

World Watch Research

South Sudan: Background Information

October 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

October 2024

© Open Doors International

research@od.org

Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Copyright and sources | 1 |
| Map of country | 2 |
| Recent history | 2 |
| Political and legal landscape | 4 |
| Religious landscape..... | 6 |
| Economic landscape..... | 7 |
| Social and cultural landscape..... | 8 |
| Technological landscape | 9 |
| Security situation | 10 |
| Christian origins | 11 |
| Church spectrum today..... | 12 |
| Further useful reports..... | 12 |
| External Links | 13 |

Copyright and sources

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

Map of country



| South Sudan: Population (UN estimate for 2024) | Christians | Chr% |
|--|------------|------|
| 11,277,000 | 6,862,000 | 60.8 |

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Recent history

South Sudan gained independence on 9 July 2011, following a referendum in which 98.83% of voters supported secession from Sudan. Since then, it has become a member of the United Nations, the African Union, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. In July 2012, the country also signed the Geneva Conventions.

With an estimated population of just under 12 million, South Sudan's economy remains largely rural, primarily dependent on subsistence farming. Around 2005, the economy began transitioning away from this rural dominance, leading to significant urban development in various parts of the country. However, South Sudan continues to grapple with the lingering effects of two protracted civil wars: the First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972), in which the Sudanese government fought the Anyanya rebel army, and the Second Sudanese Civil War (1985-2005), marked by conflict between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). Unlike the earlier conflict, the latter war took on a more religiously confrontational nature. Decades of war have left the country

with severe neglect, underdeveloped infrastructure, widespread destruction and significant displacement.

Following independence in 2011, the conflict between the two independence leaders, President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar, led to the outbreak of civil war in 2013. The two leaders were supported by the two major ethnic groups in the country, the Dinka and Nuer respectively. This South Sudan civil war has led to a major socio-economic disaster and to the deaths of over [400,000 people](#) (London School of Hygiene, 26 September 2018). On [12 September 2018](#), the two factions signed an agreement to end the civil war (BBC News, 13 September 2018). However, there were multiple unresolved issues following the accord and there were some areas in the country where fighting continued. Many other agreements were signed (see below: *Political and legal landscape*) but were not honored by the parties involved. Eventually, in [February 2020](#), a unity government was formed and an end to the civil war (2013-2019) was declared (Lemon Wire, 22 February 2020). It was hoped this would end all hostilities between the Nuer and Dinka.

The agreement that led to the formation of the unity government in February 2020 brought high hopes for peace both in the country and in the international community. However, certain armed groups were left out of the peace agreement and in April 2021 [UN experts](#) warned: “[P]olitical, military and ethnic divisions in South Sudan are widening, leading to multiple violent incidents between the main signatories to last year’s cease-fire, the possibility of renewed war, and nearly 100,000 people facing ‘famine-like conditions’” (AP News, 27 April 2021).

Intra-group fighting and growing intergroup violence threatened to derail the peace agreement, even as South Sudan celebrated 10 years of independence with [President Salva Kiir pledging not to return the country to war](#) (Al-Jazeera, 9 July 2021). In early August 2021, rival military leaders announced that South Sudan’s Vice President Riek Machar, who played a major role in pushing his partner President Salva Kiir to the 2018 peace deal, was deposed as head of his party and its armed forces, a claim he later disputed by claiming that [‘peace-spoilers’ had been removed from his party](#) (Al-Jazeera, 5 August 2021). Unfortunately, this was followed a few days later by deadly fighting between rival factions of Vice President Riek Machar’s SPLA-IO, forcing regional African trade body IGAD [to urge](#) the two rival military factions to enter into dialogue to ease the tension (Al-Jazeera, 10 August 2021).

In 2022, after weeks of escalating conflict, President Kiir and Vice President Machar agreed to resume talks about integrating their rival forces under a unified command as part of implementation of the 2018 peace deal. In mid-April 2022, this resulted in President Kiir ordering military officers loyal to Vice President Machar to be [officially integrated into a unified command of the army](#), with the announcement touted as being a central pillar of the peace process (Al-Jazeera, 13 April 2022).

