



**“THIS TOWN WILL BE TOO SMALL FOR YOU”**

**REPRESSION OF CIVIC SPACE IN  
SOUTH SUDAN (2022-2025)**



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                            |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....                                                                    | 1  |
| 1. INTRODUCTION .....                                                                      | 3  |
| 1.1. Context .....                                                                         | 3  |
| 1.2. About SSHRDN.....                                                                     | 4  |
| 1.3. Purpose of the Report.....                                                            | 4  |
| 2. METHODOLOGY .....                                                                       | 6  |
| 3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK.....                                                                | 9  |
| 3.1. National Legal Framework.....                                                         | 9  |
| 3.2. Regional Legal Framework .....                                                        | 10 |
| 3.3. International Legal Framework.....                                                    | 10 |
| 4. THE FINDINGS .....                                                                      | 12 |
| 4.1. Threats and Intimidation of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists .....              | 12 |
| 4.2. Restrictions on CSOs, Media and Journalists .....                                     | 16 |
| 4.3. Arbitrary Arrest and Detention of HRDs and Journalists.....                           | 18 |
| 4.4. Permission and Monitoring of Events .....                                             | 22 |
| 4.5. Disruption of Protests and Events .....                                               | 25 |
| 4.6. Closure of Non-Governmental Organizations and Media Institutions .....                | 28 |
| 4.6.1. Shutdown of media institutions .....                                                | 29 |
| 4.6.2. Attacks and Closure of Non-Governmental Organizations .....                         | 30 |
| 5.7. Media Censorship .....                                                                | 32 |
| 5.7.1. Removal of Newspaper Articles .....                                                 | 32 |
| 5.7.2. Summoning Journalists by the Media Authority and the National Security Service..... | 33 |
| 5.7.3. Confiscation of Equipment from Media Practitioners .....                            | 34 |
| 5. RECOMMENDATIONS .....                                                                   | 35 |
| 6. CONCLUSION .....                                                                        | 40 |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Civic Space Monitoring Report presents an analysis of the alarming state of civic freedoms and the increasing number of violations targeting human rights defenders (HRDs), civil society actors, and journalists in South Sudan. The findings highlight a pervasive and systematic pattern of repression that continues to shrink the space for democratic expression, peaceful assembly, and civic engagement in the country.

From July 2022 to July 2025, numerous cases were documented involving summoning, harassment, intimidation, and physical threats against HRDs and journalists, many of whom were targeted for speaking out against or publishing about corruption, human rights abuses, and poor governance. There has been a worrying surge in arbitrary arrests and detentions, with both state and security actors routinely detaining HRDs and journalists without charges, or on vague national security-related grounds. Detainees are often held incommunicado, denied access to legal representation, and subjected to prolonged detention in secret facilities. These practices severely undermine due process and signal a broader erosion of the rule of law.

Media freedom has come under sustained assault. Censorship and forced removal of news articles particularly those critical of government officials or touching on sensitive political topics have become increasingly common. In some instances, media outlets have faced complete shutdowns, while individual journalists have been prosecuted for defamation, reinforcing a climate of fear and self-censorship in the newsroom. Confiscation of journalistic and organizational equipment, including cameras, computers, phones, and data storage devices, has further impeded the ability of media and civic actors to document and report on human rights abuses. Such confiscations often occur while HRDs and journalists try to attend public events like press conferences or parliamentary hearings, or when journalists are reporting in public locations.

Civil society organizations and independent civic actors have increasingly faced denial of operational space, with authorities halting their activities, cancelling public events, and threatening deregistration. In many cases, community dialogues, peaceful protests, and public forums have been disrupted or violently dispersed by security forces, often under the pretext of national security or lack of prior approval. This has effectively stifled grassroots mobilization and public participation in governance processes.

Disturbingly, the reporting period also includes cases of torture, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances of HRDs, signaling the extreme risks faced by those working to promote accountability, transparency, and justice in South Sudan. These incidents occur in an environment of near-total impunity, where perpetrators often linked to security services or powerful political interests are rarely held to account.

The cumulative effect of these violations points to a deeply hostile civic environment, characterized by state-sanctioned repression, shrinking freedoms, and escalating risks for those who dare to speak out. Civic actors now operate under constant threat, with limited legal protections and dwindling avenues for redress.

In response, this report issues a strong call to action for:

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- The Government of South Sudan to uphold its constitutional and international obligations to protect civic freedoms, ensuring among others that the NSS (National Security Service) focuses on its constitutional task of information gathering, analysis and advice instead of persecuting human rights defenders and the media;
- Regional bodies such as the African Union and IGAD to take concrete steps in addressing civic space violations in South Sudan;
- International partners and donors to provide enhanced support and protection to HRDs, independent media, and civil society organizations.

Ultimately, the preservation of civic space is not only a human rights imperative but also a prerequisite for sustainable peace, good governance, and democratic development in South Sudan. This report serves as a vital tool for advocacy, policymaking, and collective action toward safeguarding the rights and voices of those working for justice and accountability.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Context

South Sudan, the world's youngest nation since its independence in 2011, continues to confront the enduring legacies of decades of conflict, political instability, and fragile state institutions. The country's independence was accompanied by high hopes for peace and self-determination, yet it quickly became apparent that the structural weaknesses of the state, combined with deep-seated political and ethnic divisions, would present significant challenges to stability and governance.

The signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018 raised expectations for a transition from years of armed conflict toward a more peaceful, just, and democratic society. The agreement outlined a power-sharing arrangement, the creation of transitional institutions, and a roadmap toward permanent constitution-making and credible national elections. It also included provisions for security sector reforms, reintegration of former combatants, and the establishment of mechanisms for accountability and transitional justice. For many South Sudanese, the R-ARCSS represented a tangible opportunity to end cycles of violence and build inclusive governance structures.

Despite these promises, the transitional process has been uneven and marked by repeated delays. Key milestones, including national elections initially scheduled for 2023 and later postponed to 2024/2025, remain uncertain. This uncertainty has intensified anxieties over political legitimacy, the concentration of power, and the potential for renewed conflict, following the house arrest the First Vice president Dr. Riek Machar on March 26, 2025, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO), one of the principal figures in the implementation of the revitalized peace agreement of 2018 that led to the formation of the Transitional Government. The government of South Sudan accused Dr. Riek Machar of supporting the White Army militia, a group believed to be aligned with the SPLM-IO. This accusation followed an attack by the said militia on an army base in north-eastern town of Nasir.

The slow implementation of security arrangements, transitional justice mechanisms, and broader institutional reforms has eroded public confidence in the transition. For ordinary citizens, this has fostered a sense of exclusion from decision-making processes and a deepening skepticism about whether the envisioned democratic transition will ever be fully realized.

Civic space in South Sudan must be understood against this backdrop of contested transition. Civil society organizations (CSOs), human rights defenders (HRDs), and journalists have consistently played a crucial role in bridging the gap between citizens and the state, documenting human rights abuses, advocating for accountability, monitoring peace processes, and mobilizing communities around governance and service delivery. However, in a political environment where dissent is often interpreted as opposition or disloyalty, these actors face heightened risks, including surveillance, harassment, arbitrary arrests, judicial intimidation, and other legal or extralegal restrictions. In the lead-up to anticipated elections, these restrictions have intensified, further constraining freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and

leaving civic actors with increasingly limited operational space. This environment is exacerbated by the pervasive influence of security forces in public life, weak rule of law institutions, and the absence of credible mechanisms for holding perpetrators of violations accountable.

South Sudan's socio-economic realities compound these challenges. Widespread poverty, persistent humanitarian crises, inter-communal violence, food insecurity, and the displacement of millions of people place additional burdens on civil society, which often functions as a lifeline where state services are absent or insufficient. Civic actors not only advocate for human rights and governance reforms but also provide essential support to vulnerable communities, from health and education services to conflict mitigation efforts.

In this context, the protection and expansion of civic space is both a human rights imperative and a practical necessity for peacebuilding and democratic consolidation. Without a safe and enabling environment for HRDs, journalists, and civil society actors, efforts to promote accountability, inclusivity, and reconciliation are severely undermined. Moreover, the vibrancy of civic space is directly linked to the success of the transitional process and the credibility of future elections, making its safeguarding essential not only for domestic stability but also for South Sudan's engagement with regional and international partners committed to supporting the country's democratic and developmental trajectory.

## 1.2. About SSHRDN

The South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN) is a coalition of civil society actors and organizations working to advance the safety, security, and well-being of human rights defenders across South Sudan. Established in response to the heightened risks facing HRDs in the country, the network brings together diverse actors committed to promoting human rights, civic freedoms, and inclusive governance.

SSHRDN's core mission is to ensure that defenders, whether they work on governance, media freedoms, women's rights, environmental justice, or peacebuilding, can carry out their legitimate work without fear of reprisals. The network facilitates collective protection mechanisms, coordinates rapid responses for defenders at risk, provides capacity building on security and resilience, and engages with national, regional, and international stakeholders to advocate for an enabling civic environment. By documenting incidents and trends affecting HRDs, SSHRDN generates reliable evidence that strengthens advocacy, informs policy, and ensures accountability for violations.

This Civic Space Situational Report is part of SSHRDN's broader mandate to monitor, document, and analyze the civic environment in South Sudan. By systematically collecting and presenting evidence on restrictions, violations, and threats facing civic actors, SSHRDN seeks not only to protect defenders on the ground but also to contribute to a global understanding of the challenges and risks confronting civil society in South Sudan today.

### 1.3. Purpose of the Report

This report covers the period from July 2022 to June 2025 and provides a comprehensive analysis of the civic space situation in South Sudan. It systematically documents and examines patterns of violations against human rights defenders (HRDs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and journalists, situating these incidents within the broader political, security, and socio-economic context of the country. The report highlights emerging risks, structural constraints, and recurring trends, including arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, media censorship, judicial harassment, and restrictions on civil society operations. By analyzing these incidents as part of a broader, systemic contraction of civic space, rather than as isolated occurrences, the report underscores the scale and persistence of threats faced by civic actors.

Beyond documentation, the report examines the implications of these trends for South Sudan's transitional process and democratic prospects. Civic space is a critical enabler of accountability, transparency, and inclusive governance, and its erosion has direct consequences for the credibility of the transitional period and the anticipated elections. The report therefore links violations of civic space to broader challenges in achieving peace, democratic participation, and social cohesion, emphasizing that protecting civic actors is inseparable from protecting the transition itself.

