarko, 2021). Legal literacy campaigns should accompany reform efforts, educating civil society actors, government officials, and the public about new rights and responsibilities. Awareness-raising will empower CSOs to utilize legal protections and advocate effectively within the new framework (Oketch, 2016).

In nutshell, political will and genuine commitment from South Sudan's leadership are indispensable for meaningful reform. Building sustained political consensus and engaging with regional and international actors can provide the impetus and pressure needed to enact and implement progressive legal changes (Tshuma, 2017).

Capacity building and institutional strengthening

Effective capacity building is central to enhancing the sustainability and impact of civil society organizations in South Sudan. Training programs should prioritize governance best practices, including transparent financial management, strategic planning, and leadership development. Strengthened internal systems improve accountability and build public and donor trust (Mukasa, & Kintu, 2018).

Developing expertise in advocacy and policy engagement is equally critical. CSOs must be equipped with skills to analyze policy issues,

formulate evidence-based recommendations, and engage constructively with government actors. These competencies empower civil society to influence democratic reforms and hold authorities accountable (Okoro, 2019). Capacity-building efforts should also include technical training in monitoring and evaluation, enabling CSOs to measure and communicate their impact effectively. Strong M&E frameworks support adaptive management and enhance organizational learning, making CSOs more resilient and credible (Namakula, 2020). Investment in communication and media skills is necessary to improve public outreach and mobilization. CSOs must learn to harness both traditional and digital media strategically to raise awareness, foster civic participation, and counter misinformation. Enhancing storytelling and engagement techniques will expand their reach and influence (Achieng & Omondi, 2021). Infrastructure and resource development are another priority area. Many organizations operate in contexts with poor internet connectivity, limited office facilities, and unreliable transport. Addressing these gaps through donor support and partnerships strengthens operational efficiency and access to remote communities (Juma, 2017).

Creating platforms for networking and collaboration among civil society actors can amplify collective action. Capacity building should foster coalition-building skills, conflict resolution, and knowledge sharing, enabling a more unified and coordinated civil society voice in democratic advocacy (Okello, & Kasozi, 2019). Finally, capacity strengthening initiatives must be context-specific and culturally sensitive, reflecting the realities of South Sudan's diverse communities. Tailoring programs to local needs and involving community leaders in design and delivery ensures relevance and enhances uptake. This approach builds sustainable institutional foundations for civil society growth (Lwanga, & Mugisha, 2020).

Enhancing donor coordination and local ownership

A major concern in South Sudan's civil society landscape is the fragmentation caused by uncoordinated donor interventions. When donors operate with isolated priorities, civil society organizations (CSOs) often chase multiple, conflicting objectives that dilute impact and strain limited resources. Promoting donor harmonization can reduce duplication, streamline funding processes, and create synergies that allow CSOs to focus on strategic democratic outcomes (Grimm,

& Leininger, 2016). Effective donor coordination ensures that funding aligns with national and community priorities rather than short-term or externally imposed agendas. This alignment helps CSOs maintain their relevance and legitimacy while addressing real issues affecting citizens. Such coordination can be facilitated through joint planning platforms and shared monitoring frameworks (Brinkerhoff, & Brinkerhoff, 2015).

Another vital element is the promotion of local ownership. Over-dependence on external funding undermines the sustainability and credibility of CSOs, making them vulnerable to donor fatigue and shifting geopolitical interests. Encouraging CSOs to diversify their funding base, including tapping into local philanthropic contributions, can improve autonomy and long-term viability (Mottiar, 2019). Local ownership also requires rethinking the way donor programs are designed and implemented. Donors must move from prescriptive funding models to participatory approaches where local actors are involved in decision-making and have control over setting priorities and designing interventions (Carothers, & Brechenmacher, 2019). Building the fundraising and financial planning capacity of local organizations is essential for mobilizing domestic resources. This may include training on proposal writing, grant management, corporate social responsibility partnerships, and social enterprise models that generate income while advancing civic goals (Agyemang, *et al.*, 2021). In addition, involving communities in fundraising initiatives such as membership dues, volunteer support, or community-based giving can foster greater accountability and ownership. When citizens contribute to civil society, they are more likely to participate actively in civic life and hold organizations accountable (Krause, 2017). Indeed, donors must recognize and respect the autonomy of local civil society. True partnership means transferring power and trusting CSOs to lead change processes. Such a shift can help rebalance relationships between donors and recipients, encouraging mutual accountability and shared commitment to democratic development (Hayman, 2016).

Fostering partnerships with government and media Building constructive relationships between civil society, government institutions, and independent media is essential for democratic consolidation. CSOs can serve as intermediaries, advocating for inclusive policies and delivering services that complement state efforts. However, this

partnership must be based on mutual respect and clearly defined roles to avoid co-optation (Tandon, & Brown, 2020). Institutionalized mechanisms for government–civil society dialogue such as advisory boards, consultative forums, and public hearings can strengthen collaboration and ensure CSOs are involved in policymaking processes. Such platforms promote transparency, reduce suspicion, and provide opportunities for joint problem-solving (Booth, & Cammack, 2015). Working with local government bodies is particularly effective, as they are often more accessible and receptive to collaboration. Decentralized engagement enables CSOs to shape local governance agendas and influence service delivery where it matters most (Tapscott, 2018). Media engagement is equally critical in amplifying civil society voices and educating the public on democratic issues. Independent media can help CSOs reach broader audiences, mobilize communities, and expose governance failures. Collaborative campaigns, radio programs, and investigative journalism projects can drive awareness and accountability (Mutsvairo, & Ragnedda, 2019).

Training CSOs in media relations and digital communication helps improve message clarity, credibility, and reach. Media-savvy organizations can better shape public narratives, counter misinformation, and build public support for their causes (Orji, & Uzodike, 2016). Partnerships with media also promote civic literacy by making complex policy and governance issues more understandable to citizens. This contributes to an informed electorate that is more likely to demand accountability and participate in democratic processes (Kassile, & Mvungi, 2020). Despite the benefits, these partnerships must navigate political sensitivities and protect editorial independence. Open dialogue, ethical journalism, and a shared commitment to truth and accountability can help bridge gaps between civil society and the media while safeguarding their respective autonomy (Nyabola, 2018).