The transitional government, established under the peace deal, has faced delays in implementing key reforms and preparing for long-overdue elections. Recently, South Sudan has been accused of involvement in the ongoing conflict in Sudan, allegations that it has [vehemently denied](#). This accusation has further strained relations and added to the challenges the country faces as it seeks to stabilize internally and address the humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the influx of refugees from the Sudan conflict.

In September 2024, the government announced it had decided to postpone long-delayed general elections until [December 2026](#), citing a lack of preparedness (Al-Jazeera, 14 September 2024).

Political and legal landscape

South Sudan faced one of the gravest situations regarding human rights, democracy, and human security in 2022/2023. Freedom House has repeatedly given the country a dismal rating of 'Not Free' with a score of just 1 out of 100, reflecting the dire state of affairs in the nation ([Freedom in the World 2023 South Sudan](#) and [2024](#)).

Under the [2011 Transitional Constitution](#), South Sudan is a republic with executive power vested in the president and vice president, who was appointed by the president (Britannica, South Sudan/Constitutional Framework, accessed 11 October 2024). Hence, in July 2011, Salva Kiir Mayardit became president of the new independent state of South Sudan. However, seven years of civil war erupted when President Kiir sacked his cabinet and accused Vice President Riek Machar of attempting a failed coup. In September 2018, a power-sharing agreement was signed by President Kiir and opposition groups in a bid to end the brutal conflict. As a first step, the accord called for all armed groups to withdraw from all cities and civilian areas such as schools and refugee camps in the run-up to the country entering into a three-year-long political transition.

In January 2020, the [UN Human Rights Council](#) (UNHRC, 21 January 2020) expressed its 'grave concern' about the sustained lack of political will to end the fighting in the country and reported:

- "Beyond the fragile peace at the national level, localized and often ethnically-based tensions intensified, leading to an increase of nearly 200 percent in the number of civilian casualties over 2018. Between late February and May 2019, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan recorded some 531 deaths and 317 injuries in 152 incidents of localized violence. Of grave concern, brutal attacks, often premised on cattle raiding, involved members of the State apparatus or the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (pro-Riek Machar) (SPLA-IO (RM)) and drove displacement at alarming rates, including in Western Bahr el Ghazal, Unity and Jonglei States."

This meant that even if the peace treaty was honored, there were issues of human rights abuses and atrocities that still had to be resolved.

In February 2020, the rival leaders [succeeded](#) in forming a coalition government: A day after President Salva Kiir dissolved the previous government, opposition leader Riek Machar was sworn in as his deputy (Lemon Wire, 22 February 2020). As a first step towards durable peace and a transition to civil rule, on 22 February 2020, the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) was formed in accordance with the 2018 "Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan" ([R-ARCSS](#), 12 September 2018), marking the start of a 36-month transitional period. So far, the parties have made progress in certain key areas such as defining the number of states and boundaries in South Sudan, and the process of unification of the armed forces.

In October 2021, a UN-appointed independent body of experts reported that prevention of dissent by ['overzealous' security forces](#) was causing dramatic erosion of civic space and undermined South Sudan peace (UN News, 20 October 2021). In February 2022, UN-appointed fact-finding human rights experts revealed [increasing political violence](#) and polarization between communities (UN News, 11 February 2022), with widespread outbreaks of fighting between the SPLA-IO and armed gangs of youths. In 2022, even a [UN convoy carrying food and humanitarian assistance](#) was attacked in an ambush by gunmen (UN News, 1 March 2022). Human rights organizations also reported a [surge in attacks against](#)

[aid workers](#) in South Sudan (Human Rights Watch, 4 March 2022). In 2022, violence against civilians remained unacceptably high, even though it [had decreased in comparison to previous years](#) (UN News, 17 February 2022).