The report is intended for multiple audiences:

- National stakeholders, including government authorities, legislative bodies, and security institutions, are provided with evidence of the real-world challenges faced by HRDs, civil society and the media. The report serves as both a mirror and a call to action, emphasizing the urgent need for legal, institutional, and policy reforms that safeguard fundamental freedoms and enable civic actors to operate without fear of reprisal.
- Regional and international actors, including the African Union (AU), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the United Nations, diplomatic missions, development partners and international NGOs, are provided with an evidence-based tool to shape engagement, guide strategic interventions, and prioritize support for South Sudan's civic actors. By detailing patterns of abuse, risks, and systemic barriers, the report allows external actors to advocate more effectively, monitor compliance with international human rights standards, and design targeted programs that strengthen civic space.

Ultimately, the report seeks to promote an open, inclusive, and democratic civic space in South Sudan. It underscores the principle that sustainable peace, democratic governance, and societal resilience cannot be achieved without an empowered civil society and protected human rights defenders. By documenting threats and violations, highlighting risks, and offering actionable insights, the report contributes to ongoing efforts to strengthen civic freedoms, protect human rights defenders, and support a democratic and accountable transition in South Sudan.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This situational report is based on 36 months of documentation of incidents to systematically capture, analyze, and verify civic space-related violations in South Sudan. Through a combination of direct observation, interviews with affected individuals and witnesses, organizations, and secondary data review, this methodology ensures a comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of the state of civic freedoms for the past 3 years, from July 2022 to July 2025.

In November-December 2021, 15 monitors were trained on principles of monitoring, documenting and reporting. The training integrated digital data collection tools with rights-based monitoring principles to ensure accurate, ethical and actionable information for advocacy purposes. In January and October 2024, an additional 8 new members were co-opted into the pool of national monitors after just 8 of the initial monitors had remained actively documenting the civic space-related violations across South Sudan - but majorly violations from Juba, Torit, Wau, Yei, and Bentiu.

SSHRDN secretariat selected the monitors from amongst their network of members (HRDs) because of their; one—prior knowledge on human rights-violations monitoring, documentation and reporting, and two—geographic and thematic coverage.

The trained monitors from the various States and towns of South Sudan were deployed to document incidents related to civic space, as identified below:

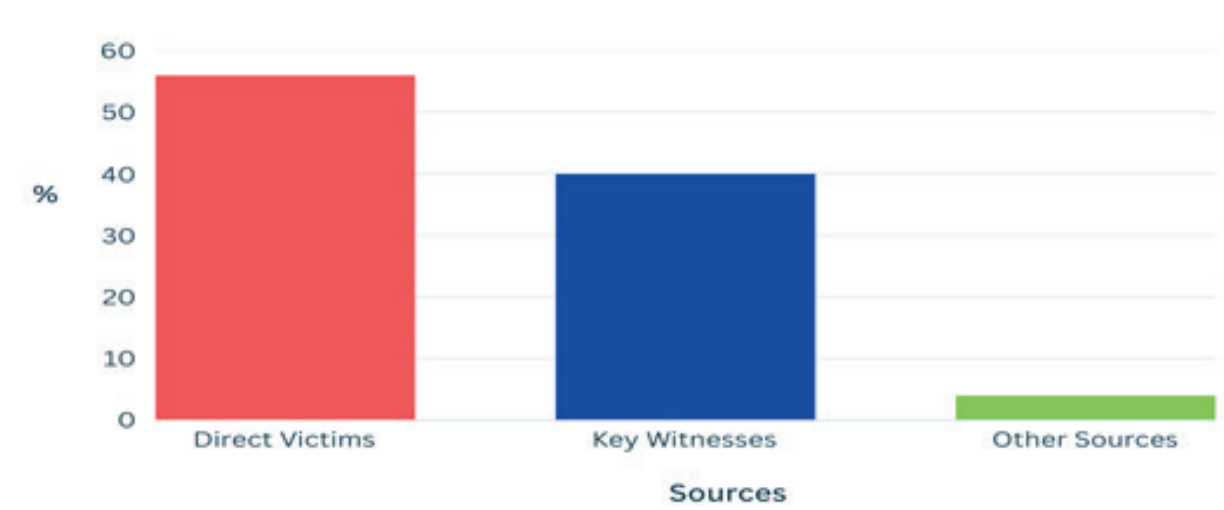
- Summons of HRDs and journalists,
- Attacks/harassment/threats of HRDs and journalists,
- Attacks on/Disruption of public events/protests,
- Denial of operation (stopping HRDs/journalists from carrying out their work),
- Censorship of publications,
- Arrest and detention of journalists and HRDs,
- Court cases especially defamation cases against journalists.
- Killings of HRDs and journalists, among many more others.

The monitors conducted direct face-to-face interviews, and in some cases, they had phone-call interviews with direct victims and witnesses. For every case at least two primary sources were interviewed. Where necessary, interviews were conducted with secondary sources, mainly to verify factual details. News articles on news websites, social media posts, print media information and official police records were also obtained, analyzed and studied to further verify information on the recorded incidents. All these data were collected using a digitally secured documentation tool.