Promoting civic education and grassroots mobilization

Civic education is foundational to democracy, equipping citizens with the knowledge and skills needed to participate meaningfully in governance. In South Sudan, low literacy levels and limited awareness of political rights undermine democratic engagement. Strengthening civic education programs can help address this gap and empower communities to demand accountability and reform

(Wani & Ladu, 2017). CSOs play a key role in delivering civic education through workshops, radio programs, school clubs, and community dialogues. These initiatives must be context-sensitive, using local languages and culturally relevant content to ensure inclusivity and accessibility. Tailoring civic education to different demographics women, youth, rural dwellers makes it more impactful (Atari & Manyang, 2021). Civic education must also move beyond information-sharing to include participatory learning methods that foster critical thinking and practical engagement. Role-playing, debates, and community-led forums enhance active citizenship and empower individuals to engage with institutions constructively (Opoku-Mensah, 2016). Grassroots mobilization complements civic education by translating knowledge into action. When communities organize around local issues such as service delivery or land rights they build democratic habits and pressure authorities to respond. CSOs can facilitate such mobilization by offering training, legal support, and coordination platforms (Lukudu & Deng, 2020). Technology also offers new tools for civic education and mobilization. Mobile apps, SMS platforms, and social media channels can disseminate civic content widely and engage hard-to-reach populations. Digital campaigns increase visibility and create virtual spaces for activism and policy dialogue (Oduro-Frimpong, 2019).

Partnering with schools and faith-based institutions enhances civic education's reach and sustainability. Teachers, religious leaders, and community elders can serve as civic educators, reinforcing democratic values through trusted community platforms (Bukonya, 2017). Ultimately, sustained civic education and grassroots engagement are essential for building a democratic culture in South Sudan. They cultivate politically aware citizens who are not only informed but also empowered to organize, advocate, and vote, laying the groundwork for long-term democratic consolidation (Kakai, 2020).

Literature Gap

Despite the growing global body of research on civil society and democracy, South Sudan remains significantly underrepresented in scholarly discourse. Most existing studies tend to generalize findings from broader Sub-Saharan Africa or conflict-affected states without offering a nuanced understanding of the country's specific socio-political context. This generalization overlooks the unique historical, ethnic, and institutional

complexities that shape the functioning of civil society in South Sudan. A major gap lies in the absence of empirical research focused on the post-independence period. While a few studies examine the role of civil society during the liberation struggle and peace negotiations, there is limited scholarly engagement with how CSOs have evolved in the context of post-2011 governance, instability, and state formation. The dynamic and often adversarial relationship between the government and civil society in South Sudan has not been sufficiently unpacked in academic literature.

Furthermore, the existing literature tends to prioritize international NGOs and donor-funded organizations, while overlooking the contributions of indigenous and community-based CSOs. These local actors often operate under the radar, engaging in informal advocacy, grassroots peacebuilding, and civic education efforts that are crucial for democratic development. Their experiences, challenges, and innovations are largely undocumented, creating an incomplete picture of the civil society ecosystem in South Sudan. Another notable gap is the limited analysis of how legal and policy frameworks such as the NGO Act of 2016 have affected the operational space and legitimacy of CSOs. Very few studies systematically examine how these laws influence the ability of civil society to organize, mobilize, and advocate for democratic reforms. Additionally, there is minimal academic reflection on how civil society actors navigate repression, build resilience, and adapt their strategies in restrictive environments.

There is also a scarcity of research that explores the intersection of civil society with new forms of civic activism, such as digital engagement and youth-led movements. In an era where social media is reshaping political discourse and mobilization, understanding how South Sudanese CSOs are using (or constrained in using) these tools is essential for evaluating their evolving role in democratization.

How to fill the Gap

This study seeks to fill these gaps by providing a localized and updated analysis of civil society's democratic role in South Sudan's fragile context. It draws on recent developments, engages with local perspectives, and analyzes how CSOs contribute to political accountability, peacebuilding, and civic engagement. By focusing on indigenous actors, legal-political constraints, and opportunities for reform, the study offers a grounded understanding

of civil society's contribution to democratic consolidation. Ultimately, the research adds to the limited scholarly discourse by combining theoretical frameworks with empirical observations from South Sudan. It aims to inform policy, donor strategies, and civil society programming while contributing to broader discussions on democracy in post-conflict societies.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-method design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. This approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to collect both statistical data from a broad set of respondents and in-depth insights from key informants. Quantitative data was useful in establishing general patterns and trends, while qualitative data provided deeper understanding of civil society's impact and the challenges faced in the democratic process.

Qualitative methods, particularly interviews and focus group discussions, were instrumental in capturing the experiences and perceptions of civil society actors, journalists, and policy experts. On the other hand, structured questionnaires enabled the researcher to quantify citizens' views and levels of engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs). The combination of these methods helped strengthen the validity of the study by ensuring that the limitations of one approach were compensated for by the other.

Area of Study

The research was conducted in Juba, the capital city of South Sudan. Juba was selected as the primary area of study because it hosts the highest concentration of civil society organizations, government institutions, foreign embassies, and media outlets. Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the independence of South Sudan in 2011, Juba has served as the epicenter of the country's political and civic engagement, making it an ideal location for studying democratic processes.

Moreover, Juba has witnessed key events relating to governance and civic action, including peace talks, protests, media reforms, and civic education campaigns. The political dynamics of the city reflect broader national trends and provide a strategic vantage point for understanding how civil society interacts with democratic institutions. Although this focus limits geographic diversity,

the findings are still relevant for understanding the national landscape due to Juba's central role.

Source of Information

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of information. Primary data were collected directly from respondents using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. These sources provided firsthand accounts of the challenges, successes, and overall involvement of civil society organizations in advancing democratic values, such as transparency, accountability, and political participation in South Sudan.

Secondary data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, government publications, NGO reports, and international organization documents. These sources helped provide background information, supported the literature review, and offered comparative perspectives from other African nations. The combination of primary and secondary data ensured the study was well-informed, balanced, and grounded in both empirical evidence and scholarly theory.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The population of the study consisted of individuals and institutions directly involved in or affected by civil society activities and democratic governance. These included civil society leaders, government officials, journalists, youth activists, and ordinary citizens. The selection of such a population ensured that the research would reflect a wide array of views and experiences, particularly from those actively shaping or observing South Sudan's democratic evolution.

To access this population, the study employed purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to identify key informants who were knowledgeable and influential within civil society and governance spaces. Stratified random sampling, on the other hand, was applied to select participants for the survey, ensuring diverse representation across gender, age, and organizational affiliations. This combination allowed for both depth and breadth in data collection. The target population will be 85 individuals.