According to [Freedom in the World 2024 South Sudan](#), South Sudan is rated as "Not Free" with an extremely low Global Freedom Score of 1 out of 100. This score reflects the country's severe deficiencies across several critical areas, including, not limited to:

- **Political rights and governance:** South Sudan scores zero out of 40 in Political Rights. The country is characterized by the absence of free and fair elections, with power concentrated in the hands of elites who use violence and manipulation to maintain control. The political environment remains deeply flawed despite recent attempts to prepare for the 2024 elections [now postponed until December 2026].
- **Civil liberties and freedom of expression:** South Sudan scores 4 out of 60 in Civil Liberties. Freedom of expression is severely restricted, with journalists and civil society activists facing constant harassment, arbitrary detention, and even extrajudicial killings. The state exerts tight control over the media, and dissenting voices are routinely silenced.
- **Rule of law and corruption:** The country suffers from rampant corruption, with a score of zero in this area. The judiciary lacks independence and is ineffective in holding government officials accountable. Widespread impunity for state-sanctioned violence and human rights abuses further erodes the rule of law.
- **Human rights and ethnic violence:** South Sudan remains deeply scarred by ethnic violence and atrocities. The government's failure to address these issues, coupled with the lack of a functioning judicial system, leaves victims without justice. The pervasive violence and ongoing conflict have made it impossible for many citizens to exercise their basic rights.

According to [Human Rights Watch 2024 South Sudan country chapter](#), the country remains in a dire situation, characterized by severe human rights violations and a deteriorating humanitarian crisis. Despite the 2018 peace agreement, the country continues to struggle with widespread violence, lack of accountability, and significant governance challenges. The report highlights:

- **Attacks on civilians and humanitarian operations:** The country remains one of the most dangerous places for civilians and aid workers. Numerous incidents of violence against civilians, including killings, abductions, and sexual violence, are documented. The government has failed to investigate or prosecute those responsible for these grave violations, perpetuating a cycle of impunity and violence.
- **Civic and political space:** South Sudan's civic and political space continues to shrink as the government cracks down on dissent. Journalists and human rights defenders face harassment, arbitrary detention, and severe restrictions on their activities. The National Security Service (NSS) exerts broad and unchecked powers, further stifling freedom of expression and political participation.
- **Humanitarian crisis:** The ongoing conflict, compounded by intercommunal violence, food insecurity, and the impact of climate change, has led to a worsening humanitarian situation. Over 9.4 million people, including many children and refugees from the Sudan conflict, are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. The government's response has been inadequate, exacerbating the suffering of its people.

- Legislative and institutional reforms:** Although South Sudan has passed some national laws related to the peace agreement and ratified international instruments, progress on key reforms has stalled. The creation of a new constitution and the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, both critical components of the peace process, remain unfulfilled, reflecting a lack of political will and commitment to genuine reform.

Elections were originally scheduled for December 2024. In its 9564th Meeting held on 5 March 2024, the [United Nations](#) warned that if not managed carefully, the upcoming elections in South Sudan could lead to "disastrous consequences" for the already fragile nation and the broader region. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, highlighted several challenges that could impact the elections, including intensified resource conflicts, high unemployment, political competition among elites, increased intercommunal violence, and the added strain of returnees and refugees from Sudan. Lacroix emphasized that while South Sudan is currently unprepared for elections, credible elections could still occur if the parties demonstrate political will and invest the necessary resources. He stressed that the legitimacy of the elections depends on creating a more open civic and political space, ensuring that all parties can participate freely, and securing the belief among the South Sudanese people that their voices are genuinely heard. Taking heed of such warnings, the government has now postponed general elections until [December 2026](#) (Al-Jazeera, 14 September 2024).

Religious landscape

| South Sudan: Religious context | Number of adherents | % |
|---|---------------------|------|
| Christians | 6,862,000 | 60.8 |
| Muslim | 717,000 | 6.4 |
| Hindu | 240 | 0.0 |
| Buddhist | 270 | 0.0 |
| Ethnic religionist | 3,645,000 | 32.3 |
| Jewish | 0 | 0.0 |
| Bahai | 740 | 0.0 |
| Atheist | 5,000 | 0.0 |
| Agnostic | 46,300 | 0.4 |
| Other | 570 | 0.0 |
| <i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i> | | |

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

When South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011, the demography changed from being a Muslim-majority country (when it was part of Sudan) to being a Christian-majority one. A substantial part of the population in isolated areas adheres to Traditional African religions (ATR, over 32% of the population) or combines Christian and indigenous practices. Although Christians have become a majority and no longer face the persecution they experienced under a conservative Islamic Sudanese government, their socio-economic conditions have not significantly improved to date.