The data from the field were submitted to the SSHRDN secretariat and then automatically transmitted to a centralized digital dashboard. The secretariat staff conducted thorough cross-checks and direct follow-ups with the monitors while analyzing trends over time and across regions. The staffs verified findings, collated and synthesized the data, to be used for advocacy work, nationally, regionally and internationally.

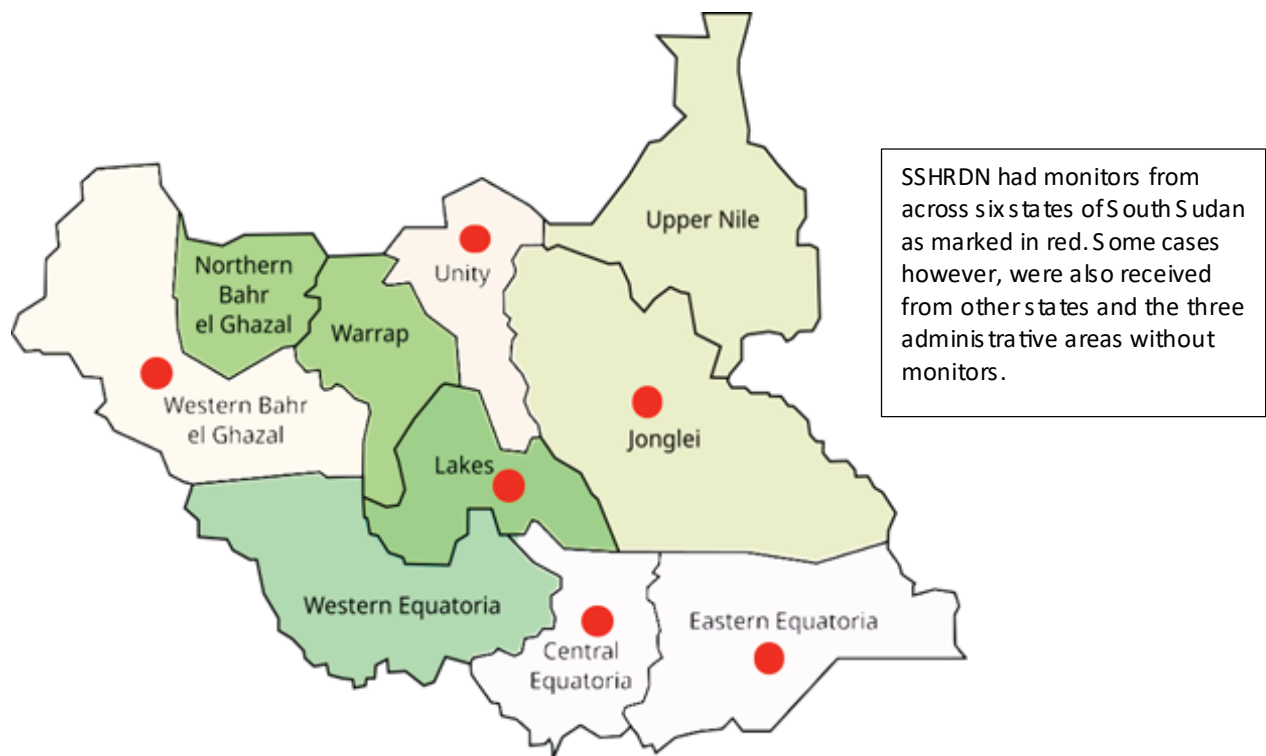
Between July 2022 and July 2025, SSHRDN field monitors documented a total of 114 cases of civic space-related violations across South Sudan, with the majority concentrated in Central Equatoria, Upper Nile, and Lakes States. These cases were primarily sourced from key witnesses and victims directly affected.

Figure 1: Type of sources interviewed while collecting the data



This situational report covers incidents of civic space repression that may amount to human rights violations, documented by the active monitors across South Sudan including in towns where SSHRDN had no trained monitors as shown in the below map.

Figure 2: Map of States of South Sudan capturing the presence of field monitors



This situational report covers incidents of civic space repression that may amount to human The process adhered strictly to DO NO HARM principles and prioritized the safety, consent, and anonymity of sources, survivors and witnesses. Monitors were always checked on by the secretariat staff and the SSHARDN protection team to ensure up-keep with their safety while in the field collecting sensitive information. They received periodic refresher trainings either bilaterally or as a group to uphold data quality and ethical standards.

### 3. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1. National Legal Framework

Civic space in South Sudan is primarily governed by the Transitional Constitution of 2011 (as amended 2015), which outlines a range of civil liberties under its Bill of Rights. Some key provisions protecting civic space are: Article 24 on Freedom of Expression and Media, which safeguards the right to express opinions, receive and disseminate information, and to access the media, while it also guarantees the freedom of the media; Article 25 on the Freedom of Assembly and Association protects the right to peaceful assembly and to form or join associations, including civil society organizations; Article 26 on the Right to Participation and Voting ensures that citizens can participate in public affairs and elections; Article 32 on the Right of Access to Information states that “Every citizen has the right of access to official information and records, including electronic records in the possession of any level of government or any organ or agency thereof, except where the release of such information is likely to prejudice public security or the right to privacy of any other person”, granting the public the right to access official information.