Determination of Study Sample

Using Taro Yamane, 1967, the formula goes as below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} \quad \text{Where}$$

n is the sample size

N is the population

e is the margin error

Let the margin area be at the confident interval of 90%

100% - 90% = 10%, where 10% is 0.1

$$n = \frac{85}{1+70(0.1)^2} = \frac{85}{1+70(0.01)} \quad n = \frac{85}{1+0.7} = \frac{85}{1.7} = 50$$

Variable definitions and measurements

The study examined both independent and dependent variables. The main independent variable was civil society engagement, which included advocacy, civic education, watchdog functions, and public mobilization. The dependent variable was democratic consolidation, measured by indicators such as political participation, institutional trust, accountability, rule of law, and freedom of expression. These variables were defined using a mix of theoretical concepts and empirical indicators drawn from previous studies. To operationalize these variables, Likert-scale questions were used in the questionnaire, and thematic codes were applied to interview transcripts. Civil society engagement was measured in terms of frequency of involvement in civic actions, perceived effectiveness, and level of government response. Democratic consolidation was assessed by gauging public perceptions of democratic institutions and practices, using both numerical scores and thematic analysis.

Procedure for data collection

The data collection process began with seeking approval from relevant authorities and institutional review boards. Research assistants were trained on ethical considerations, questionnaire administration, and interview techniques. The researchers personally conducted most of the interviews and supervised the distribution and collection of questionnaires to ensure accuracy and consistency.

The fieldwork was conducted over a period of four weeks. Interviews were scheduled in advance and conducted in safe, neutral venues, while questionnaires were either distributed in person or electronically. Participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and assured of their confidentiality. The data collection process was rigorous and systematic, enabling the gathering of rich, reliable information.

Data collection instruments

The study used two major instruments: a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire included closed and open-ended questions aimed at measuring public

perception of civil society's effectiveness and its influence on democracy. The five-point Likert scale ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," allowing for quantifiable analysis of opinions.

The interview guide was designed to extract deeper insights from key informants. It focused on themes such as the political environment for CSOs, challenges to civic engagement, successes in advocacy, and the future of democracy in South Sudan. The use of both instruments ensured methodological triangulation, improving the reliability of the data and supporting comprehensive interpretation of findings.

Piloting the Study

A pilot study was conducted with five individuals who were not part of the main sample but shared similar characteristics with the target population. This pilot allowed the researcher to test the clarity, structure, and relevance of the data collection tools. Based on the feedback received, certain questions were reworded for simplicity and cultural sensitivity.

Piloting also served as a dry run for the main data collection exercise, helping to identify potential logistical challenges and fine-tune the timing of interviews and questionnaire administration. The adjustments made after the pilot enhanced the quality and reliability of the study, ensuring that the tools were both comprehensible and capable of yielding useful data.

Impact of Piloting

The pilot study had a significant impact on the overall research process. It ensured that the data collection instruments were clear, culturally appropriate, and easily understood by participants, thereby reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation. The revisions made improved the validity of the tools by aligning the questions more closely with the research objectives. Additionally, piloting revealed potential logistical challenges, such as the time required for administering questionnaires and conducting interviews, which enabled better planning for the main study. Ultimately, the pilot increased the reliability of the research findings by guaranteeing that the tools and procedures were refined, practical, and capable of generating accurate and relevant data.

Quality/error control

To minimize data collection errors, the study implemented rigorous quality control measures. These included close supervision of research

assistants, daily verification of completed questionnaires, and immediate follow-up on incomplete responses. Transcripts of interviews were checked against audio recordings to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Furthermore, data entry and analysis were double-checked for consistency and correctness. Errors or inconsistencies were identified early and corrected before final analysis. This multi-level quality assurance process helped ensure the credibility of the research findings and reduced the margin of error.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the research instruments over time and across different settings. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a score of 0.81, which is above the accepted threshold of 0.7. This indicated that the instrument was reliable and that the responses were consistent across various items measuring the same concept. In the qualitative aspect of the study, reliability was ensured through careful transcription, member checking, and peer review of coding. Interviewees were invited to review their statements where possible to confirm that their views were accurately captured. This increased confidence in the consistency and dependability of the qualitative data collected.

Validity

The validity of the study was ensured through content, construct, and face validation techniques. Content validity was established by consulting academic experts and practitioners to review the instruments for alignment with the research objectives. Construct validity was ensured by grounding the instrument items in established democratic theory and civil society frameworks. Face validity was addressed during the piloting stage, where participants confirmed that the instruments appeared to measure what they were intended to. Furthermore, triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data enhanced the study's overall validity, as it allowed for the comparison and confirmation of findings across different sources.

Measurement of the validity of the research instruments

The validity of the research instruments was measured through multiple strategies to ensure accuracy and credibility. Content validity was assessed by consulting experts who reviewed the instruments for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives, while construct validity was measured by grounding the items in established theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Face validity was evaluated during the pilot study, where participants confirmed that the questions were clear, culturally appropriate, and appeared to measure the intended concepts. In addition, triangulation of data sources—such as questionnaires, interviews, and document review—served as a further measure of validity by enabling cross-verification of findings across different methods, thereby enhancing the overall credibility of the instruments.

Data processing and analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS software for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means were used to summarize the data. Inferential statistics, including Chi-square tests, were used to examine the relationship between civil society engagement and democratic outcomes. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using SPSS (21 version) software. Codes were assigned to recurring themes such as civic participation, state-civil society relations, and institutional resistance. This analysis helped to contextualize the statistical findings and provide a deeper understanding of the trends observed.

Ethical consideration

Ethical integrity was a priority throughout the study. The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the University of Juba's Ethics Committee and secured consent from each participant. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the data collection and reporting process. Data were stored securely and used only for academic purposes. Care was taken to avoid political bias, and respondents were not pressured to disclose information they were uncomfortable sharing. These measures ensured that the study upheld the highest ethical standards.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Civil society in South Sudan has a strong historical foundation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	4	8.0%

Agree	10	20.0%
Neutral	6	12.0%
Disagree	20	40.0%
Strongly Disagree	10	20.0%
Total	50	100%