Christianity is most prevalent among the peoples of Al Istiwai state, namely the Madi, Moru, Azande and Bari.

According to the US State Department's [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom for South Sudan](#):

- "The transitional constitution, effective through February 2025, stipulates the separation of religion and state, prohibits religious discrimination, and ensures that all religions are treated equally, even during a state of emergency. It guarantees religious groups the freedom to worship, assemble, and organize themselves, as well as to own property, receive financial contributions, and establish charitable institutions."

Economic landscape

The Republic of South Sudan became the world's newest nation and Africa's 55th country on 9 July 2011. The renewed conflicts in December 2013 and July 2016 undermined the development gains achieved since independence and worsened the humanitarian situation. [Between 2013 and 2018](#) around 400,000 people died directly through violence or indirectly through increased risk of disease and reduced access to healthcare due to the armed conflict, and 4.5 million people were displaced both internally and to neighboring countries (New Humanitarian, 21 March 2019). Much of the population is dependent on subsistence agriculture and humanitarian assistance. Property rights are insecure and price signals are weak because markets are not well-organized.

According to the [World Bank's South Sudan Overview](#) (last updated 1 October 2024):

- "The signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018 and the formation of a Transitional Government of National Unity in February 2020 have contributed to greater stability. The transitional period was recently further extended to February 2027. However, a modest economic recovery recorded following the peace agreement has been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, historic floods, the conflict in Sudan, and challenges in public financial management."
- "South Sudan's economic outlook is now clouded by crippling shocks to its heavily oil-dependent economy, highlighting the need for diversification. As South Sudan depends on neighboring Sudan as the only route to export oil to international markets, the conflict in Sudan significantly impacted South Sudan's macroeconomic stability. The fiscal capacity to mitigate significant declines in oil production or shocks in global oil and food prices remains severely constrained by substantial challenges in the governance of oil sector revenues and weak fiscal discipline."

According to the [African Development Bank's Economic Outlook](#) for South Sudan in 2024:

- **Macroeconomic challenges and growth contraction:** South Sudan's real GDP contracted by an estimated 0.4% in 2022/23, largely due to the economic disruptions caused by the conflict in Sudan, which affected oil production costs and exports. Inflation surged to 16.5% due to supply chain disruptions, and the fiscal deficit, while improved, still presents challenges with the country at high risk of debt distress.
- **Impact of climate change and conflict:** Persistent floods and the ongoing conflict in neighboring Sudan have severely impacted the agricultural and oil sectors, leading to stagnant production and decreased exports. The vandalization of oil pipelines and climate change impacts are significant headwinds that continue to hinder economic recovery.
- **Poverty, food insecurity, and unemployment:** Poverty remains widespread, with 7 million people facing food insecurity. Unemployment has also risen slightly, and the influx of refugees and returnees from Sudan has added further strain to the country's resources and social services.
- **Structural transformation and financial reforms:** South Sudan's structural transformation is challenged by low productivity and skills, with the industrial sector (primarily oil and mining) seeing a significant decline. To finance structural transformation, there is a need for enhanced domestic revenue mobilization, public spending efficiency, and debt restructuring. Access to risk-sharing instruments is also essential for crowding in private investment and financing growth.

According to the government economic advisor cited by Radio Tamazuj, the South Sudanese currency is leading the country toward an economic crisis. As reported by [Radio Tamazuj](#) on 18 July 2024, the ongoing devaluation and instability of the currency are exacerbating existing economic challenges, contributing to rising inflation and deepening the financial strain on the population.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook South Sudan](#) (accessed 11 October 2024) and [UNDP Human Development Report South Sudan](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Dinka (Jieng) 35.8%, Nuer (Naath) 15.6%, Shilluk (Chollo), Azande, Bari, Kakwa, Kuku, Murle, Mandari, Didinga, Ndogo, Bviri, Lndi, Anuak, Bongo, Lango, Dungotona, Acholi, Baka, Fertit (2011 est.)
- **Main languages:** English (official), Arabic (includes Juba and Sudanese variants), regional languages include Dinka, Nuer, Bari, Zande, Shiluk
- **Median age:** 18.6 years (2020 est.)
- **Urban population:** 20.8% (2022 est.)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 5.3 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (ages 15 and older):** 34.5%
- **Employment to population ratio (ages 15 and older):** 63.5%
- **Unemployment, total:** 12.2% of labor force
- **Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):** 18.8%
- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** South Sudan ranked 185th out of 189 countries with a human development value of 0.433
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 59.6 years (2022 est.)
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.842

- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** No data

According to the [World Bank's South Sudan Overview](#) (last updated 1 October 2024):

- **Refugees/IDPs:** "South Sudan remains in a serious humanitarian crisis. An estimated 9 million people, including refugees in South Sudan, will experience critical needs in 2024. An estimated 7.1 million individuals of South Sudan's total population of 12.4 million will require food assistance during the lean season from April to July 2024. Women and children continue to be the most affected. The humanitarian crisis has been further exacerbated by the recent conflict in neighboring Sudan, which has led to an inflow of refugees and returnees into South Sudan. As of September 2024, 797,189 returnees, refugees, and asylum seekers have arrived in South Sudan, approximately 78% of whom are South Sudanese refugee returnees."

In general, the new nation has been facing multiple challenges, all exacerbated by the 2013-2019 civil war. According to the [World Factbook South Sudan](#) (accessed 11 October 2024):

- Educational attainment is extremely poor due to the lack of schools, qualified teachers and materials.
- Teachers and students are also struggling with the switch from Arabic to English as the language of instruction.
- Many adults missed out on schooling because of warfare and displacement.

According to Transparency International's [2023 Corruption Perceptions Index](#), South Sudan ranked as one of the most corrupt nations in the world ranking #177/180 with a score of 13/100 (the same as in CPI 2022). This is an improvement compared to the 2021 report which had put South Sudan at #180/180.

Technological landscape

South Sudan has little infrastructure - about 10,000 kilometers of roads, but just 2% of them paved. Electricity is produced mostly by costly diesel generators, with less than 2% of the population having access to electricity. Indoor plumbing and potable water are scarce. About 90% of consumed goods, capital and services are imported from neighboring countries (mainly Uganda, Kenya and Sudan).

As per [Datareportal Digital 2024: South Sudan](#) (23 February 2024) / survey date - January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** South Sudan had approximately 1.36 million internet users, representing an internet penetration rate of 12.1%. This indicates a gradual increase in digital connectivity, although a significant portion of the population still remains offline.
- **Social media usage:** The number of social media users in South Sudan reached 739,000 by January 2024. This figure equates to 6.6% of the total population, showing that social media platforms are gaining traction, albeit slowly, within the country.
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** There were 3.97 million active cellular mobile connections in South Sudan at the beginning of 2024. This number corresponds to 35.5% of the total population, highlighting the reliance on mobile phones for communication and internet access, despite the challenges in infrastructure.

- **Digital challenges and opportunities:** While digital adoption is on the rise, the low internet penetration and social media usage reflect ongoing challenges such as infrastructure deficits, affordability, and digital literacy. However, the growth in mobile connections suggests potential for expansion in digital services and opportunities for greater internet accessibility in the future.

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (Publication date: October 2024):

- "South Sudan has one of the lowest mobile penetration rates in Africa. Growth in the sector in coming years is premised on a resolution to the political crisis and a recovery of the country's economy. The virtually untapped internet and broadband market also depends to a large extent on the country gaining access to international fibre cables and on a national backbone network being in place. Sophisticated infrastructure solutions are needed to reach the 80% of the population that live outside of the main urban centres. With a negligible rate of bank account ownership, mobile payment and banking solutions also have a strong potential once a reliable mobile infrastructure is built."
- "The limits to growth are currently defined by widespread poverty and a low literacy rate, but the government recognises the positive feedback loop on development that access to ICT can have and is providing a range of investment incentives. The international community has provided billions of dollars in aid to strengthen governance and institutions in the young nation."
- "Some improvement has followed from the cable link completed by Liquid Telecom in February 2020 which connects Juba directly to the company's submarine landing station at Mombasa. The cable was South Sudan's first direct international fibre link, and has helped drive down the price of retail internet services for residential and business customers. A second cable linking to the border with Kenya was completed in December 2021."