On the other hand, South Sudan has a significant number of subsidiary laws that provide for the safety and protection of civic and political space. The Political Parties Act 2012 (as amended 2024) regulates the formation, operation, and regulation of political parties in South Sudan. It allows for the establishment of political parties, ensuring political pluralism and competition. The Media Authority Act (2013) affirms freedom of expression and a pluralistic media environment and established a body “for the regulation, development and promotion of an independent and professional media in South Sudan”; nevertheless, it has faced criticism for its lack of independence and the government's control over the media. Journalists and media outlets often face harassment, and the freedom of the press has been restricted various times, especially during periods of conflict. The Right of Access to Information Act (2014) grants citizens the right to access public information (see article 3 and article 4). The Act gives effect to the constitutional right to access information, promotes maximum disclosure even from the private bodies provided it is necessary for the enjoyment and protection of any right, subject to limited and specific exceptions.

There are some subsidiary laws that have been used to repress civic and political space. The National Security Service Act of 2014 (as amended 2024) has been widely criticized for granting broad powers to the National Security Service (NSS), including

<sup>1</sup> South Sudan Transitional Constitution, PART II Bill of Rights

<sup>1</sup> “Entrenched repression: systematic curtailment of the democratic and civic space in South Sudan”, UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (CHRSS) report to the Human Rights Council, October 2023. [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/cohrsouthsudan/A\\_HRC\\_54\\_CRP.6\\_0.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/cohrsouthsudan/A_HRC_54_CRP.6_0.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/South-Sudan\\_Right.pdf](https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/South-Sudan_Right.pdf)

arrest of suspects (which is normally within the mandate of the police only) and detention without adequate judicial oversight, which has been used to suppress dissent.

While in 2023 the articles 54 and 55 on the NSS arrest mandate were proposed to be removed from the NSS Act by the President and the 1st Vice-President, the RTNLA agreed not to remove them, and to keep a number of contentious elements in the amended Act.

While much as the media is regulated under the Media Authority Act 2013, the Media Authority works in close coordination with the NSS, and effectively operates as an auxiliary to the NSS-managed regime of media censorship. The NSS has been able to preside over the removal of articles from the print media, and shut down media institutions without any hesitation from the Media Authority that is mandated to regulate and protect the media activities from any form of censorship. While the Political Parties Act provides guarantees for political participation, the law also places restrictions on the functioning of political parties, including financial reporting and adherence to national security concerns.

### 3.2. Regional Legal Framework

As a member of the African Union, South Sudan is bound by the provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), which protects fundamental rights, including the right to participate in government, freedom of association, and freedom of expression.

Both the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the Treaty for the establishment of East African Community play a decisive role in bolstering the legal protection of civic space. Notably, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) which monitors the Charter and other African treaties has taken significant steps in support of HRDs by adopting numerous resolutions. Among these resolutions is the Resolution on the Right to Freedom of Information and Expression through Access to Internet Services. This resolution calls on Member States to respect and guarantee citizens' rights to access the internet and other communication technologies. The Resolution on the Need to Protect Civic Space, Freedom of Association and Assembly in Africa, African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the Declaration on the promotion of the Role of Human Rights Defenders and their Protection in Africa, emphasize the importance of these fundamental freedoms for civil society and for holding those in power accountable.

### This Civic Space Monitoring Report presents an analysis of the alarming state of civic freedoms 3.3. International Legal Framework

The international legal framework provides additional protection mechanisms for civic and political space in South Sudan. The international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), both ratified by the South Sudanese parliament in June 2019 and officially acceded to on the 5th of February 2024, obliges the government of South Sudan to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights therein contained, including freedom of expression, the right to peaceful assembly, and the right to participate in public affairs.

On April 30th 2015, South Sudan also ratified the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT), which prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Given torture and ill-treatment are often so distinct whenever civil society actors or journalists are arrested or detained, it is very important to note that South Sudan is bound by the provisions of CAT.

Despite these legal provisions, South Sudan has consistently ranked among the world's lowest in terms of civic and political space, and within this year 2025, a political stalemate and disagreements have further eroded the already shrinking civic and political space, with arbitrary arrests and detention of opposition politicians without due process of the law. This has restricted civic engagement and weakened democratic processes. It is worth noting that the ratification of treaties and conventions alone will not be able to overturn the civic and political space issues, but the government must take on extensive legal and policy reforms to integrate these treaties effectively into domestic law and bring about meaningful change throughout South Sudan.

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<sup>1</sup> "Country brief: South Sudan; Overview of recent restrictions to civic freedoms". <https://www.civicus.org/documents/SouthSudanResearchBrief.pdf> accessed on 27th April, 2025

<sup>1</sup> A/HRC/46/CRP.2, para. 53

<sup>1</sup> Refworld, "United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 10 December 1948, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712c.html>, accessed on 4 April 2025.

## 4. THE FINDINGS

### 4.1. Threats and Intimidation of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists

HRDs and journalists are often threatened and intimidated in order to silence critical voices. These tactics, ranging from anonymous threats either via a phone call or text message, to online chats on social media and to some extent threats in person (for example during summoning). Threats and intimidations are usually deliberately employed to suppress dissent and obstruct accountability. In South Sudan, such violations have become increasingly systematic, targeting individuals who document abuses, advocate for justice, or challenge entrenched power structures.

This section highlights the common patterns of intimidation and the impact threats have on the work and well-being of HRDs and journalists in South Sudan.