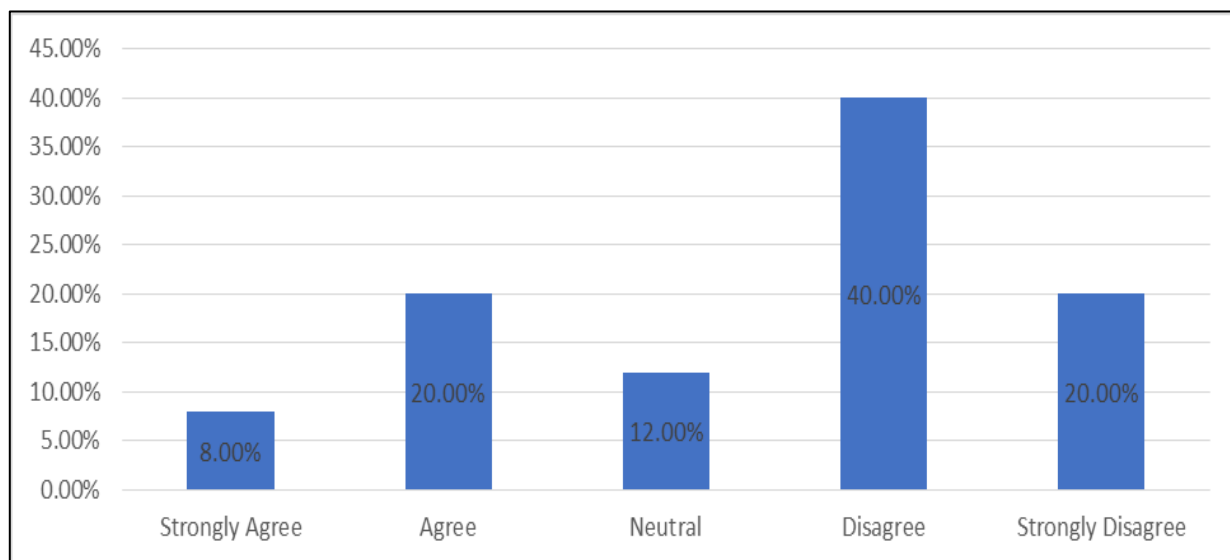


Figure 1: Civil society in South Sudan has a strong historical foundation

The table above shows that 4 respondents (8.0%) strongly agreed, 10 respondents (20.0%) agreed, and 6 respondents (12.0%) were neutral. A notable 20 respondents (40.0%) disagreed and 10

respondents (20.0%) strongly disagreed. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents (40.0%) perceive that civil society in South Sudan does not have a strong historical foundation.

Table 2: Civil society has played an important role in shaping political and social life historically

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	12	24.0%
Agree	18	36.0%
Neutral	8	16.0%
Disagree	8	16.0%
Strongly Disagree	4	8.0%
Total	50	100%

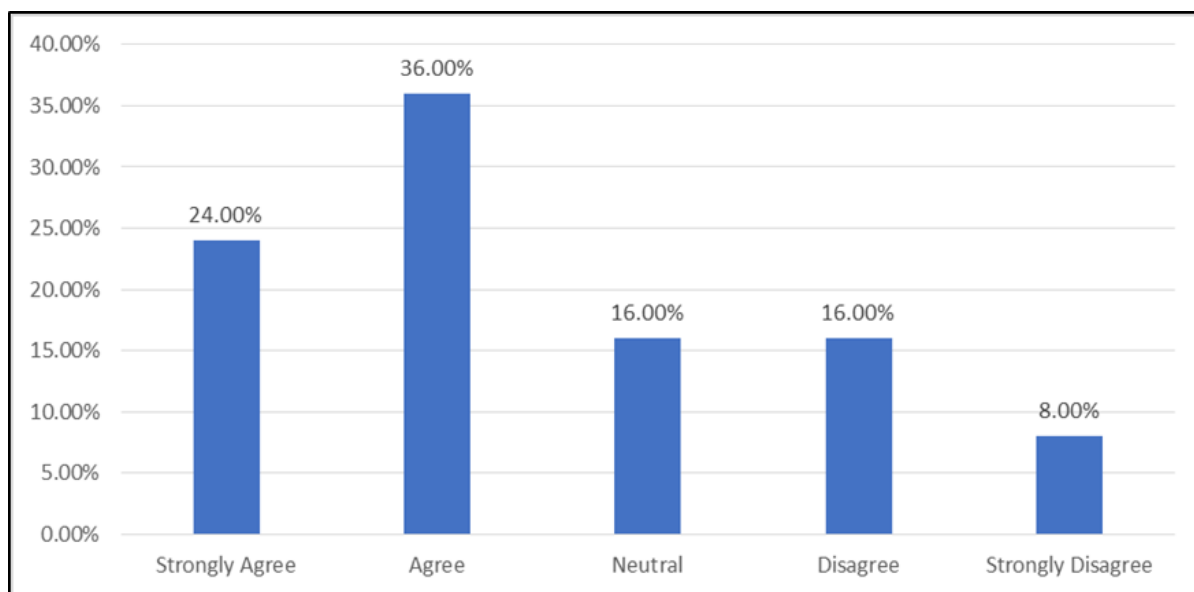


Figure 2: Civil society has played an important role in shaping political and social life historically

The table shows that 12 respondents (24.0%) strongly agreed, 18 respondents (36.0%) agreed, and 8 respondents (16.0%) were neutral. A smaller proportion, 8 respondents (16.0%) disagreed, and 4

respondents (8.0%) strongly disagreed. The majority of respondents (60.0%) acknowledged that civil society has historically played an important role in political and social life.

Table 3: The current state of civil society in South Sudan is strong and influential

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	6	12.0%
Agree	8	16.0%
Neutral	10	20.0%
Disagree	16	32.0%
Strongly Disagree	10	20.0%
Total	50	100%