Security situation

South Sudan continues to face significant insecurity due to ongoing internal conflicts, intercommunal violence, and the presence of armed groups. Despite the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018, violence persists in many parts of the country, exacerbated by political rivalries and ethnic tensions. The South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF) and various militia groups have been implicated in human rights abuses, including attacks on civilians, looting, and sexual violence. These conflicts have led to widespread displacement, with millions of people forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps or neighboring countries. The lack of accountability for these abuses has further fueled the cycle of violence, making the security situation extremely volatile.

The insecurity in South Sudan is compounded by the spillover effects of the conflict in neighboring Sudan, which has intensified competition for resources and increased the flow of weapons and militants across the border. This has led to an uptick in violence, particularly in border areas, and has strained the capacity of local authorities to maintain order. Additionally, the government's limited control over many regions has allowed armed groups to operate with impunity, further destabilizing the country. The ongoing insecurity poses significant challenges to the implementation of the peace agreement and hinders efforts to rebuild the nation, leaving civilians vulnerable and the prospects for lasting peace uncertain.

According to a press release by Reliefweb (27 March 2024), the ongoing conflict in [Sudan](#) has led to a humanitarian crisis at the South Sudanese border, where approximately 1,000 people, including many children, are fleeing into South Sudan daily. Since the conflict began nearly a year ago (April 2023), more than 600,000 people have crossed the border, arriving in regions already grappling with severe hunger and limited resources. These refugees and returnees face dire conditions, including overcrowded transit centers with scarce food, water, and healthcare. Many of these individuals, including children, have experienced significant trauma, with some witnessing the deaths of loved ones during their journey. The situation is exacerbated by South Sudan's own internal challenges, including ongoing violence, displacement, and a fragile economic environment, making it one of the world's most overlooked crises. Save the Children and other humanitarian organizations are working to provide essential support, but the need for international aid remains critical.

As reported by Reuters on [29 January 2024](#), a recent surge of violence along the disputed border between Sudan and South Sudan has claimed the lives of 54 people, including women, children, and two UN peacekeepers. The attacks, which occurred in the oil-rich Abyei region—a territory claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan—were carried out by armed young men from South Sudan's Warrap state. The violence represents the deadliest incident in the area since 2021 and has led to a significant increase in fear and displacement among local populations. The UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) reported that one peacekeeper from Ghana was killed during an attack on a UN base in Agok, followed by another peacekeeper from Pakistan who was killed the next day while transporting civilians to a hospital. The clashes, rooted in ethnic and boundary disputes, highlight the ongoing instability in the region despite the formal end of South Sudan's civil war in 2018.

Gender perspective

According to a report by UN-appointed rights experts, the widespread rape and sexual violence perpetrated on women and girls by all armed groups across the country amounted to a '[hellish existence](#)' for the victims (UN News, 21 March 2022).

Christian origins

Christianity was very influential in the Sudan region from the 4th century onwards; for nearly a millennium the majority of the population was Christian. Christians suffered when invading Arabs brought Islam and gradually Islamized the northern part of Sudan by the 15th century. Following the defeat of the self-proclaimed Islamic Mahdi and his supporters by the British in 1898, many Christian groups entered the country. Roman Catholics, Anglicans (via the Church Missionary Society) and American Presbyterians also came from their base in Egypt. The Anglican Sudan United Mission, the Africa Inland Mission, and the Sudan Interior Mission all followed. Several African-initiated churches have also become established.

Church spectrum today

| South Sudan: Church networks | Christians | % |
|--|------------------|--------------|
| Orthodox | 3,000 | 0.0 |
| Catholic | 6,229,000 | 90.8 |
| Protestant | 3,266,000 | 47.6 |
| Independent | 197,000 | 2.9 |
| Unaffiliated | 44,300 | 0.6 |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians | -2,879,000 | -42.0 |
| Total | 6,860,300 | 100.0 |
| <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i> | | |
| Evangelical movement | 1,775,000 | 25.9 |
| Pentecostal-Charismatic | 1,019,000 | 14.8 |

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world’s 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as “Renewalists”.