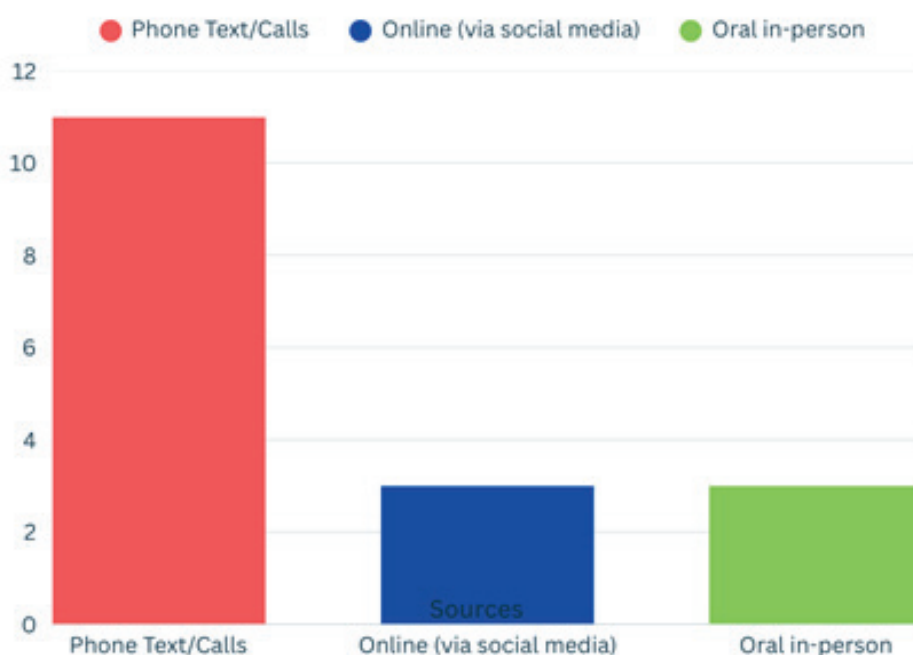
Threatening phone calls are often made from anonymous or masked numbers. Messages often contain explicit threats, such as warning to ‘stop talking on media’, ‘leave the issue’, or ‘face consequences. Timing is usually strategic, calls and texts are often sent late at night or very early in the morning or immediately after public statements or media appearances by the civil society members. In some cases, threats are repeated or become more severe, with multiple messages or calls over days or weeks to instill fear and psychological pressure. Escalation might also result in physical attack on the HRD or journalist.

Direct, oral threats can also be delivered in face-to-face encounters, often during public events, court hearings, community meetings or when summoned to the National Security Service (NSS) or Military Intelligence (MI) premises to answer some questions. Language is often suggestive, such as ‘you are being watched’, often made after being played a recording of your voice or a video of you, or after showing one of your posts on social media. Women HRDs report sexist remarks and intimidations, including threats of sexual violence, sexist words or exclusion from spaces.

Online threats via social media are often posted in comment sections, shared in targeted posts or sent via private messages directly into the inbox of the HRD or journalist.

The below graph indicates the statistics for the documented number of cases with regards to the three ways HRDs and journalists have been threatened and intimidated.

Figure 3: Statistics regarding the three ways of threatening and intimidating HRDs and journalists in South Sudan as per the documentation findings from July 2022 to July 2025



FAs shown in the graph above, intimidations/threats via phone calls and text messages are more common than online (social media) threats and in-person oral threats. This is probably because it makes it easier to conceal the true identity of the intimidator. Later on, if the threat culminates into other forms, such as summoning, their identity will however become known.

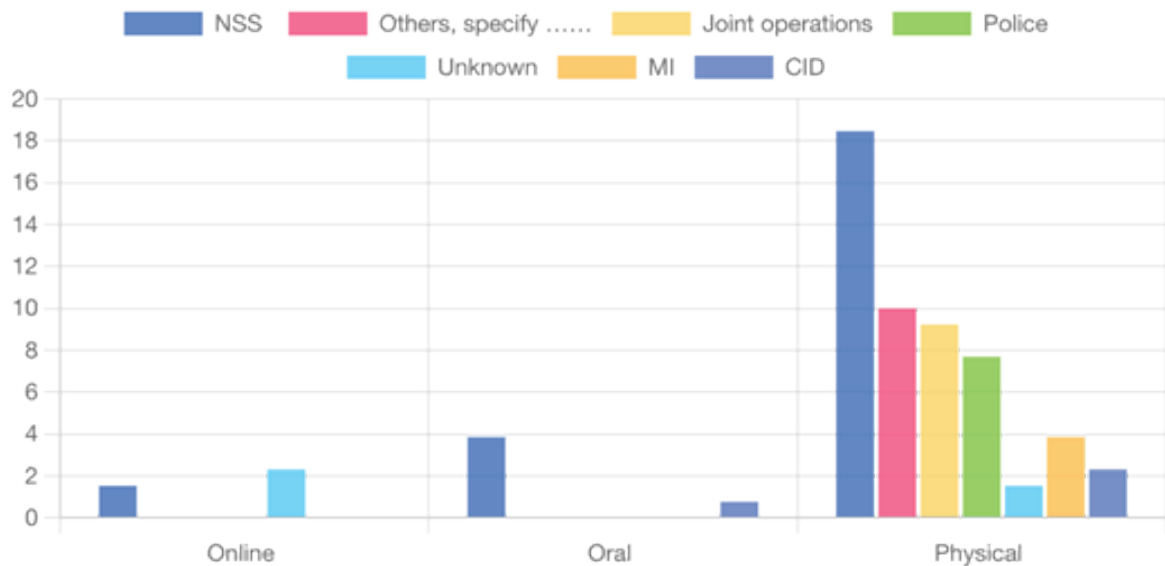
For the in-person oral threats or intimidations, in most cases, HRDs and journalists are summoned to NSS or Military Intelligence offices, and there they are interrogated, intimidated and/or threatened. In other cases, they are abruptly threatened and intimidated in other places, wherever the security officers find them, sometimes at their work places or at their homes. Such summons and threats are often repeated, instilling fear in the HRDs and journalists as well as in their colleagues, leading to a climate of fear and self-censorship.