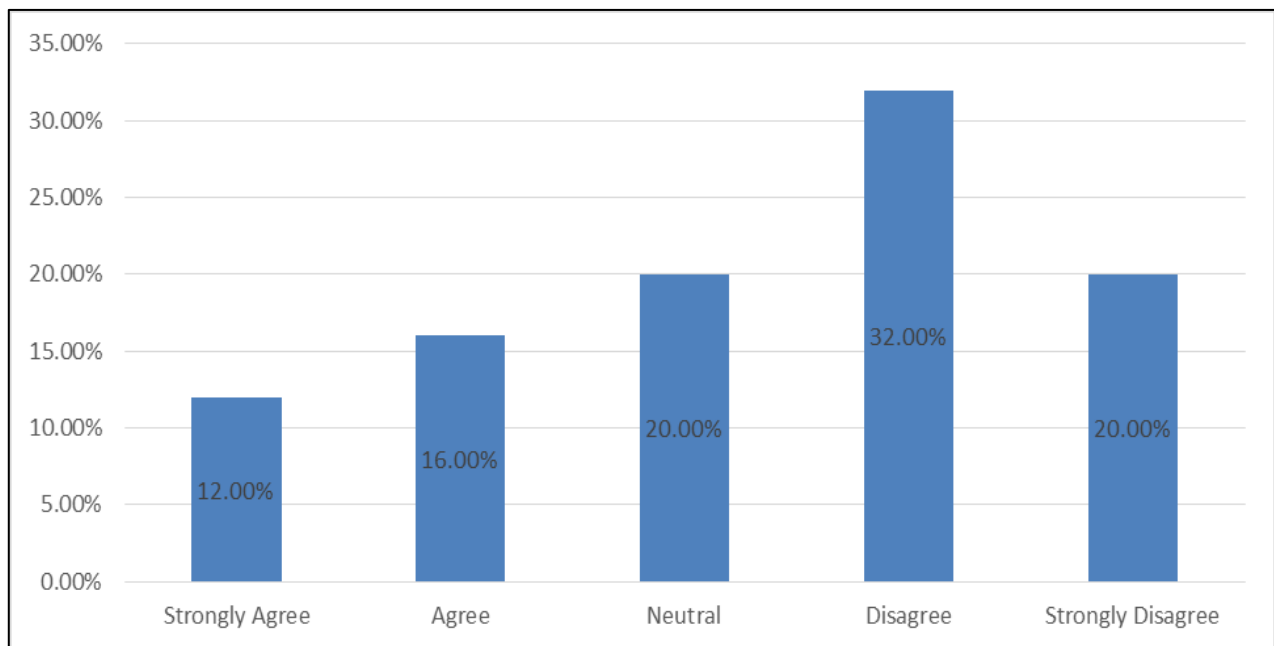


Figure 3: The current state of civil society in South Sudan is strong and influential

The table above shows that 6 respondents (12.0%) strongly agreed, 8 respondents (16.0%) agreed, and 10 respondents (20.0%) were neutral. A majority of 26 respondents (52.0%) disagreed,

indicating that most respondents perceive civil society in South Sudan as currently weak and less influential.

Table 4: Civil society organizations today are more active than in the past

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	8	16.0%
Agree	12	24.0%
Neutral	10	20.0%
Disagree	14	28.0%
Strongly Disagree	6	12.0%
Total	50	100%

The table above shows that 8 respondents (16.0%) strongly agreed, 12 respondents (24.0%) agreed, and 10 respondents (20.0%) were neutral. Meanwhile, 14 respondents (28.0%) disagreed and

6 respondents (12.0%) strongly disagreed. The findings suggest that there is a moderate increase in the activity of civil society organizations today compared to the past.

Table 4: The history of civil society contributes to its present relevance in South Sudan

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	10	20.0%
Agree	14	28.0%
Neutral	8	16.0%
Disagree	12	24.0%
Strongly Disagree	6	12.0%
Total	50	100%

The table shows that 10 respondents (20.0%) strongly agreed, 14 respondents (28.0%) agreed, and 8 respondents (16.0%) were neutral. A combined 18 respondents (36.0%) disagreed. The

majority view (48.0%) supports the notion that the historical development of civil society contributes positively to its present relevance.

Table 5: Civil society organizations face major challenges in promoting democracy

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	14	28.0%
Agree	18	36.0%
Neutral	6	12.0%
Disagree	8	16.0%
Strongly Disagree	4	8.0%
Total	50	100%

The table above shows that 14 respondents (28.0%) strongly agreed, 18 respondents (36.0%) agreed, and 6 respondents (12.0%) were neutral. A total of 12 respondents (24.0%) disagreed. These

results reveal that the majority (64.0%) of respondents perceive civil society organizations as facing major challenges in promoting democracy in South Sudan.

Table 6: Political instability hinders the effectiveness of civil society in South Sudan

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	20	40.0%
Agree	16	32.0%
Neutral	6	12.0%
Disagree	6	12.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	4.0%
Total	50	100%

The table shows that 20 respondents (40.0%) strongly agreed, 16 respondents (32.0%) agreed, and 6 respondents (12.0%) were neutral. A smaller proportion, 8 respondents (16.0%), disagreed. The

findings indicate that political instability is a significant hindrance to civil society effectiveness, as recognized by 72.0% of respondents.

Table 7: Civil society has opportunities to influence democratic processes positively

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	12	24.0%
Agree	20	40.0%
Neutral	8	16.0%
Disagree	6	12.0%
Strongly Disagree	4	8.0%
Total	50	100%

The table above shows that 12 respondents (24.0%) strongly agreed, 20 respondents (40.0%) agreed, and 8 respondents (16.0%) were neutral. A combined 10 respondents (20.0%) disagreed. The

majority (64.0%) perceive that civil society has opportunities to positively influence democratic processes.

Table 8: Lack of resources is a key barrier to the effectiveness of civil society organizations

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	16	32.0%
Agree	18	36.0%
Neutral	6	12.0%
Disagree	6	12.0%
Strongly Disagree	4	8.0%
Total	50	100%

The table shows that 16 respondents (32.0%) strongly agreed, 18 respondents (36.0%) agreed, and 6 respondents (12.0%) were neutral. A total of 10 respondents (20.0%) disagreed. The findings

reveal that lack of resources is a major barrier for civil society effectiveness according to 68.0% of respondents.

Table 9: Civil society organizations enjoy support from international partners in promoting democracy

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	8	16.0%
Agree	12	24.0%
Neutral	14	28.0%
Disagree	10	20.0%
Strongly Disagree	6	12.0%
Total	50	100%

The table shows that 8 respondents (16.0%) strongly agreed, 12 respondents (24.0%) agreed, and 14 respondents (28.0%) were neutral. A combined 16 respondents (32.0%) disagreed. The

results indicate that support from international partners exists but is not fully consistent or sufficient.

Table 10: Strengthening civil society is essential for democratic consolidation in South Sudan

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	20	40.0%
Agree	18	36.0%
Neutral	6	12.0%
Disagree	4	8.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	4.0%
Total	50	100%

The table above shows that 20 respondents (40.0%) strongly agreed, 18 respondents (36.0%) agreed, and 6 respondents (12.0%) were neutral. Only 6 respondents (12.0%) disagreed. The

findings suggest that strengthening civil society is viewed as critical for democratic consolidation by the majority (76.0%) of respondents.