Christianity is predominantly Roman Catholic in South Sudan and is most prevalent among the peoples of Al Istiwai state, namely the Madi, Moru, Azande and Bari.

Other principal Christian denominations are Episcopal, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Sudan Interior, Presbyterian Evangelical, and African Inland churches. Smaller congregations of Eritrean Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox also exist (Source: [IRFR 2023 South Sudan](#)).

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=South Sudan>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.

External Links

- Recent history: 400,000 people - <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2019/war-south-sudan-estimated-have-led-almost-400000-excess-deaths>
- Recent history: 12 September 2018 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-45511352>
- Recent history: February 2020 - <https://lemonwire.com/2020/02/22/south-sudans-rivals-form-unity-government-meant-to-end-war/>
- Recent history: UN experts - <https://apnews.com/article/famine-sudan-africa-middle-east-south-sudan-9704f524380e58a623f76bc648d68bf7>
- Recent history: President Salva Kiir pledging not to return the country to war - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/9/kiir-pledges-peace-as-south-sudan-marks-decade-of-independence>
- Recent history: ‘peace-spoilers’ had been removed from his party - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/5/south-sudans-machar-says-peace-spoilers-backed-his-removal-as>
- Recent history: to urge - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/10/regional-states-urge-dialogue-to-ease-south-sudan-tensions>
- Recent history: officially integrated into a unified command of the army - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/13/south-sudan-president-kiir-integrates-rivals-officers-into-army>
- Recent history: vehemently denied - <https://sudantribune.com/article289628/>
- Recent history: December 2026 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/14/south-sudan-postpones-december-election-by-two-years>
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom in the World 2023 South Sudan - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-sudan/freedom-world/2023>
- Political and legal landscape: 2024 - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-sudan/freedom-world/2024>
- Political and legal landscape: 2011 Transitional Constitution - <https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Sudan/Government-and-society#ref300747>
- Political and legal landscape: UN Human Rights Council - https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A_HRC_43_56.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: succeeded - <https://lemonwire.com/2020/02/22/south-sudans-rivals-form-unity-government-meant-to-end-war/>
- Political and legal landscape: R-ARCSS - <https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/02/South-Sudan-Peace-Agreement-September-2018.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: ‘overzealous’ security forces - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1103512>
- Political and legal landscape: increasing political violence - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1111752>
- Political and legal landscape: UN convoy carrying food and humanitarian assistance - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113012>
- Political and legal landscape: surge in attacks against aid workers - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/04/surge-attacks-aid-workers-south-sudan>
- Political and legal landscape: had decreased in comparison to previous years - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1112172>
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom in the World 2024 South Sudan - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-sudan/freedom-world/2024>
- Political and legal landscape: Human Rights Watch 2024 South Sudan country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/south-sudan>
- Political and legal landscape: United Nations - <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15611.doc.htm>
- Political and legal landscape: December 2026 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/14/south-sudan-postpones-december-election-by-two-years>
- Religious landscape description: 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom for South Sudan - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/south-sudan/>
- Economic landscape: Between 2013 and 2018 - <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/in-depth/south-sudan-humanitarian-toll-half-decade-war>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's South Sudan Overview - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southsudan/overview>

- Economic landscape: African Development Bank's Economic Outlook - <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/east-africa/south-sudan/south-sudan-economic-outlook>
- Economic landscape: Radio Tamazuj - <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/currency-crisis-threatens-south-sudans-economy>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook South Sudan - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-sudan/>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP Human Development Report South Sudan - <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/SSD>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Bank's South Sudan Overview - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southsudan/overview>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook South Sudan - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-sudan/>
- Social and cultural landscape: 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index - <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/south-sudan>
- Technological landscape: Datareportal Digital 2024: South Sudan - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-south-sudan>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/South-Sudan-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: Sudan - <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/crisis-border-south-sudan-and-sudan-escalating-about-1000-people-arrive-daily-even-after-nearly-one-year-war>
- Security situation: 29 January 2024 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/fifty-two-killed-fighting-disputed-region-straddling-sudan-south-sudan-2024-01-29/>
- Security situation: hellish existence - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114312>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: IRFR 2023 South Sudan - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/south-sudan/>