William (pseudonym), a human rights defender, had just gone to visit a detention facility inside military barracks to assess the situation of the inmates when he was locked up and intimidated by the centre commander from the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF). He was taken inside a very small dirty cell full of dirty water leaking from the roof, kept inside for 18 hours, exposed to rodents' movement sound and the deafening sound of dripping dirty water. The feeling sent a chill onto his spine that it is still affecting his thinking and daily activities.

Rebecca (pseudonym), a women's rights activist, who made a presentation in a workshop on human rights, was too befallen by the intimidation tactics when 3 armed men dressed in military uniforms belonging to SSPDF in Lakes State stopped her at around 16:30 hrs local time. Her phone was forcefully grabbed, ordered to unlock and delete the images she had taken in the meeting she was coming from. She had mentioned the SSPDF as one of the institutions violating human rights in the country, and was then threatened to never mention SSPDF in any of her presentations.

Security agencies especially the Counter Military Intelligence (CMI) , NSS and the SSPDF have also been cited to deploying the “summon to intimidate” tactic. Those summoned undergo prolonged questioning, often without legal representation, and HRDs are pressured to disclose details about their work and affiliations. This practice is particularly common in areas like Yei River County, Central Equatoria State, and Lakes State, where HRDs have been detained or interrogated under vague charges.

Figure 4: The perpetrators of different types of threats and intimidations of CSOs and Journalists



Martin (pseudonym), a journalist working with a local radio station in Rumbek, found himself invited by a Tiger Division commander. In the morning hours of October 2023, a numberless army Landcruiser went to the radio station —straight to the station manager’s office requesting Martin to accompany them back to their base to answer on a case filed against him by the president of the town’s B Court. The station manager accompanied him but was refused entry at the gate. Martin was shoved into a small dark room without any furniture where he was left standing for nearly 3 hours. He was then released and forced to apologize for having previously reported on a case of adultery in which the B Court’s judge was implicated.

<sup>1</sup> Date of interview, February 13 2025, Lakes State.

<sup>1</sup> Counter Military Intelligence: An intelligence unit comprising of all security agencies in South Sudan. It has officers from the SSPDF, MI, NSS and other units .

<sup>1</sup> Tiger Division: The presidential protection division within the SSPDF army ranks .

<sup>1</sup> A ‘B Court’ refers to one of the levels within the customary law court system, which operates alongside the formal judiciary. These courts are established under the Local Government Act and are part of a four-tier structure

Anonymous phone calls and threatening text messages or to some extent social media messaging have also been used to intimidate and threaten HRDs and journalists. During the investigation, one HRD revealed being threatened and warned that he will “rot in prison” in case he continues with his work. These warnings often instruct HRDs to abandon their activism or face severe consequences. Since these messages are typically sent from anonymous numbers, identifying the perpetrators becomes nearly impossible, intensifying the climate of fear. The inability to trace these sources leaves defenders with few legal protective options.

Ousmane (pseudonym), a journalist working for an independent national radio station in Juba, was called in mid-February 2025 by a local phone number new to him, instructing him to “desist from reporting on the incident”. During this time, South Sudan had an unrest following the extrajudicial killings of South Sudanese citizens in Wad Madani in Sudan. Ousmane recounted how that first call was followed by another call by an unknown number a week later with the same threat of directing him to stop reporting on the killings in Sudan.

Likewise, Anthony (pseudonym), a journalist in a State in central South Sudan, was called by an unknown number in the same month of February—asking him to leave the State within 72 hours. Anthony was left confused because he had never done anything wrong to anyone apart from reporting daily in the newsroom. The caller had also not given reasons as to why he posed the threats on Anthony—the threat however left Anthony shaken because similar threats have been given to journalists previously and most developed into actions against journalists.

In Rumbek in May 2024, the offices of an NGO were broken into and vandalized. Windows were broken and all documents had been torn from cupboards and were scattered across the floor. Patrick (pseudonym), who leads the NGO and was immediately called to the office in the morning, found two threatening notes on the floor as well. They stated: “you will see, this is just the beginning” and “this town will be too small for you, idiot”, presumably implying the aggressors will come after him anywhere. In the following days, Patrick was informed that unknown men were looking for him in his residential area and around his office. Patrick had to hide for some time. Patrick believes the office raid and threats are related to his active involvement in investigating and preventing human rights violations by local authorities. Patrick reported the threats to the police.