Table 11: Policy reforms are necessary to support the growth of civil society organizations

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	16	32.0%
Agree	20	40.0%
Neutral	6	12.0%
Disagree	6	12.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	4.0%
Total	50	100%

The table shows that 16 respondents (32.0%) strongly agreed, 20 respondents (40.0%) agreed, and 6 respondents (12.0%) were neutral. Only 8

respondents (16.0%) disagreed. The majority (72.0%) support policy reforms as essential for civil society growth.

Table 12: Capacity-building programs would enhance the effectiveness of civil society organizations

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	18	36.0%
Agree	20	40.0%
Neutral	6	12.0%
Disagree	4	8.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	4.0%
Total	50	100%

The table shows that 18 respondents (36.0%) strongly agreed, 20 respondents (40.0%) agreed, and 6 respondents (12.0%) were neutral. Only 6 respondents (12.0%) disagreed. The findings

indicate that capacity-building programs are highly valued as a way to improve civil society effectiveness.

Table 13: Partnerships between civil society and government can improve democratic governance

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	14	28.0%
Agree	20	40.0%
Neutral	8	16.0%
Disagree	6	12.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	4.0%
Total	50	100%

The table shows that 14 respondents (28.0%) strongly agreed, 20 respondents (40.0%) agreed, and 8 respondents (16.0%) were neutral. Only 8 respondents (16.0%) disagreed. The findings

suggest that partnerships between civil society and government are viewed as beneficial for democratic governance by the majority (68.0%) of respondents.

Table 14: Civil society needs greater financial and technical support to promote democracy effectively

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	18	36.0%
Agree	20	40.0%
Neutral	6	12.0%
Disagree	4	8.0%
Strongly Disagree	2	4.0%
Total	50	100%

The table above shows that 18 respondents (36.0%) strongly agreed, 20 respondents (40.0%) agreed, and 6 respondents (12.0%) were neutral. A small 6 respondents (12.0%) disagreed. This indicates that the majority (76.0%) of respondents consider financial and technical support essential for civil society to promote democracy effectively.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study found that civil society in South Sudan has a mixed historical and current presence. While respondents recognized that civil society has historically played a significant role in shaping political and social life, most noted that its current state is weak and less influential. A substantial portion of respondents observed that civil society organizations today are moderately active but face significant structural and resource limitations. The historical foundations of civil society were considered relevant for its present role, yet the

impact remains constrained by political instability and limited institutional capacity. Respondents highlighted that civil society organizations face major challenges in promoting democracy. Political instability, lack of resources, and limited access to decision-making processes were identified as primary obstacles. Despite these challenges, respondents acknowledged opportunities for civil society to influence democratic processes positively, including advocacy, civic education, and engagement with international partners. Support from international partners exists but is inconsistent and insufficient to fully strengthen civil society operations.

The study also revealed that strengthening civil society is considered essential for democratic consolidation. Respondents emphasized the need for policy reforms, capacity-building programs, and institutional support to enhance the

effectiveness of civil society organizations. Partnerships between civil society and government were seen as critical for improving governance, while financial and technical support was highlighted as a priority for ensuring sustained democratic advocacy. In addition, the study found that civil society organizations have the potential to act as mediators and watchdogs in South Sudan's fragile democratic environment. The majority of respondents agreed that civil society can contribute to public accountability, promote civic participation, and support peacebuilding initiatives. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of civil society remains dependent on broader political, social, and economic conditions that either enable or constrain their activities. The research also indicated that public awareness and engagement with civil society organizations are limited. Many respondents noted that citizens have minimal knowledge of civil society initiatives, which reduces the ability of these organizations to mobilize communities for democratic participation. Improving outreach and public education was identified as a key strategy for enhancing civil society influence.

Capacity limitations were a recurring theme, with respondents emphasizing that civil society organizations require skilled personnel, access to information, and technical support. Strengthening institutional frameworks and governance structures within civil society organizations was recommended to improve transparency, accountability, and effectiveness. Furthermore, respondents indicated that legal and policy reforms are necessary to create an enabling environment for civil society. Restrictions on freedom of association, limited funding mechanisms, and inadequate government engagement were cited as barriers that hinder civil society from playing its full role in democratic consolidation. The study also found that partnerships and collaboration between civil society, government, and international actors are vital. Respondents suggested that joint programs, coordinated advocacy efforts, and inclusive policy dialogues can amplify the impact of civil society and foster democratic governance.

Financial constraints were repeatedly highlighted as a major challenge. Respondents noted that sustainable funding mechanisms are required for civil society organizations to implement programs effectively and ensure continuity. Reliance on sporadic international funding limits long-term planning and reduces the impact of civil society

initiatives. Finally, the findings suggest that civil society organizations have a critical role to play in post-conflict South Sudan. They are positioned to support democratic consolidation by advocating for human rights, promoting accountability, and engaging citizens in political processes. However, their impact is contingent on addressing structural, financial, and political challenges.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Civil society in South Sudan has a historically significant role but remains weak and constrained in its current form. Its influence on political and social life is limited by instability, inadequate resources, and institutional weaknesses. Political instability and limited access to decision-making structures are major challenges hindering civil society from fully promoting democratic consolidation in South Sudan. Despite these challenges, civil society organizations have opportunities to positively influence democracy through advocacy, civic education, and collaboration with international partners. Strengthening civil society is essential for democratic consolidation. Policy reforms, capacity-building programs, and institutional support are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of civil society organizations. Public awareness and citizen engagement are limited, reducing the potential impact of civil society initiatives. Strategies to enhance outreach and civic education are critical. Partnerships between civil society, government, and international actors are vital for promoting democratic governance and amplifying the influence of civil society. Financial and technical support is a key determinant of civil society effectiveness. Sustainable funding mechanisms and capacity development programs are necessary to ensure that civil society organizations can operate effectively in promoting democracy.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study provides the following recommendations for strengthening civil society and enhancing democratic consolidation in South Sudan:

- The government should create an enabling policy and legal environment that supports the growth of civil society organizations.
- Civil society organizations should implement capacity-building programs to strengthen institutional and human resource capabilities.
- Sustainable funding mechanisms should be developed to reduce overreliance on international donors.

- Partnerships between civil society, government, and international actors should be promoted for coordinated advocacy and program implementation.
- Civil society organizations should enhance public awareness campaigns to increase citizen engagement and participation in democratic processes.
- Policy reforms should address restrictions on freedom of association and ensure operational independence of civil society.
- Civil society organizations should strengthen internal governance and transparency to build public trust and credibility.
- Programs targeting civic education should be scaled up to empower citizens with knowledge about their rights and responsibilities.
- International partners should provide consistent technical and financial support tailored to local needs.
- Collaborative platforms should be established to facilitate dialogue between civil society, government, and communities.
- Research and monitoring programs should be conducted to evaluate civil society effectiveness and impact on democracy.
- Civil society should engage in conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities to foster stability and democratic practices.
- Mechanisms should be established to ensure equitable representation of marginalized groups in civil society initiatives.
- Advocacy efforts should focus on promoting transparency, accountability, and rule of law in governance.
- Civil society organizations should adopt innovative approaches, including digital tools and media engagement, to expand reach and influence.

8. REFERENCES

1. Achieng, F., & Omondi, G. "Digital activism in Africa: Enhancing civic engagement through media platforms." *African Journal of Democracy and Governance* 8.2 (2021): 45–60.
2. Achieng, J. "Grassroots peacebuilding in South Sudan: The role of local civil society." *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 13.1 (2018): 62–75.
3. Agyemang, G., Osei, A., & Awumbila, M. "Building local fundraising capacity for NGOs in fragile states." *Development in Practice* 31.3 (2021): 295–308.
4. Amnesty International. "Civil society under siege in South Sudan: Repression and threats to civic space." *Amnesty International Publications*, (2021).
5. Atari, J., & Manyang, P. "Civic education as a peacebuilding tool in South Sudan." *Journal of African Civic Engagement* 6.1 (2021): 32–49.
6. Bennett, C., Hyden, G., & Olukoshi, A. "The contested role of civil society in fragile states: Case study of South Sudan." *Policy and Practice Briefs* 34.2 (2017): 1–12.
7. Booth, D., & Cammack, D. "Governance for development in Africa: Solving collective action problems." *Zed Books*, (2015).
8. Brass, J. N. "Surviving statehood: The role of civil society in post-conflict governance." *Governance and Society* 34.2 (2020): 210–228.
9. Brinkerhoff, D. W., & Brinkerhoff, J. M. "Public sector management and democratization: Lessons from fragile contexts." *Public Administration and Development* 35.1 (2015): 46–61.
10. Bukenya, B. "The role of faith-based organizations in civic education." *Journal of Civil Society* 13.3 (2017): 301–318.
11. Bussmann, M., & Sharma, K. "International aid and local legitimacy: CSOs in fragile states." *Conflict, Security & Development* 19.4 (2019): 369–391.
12. Carothers, T., & Brechenmacher, S. *Do's and don'ts for supporting civil society in fragile contexts*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2019).
13. Chikwanha, A. "Civic space in Africa: Governance implications and reform pathways." *African Governance Review* 9.1 (2019): 15–32.
14. Clark, J., & Cook, S. "Strengthening civil society organizations in conflict-affected countries." *Development in Practice* 30.2 (2020): 150–165.
15. Davies, T. "Localization and civil society in humanitarian response: Lessons from South Sudan." *Journal of Humanitarian Action* 6.1 (2021): 1–18.
16. De Waal, A. "The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power." *Polity*, (2014).
17. Deng, D. "A Search for Lasting Peace: Ending Sexual Violence in South Sudan." *Policy Brief* (2018).
18. Diamond, L. "Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation." *Johns Hopkins University Press*, (1999).
19. Edwards, M. "Civil Society." *Polity Press*, (2004).

20. Fleck, F., & Schomerus, M. "Fragmented civil society in South Sudan: Beyond international narratives." *Rift Valley Institute Research Paper*, (2019).
21. Fowler, A. "Revisiting civil society: A necessary condition for development?" *Third World Quarterly* 37.4 (2016): 665–683.
22. Fox, J. "Civil Society and Political Accountability: Propositions for Discussion. Presented at the Institutions, Accountability and Democratic Governance in Latin America Conference." *The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame*, (2000).
23. Gordon, A. "Civic space in South Sudan: Prospects for engagement and resilience." *South Sudan Briefing Series* 5.1 (2020): 1–12.
24. Grimm, S., & Dietz, T. "Supporting civil society in fragile states: Rethinking funding mechanisms." *German Institute of Development Studies*, (2018).
25. Grimm, S., & Leininger, J. "Not all good things go together: Conflicting objectives in democracy promotion." *Democratization* 23.1 (2016): 115–134.
26. Hayman, R. "Unpacking civil society legitimacy: Lessons from aid partnerships in Rwanda and South Sudan." *Development Policy Review* 34.4 (2016): 563–582.
27. Hovil, L., & Okello, M. "Civil society's role in responding to displacement in South Sudan." *Forced Migration Review* 56 (2017): 20–22.
28. HRW (Human Rights Watch). "South Sudan: Events of 2017." *HRW.org*, (2018).
29. ICG (International Crisis Group). "Salvaging South Sudan's Fragile Peace Deal." *Africa Report No. 270*, (2019).
30. Johnson, D., & Pendle, N. "Youth and civic activism in South Sudan: Digital frontiers and political realities." *Conflict Trends* 2021.2 (2021): 18–25.
31. Jok, J. M. "Sudan: Race, Religion and Violence." *Oneworld Publications*, (2011).
32. Jok, J. M., & Hutchinson, S. "Civil society and state-building in South Sudan: Historical continuities and ruptures." *African Affairs* 117.466 (2018): 413–430.
33. Juma, C. "Infrastructure challenges facing CSOs in fragile states." *Global Journal of Humanitarian Research* 3.2 (2017): 45–58.
34. Kabia, J. "Civil society accountability in fragile states: Evidence from Africa." *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development* 25.1 (2019): 58–75.
35. Kakai, P. "Building a civic culture in post-conflict societies: Lessons for South Sudan." *African Journal of Governance and Development* 9.1 (2020): 89–105.
36. Kanyongolo, F. "Legal frameworks and civic freedoms: Trends in Eastern Africa." *Open Society Foundation Briefing Paper*, (2017).
37. Kassile, T., & Mvungi, A. "The role of media in promoting civic education in Sub-Saharan Africa." *International Journal of Civic Engagement* 5.1 (2020): 13–29.
38. Kleinfeld, R. "Improving development aid design and evaluation: Plan for Sailboats, not Trains." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (2017).
39. Kraft, A., & Payne, L. "Donor aid, legitimacy, and CSO effectiveness in fragile contexts." *Development in Practice* 30.6 (2020): 755–768.
40. Krause, J. "Civic engagement in fragile contexts: Strategies for mobilization." *Peacebuilding Review* 5.3 (2017): 212–230.
41. Kuol, L. B. "Civil society and conflict resolution in South Sudan." *Journal of Peacebuilding and Civil Society* 4.1 (2020): 1–19.
42. Lango, P. "Shrinking civic space in South Sudan: Government responses and legal limitations." *Journal of African Law and Society* 8.2 (2020): 144–162.
43. Lau, T. "Post-independence challenges of civil society in South Sudan." *Africa Spectrum* 52.3 (2017): 37–54.
44. Leonard, D. K. "Civil society and service delivery in post-conflict states." *Public Administration and Development* 37.4 (2017): 247–258.
45. Leonard, D. K., & Strauss, S. "The search for effective civil society-state collaboration in fragile states." *Development Policy Review* 37.S1 (2019): O105–O121.
46. Lindsey, A. "Digital mobilization in fragile states: Civic tech in South Sudan." *African Affairs* 119.475 (2020): 673–691.
47. Lukudu, J., & Deng, S. "Mobilizing grassroots voices for democratic governance in South Sudan." *African Democracy Review* 11.3 (2020): 78–90.
48. Lwanga, D., & Mugisha, R. "Contextualizing capacity building in civil society organizations in East Africa." *Development Practice Quarterly* 6.1 (2020): 29–42.
49. Malwal, R. "Repression and civil society resistance in South Sudan: Patterns and

- strategies." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 37.2 (2019): 150–169.
50. Mamdani, M. "Civil society and the state in post-conflict nations: Prospects for democratization." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61.3 (2019): 512–537.
51. Mills, A. "Operating under pressure: Legal constraints facing NGOs in South Sudan." *Human Rights Defender* 28.1 (2019): 34–42.
52. Mottiar, S. "Rethinking CSO sustainability: Local ownership in fragile contexts." *Social Movement Studies* 18.2 (2019): 192–209.
53. Moyo, T., & Mutume, G. "Transparency and legitimacy in African CSOs." *African Journal of Public Administration* 6.1 (2018): 31–47.
54. Mukasa, S., & Kintu, M. "Organizational development strategies for NGOs in Africa." *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 28.4 (2018): 495–510.
55. Mutsavairo, B., & Ragnedda, M. "Mapping Digital Media and Civic Engagement in Africa." *Palgrave Macmillan*, (2019).
56. Mwangi, S. "Reforming civil society laws in East Africa: Lessons for South Sudan." *Journal of African Legal Studies* 13.1 (2020): 88–105.
57. Mwenda, A. "Towards a national civil society policy: Lessons from Uganda and implications for South Sudan." *Policy Insights* 5.4 (2018): 44–60.
58. Nyabola, N. "Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era Is Transforming Kenya." *Zed Books*, (2018).
59. Nyadera, I. N. "Youth and democracy in Africa: Innovations from below." *Journal of African Youth Studies* 2.1 (2019): 20–34.
60. Nyarko, M. G. "Regional human rights standards and civil society protection in Africa." *African Human Rights Law Journal* 21.1 (2021): 1–27.
61. Ocha, J. "Challenges of civic space in post-war South Sudan." *African Civic Monitor* 4.1 (2020): 15–28.
62. Odhiambo, M., & Onyango, T. "Pathways to strengthening civil society in conflict zones: Lessons from Eastern Africa." *Development and Society* 15.1 (2020): 103–121.
63. Okello, J., & Kasozi, B. "CSO networks and collective action in Africa." *Pan African Policy Briefs* 3.1 (2019): 27–39.
64. Okoro, C. "Building advocacy capacity in African civil society." *Advocacy Quarterly* 2.2 (2019): 56–70.
65. Opoku-Mensah, P. "Rethinking civic education in post-conflict societies." *Democracy and Education Journal* 24.1 (2016): 10–19.
66. Orji, N., & Uzodike, U. O. "Media and civil society collaboration for democratic development in Africa." *African Journalism Studies* 37.1 (2016): 93–111.
67. Pantuliano, S., Buchanan-Smith, M., Murphy, P., & Mosel, I. *The Long Road Home: Opportunities and Obstacles to the Reintegration of IDPs and Refugees Returning to Southern Sudan and the Three Areas*. Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, 2011.
68. Parker, J. "Partnering for peace: The role of donor-CSO relationships in fragile states." *International Journal of Peace Studies* 14.2 (2019): 87–103.
69. Putnam, R. D. "Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy." *Princeton University Press*, (1993).
70. Putnam, R. D. "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community." *Simon & Schuster*, (2000).
71. Rolandsen, Ø. H. "Guerrilla Government: Political Changes in the Southern Sudan during the 1990s." *Nordiska Afrikainstitutet*, (2015).
72. Rolandsen, Ø. H. "Civil society in South Sudan: From liberation struggle to fragmented participation." *Sudan Studies* 57.1 (2018): 35–47.
73. Tandon, R., & Brown, L. D. "Partnerships for democratic governance: Linking civil society, government and media." *International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law* 22.3 (2020): 29–45.
74. Tapscott, R. "Local governance and civil society in South Sudan: Decentralization in crisis." *African Affairs* 117.467 (2018): 635–660.
75. Tshuma, L. "Legal reform and democratic consolidation in fragile states." *African Journal of Legal Studies* 10.2 (2017): 101–119.
76. USAID, "South Sudan Civil Society Assessment: Constraints and Opportunities." *United States Agency for International Development*, (2019).
77. Wani, J., & Ladu, C. "Understanding civic education in South Sudan: Challenges and opportunities." *South Sudan Democracy Monitor* 2.1 (2017): 41–55.
78. Wani, K., & Makara, S. "Civil society–state relations in South Sudan: Conflict or collaboration?" *Journal of Contemporary Governance* 6.2 (2019): 118–134.

-
79. Wilson, D., & Oduro, A. "Civic awareness and participation in rural Africa." *Journal of Democratic Engagement* 5.2 (2017): 89–102.
80. Young, J. "Popular struggles and elite politics in post-independence South Sudan." *Review of African Political Economy* 43.150 (2016): 194–210.
81. Young, J., & Natsios, A. "South Sudan's civil society: Prospects in post-war recovery." *Africa Policy Review* 11.3 (2018): 21–34.

Source of support: Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

Cite this article as:

Riak, J. D. C and Ladu, P. Y. "Understanding Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation in Africa: A Case Study of South Sudan." *Sarcouncil Journal of Multidisciplinary* 5.11 (2025): pp 134-156.