The continuous exposure to threats, intimidation and harassment has a profound effect on the HRDs’ emotional and psychological well-being, not only on the affected HRDs themselves but also on others, who may be discouraged from engaging in similar work.

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, December 16 2024, Lakes State

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, February 24 2025, Juba

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, February 21 2025

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, May 13 2024, Lakes State

Many experience stress, anxiety, and trauma, affecting both their personal lives and professional activities, as captured by the report ‘Entrenched Repression’ by the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, released in October 2023. Some resort to self-censorship due to the unbearable pressure. The unpredictability of when or how a threat may materialize creates a constant state of fear, leading to burnout and emotional distress. HRDs in particularly hostile environments often report symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and other psychological distress. SSHRDN’s protection team has responded to a number of cases reported by HRDs who were emotionally affected as a result of the continuous patterns of threats and intimidations.

#### 4.2. Restrictions on CSOs, Media and Journalists

This section seeks to examine various constraints imposed by state actors and their agents on civil society organizations (CSOs), the media, and journalists. It also explores the resulting adverse impacts on individual activists, media professionals, their work, and the broader public. Particular attention is given to the restrictions targeting individual journalists, activists, and media outlets.

In the past three years, SSHRDN registered 16 such cases of restrictions against civil society members, media houses and journalists.

We are looking at restrictions from three perspectives: one—through denial of access to or physical removal of human rights defenders and journalists from spaces of interest to their work, two—denial of access to vital information, and three—confiscation of the gadgets and equipment of these HRDs and journalists. There are also other restrictions imposed on HRDs and journalists, such as closure of media houses and NGO offices and the imposition of permits for public events, but these are examined in separate sections in this report.

Amongst the cases reported, denial of access to information emerges as the most prevalent form of restrictions targeting CSOs, journalists and media outlets. It has been cited in all 16 cases. Restriction on movement was reported 14 times, while closures of media houses and NGO offices appeared 8 times. Confiscation of gadgets and equipment happens less frequently, but in many cases of denial of access to areas or physical removal of majorly journalists their gadgets and equipment have been confiscated. These figures suggest that a single form of restriction often triggers additional restrictions, particularly while the case remains active.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/south-sudan-un-inquirys-report-finds-entrenched-repression-imperils>

proceedings. They had their notebooks taken and thoroughly checked by the security officers in the courtroom.

As already mentioned above, CSOs and journalists are often denied access to information and barred or removed from public meetings including press conferences and parliamentary hearings. Public office-holders have used members of the security personnel, especially the national security officers to deny civil society members and journalists access to vital spaces of public information. We documented at least one case where several members of the civil society and journalists have been locked out of parliamentary proceedings. In at least two cases, CSO members and journalists were removed from press conferences, where for example the country or State fiscal budgets were being discussed. All these sittings were open to the public, and CSOs and journalists were just carrying out their legitimate tasks of monitoring government actions and informing the public.

For example, in July 2024, a prominent human right defender by the name of Samuel (pseudonym) was barred from attending the third reading of the controversial National Security Service Act, 2014 (Amendment Bill 2024). The national security operatives at the parliamentary building briefly detained him alongside two other colleagues when they attempted to access the parliamentary proceedings. The incident was confirmed by the chairperson of the specialized committee of information at the Reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly of South Sudan, who said that Samuel was allegedly not invited to attend the proceedings—despite the law guaranteeing public participation as described under article 166(6) of the Transitional Constitution.

In another case, Hilde (pseudonym) and 2 other members of the local press were in October 2024 chased out of the State Secretariat premises on Governor's orders by security personnel believed to being officers of the National Security Service. This happened during the discussion on the fiscal budget for the particular state despite having been officially informed by the State Minister of Finance and thereafter fulfilling the protocol to attend the proceedings.

In other cases, journalists in particular have been manhandled and bundled out of buildings or meetings by security personnel. Their treatment could be qualified as excessive use of force, as it was not necessary for the purpose. The force was also used against women, who were not treated differently from men.

Monica (pseudonym) and 2 other colleagues working for a local media house were 'held by the collars of our dresses and pushed out by force from the hall' as said by the victim. This aggressive removal was carried out by security details of a State governor during the presentation of the 2024/25 State fiscal budget.

<sup>1</sup> Date of interview, December 11th, 2022. Juba, Central Equatoria State

<sup>1</sup> Date of interview, January 21 2025, Juba

<sup>1</sup> Date of interview, November 1 2024, Lakes State

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, November 3 2024, Lakes State

### 4.3. Arbitrary Arrest and Detention of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists

This section deals with arbitrary arrest and detention incidents from July 2022 to June 2025. From the interviews conducted, 39 incidents of arbitrary arrest and detention were reported carried out by several perpetrators that include public officials, NSS, Military Intelligence, Joint operations, and the police.

In accordance with the interviews conducted, 12 arrests and detentions were registered in Juba of which 9 were of journalists and 3 civil society actors. Incidents of arbitrary arrests and detentions were also recorded in Bor, Yambio, Kapoeta, Wau, Yei, Aweil, Yirol and Bentiu. According to the respondents, some victims were detained for prolonged hours or days without any interrogations and without food and water. People who get detained in military facilities are often assaulted and experience physical harm and also subjected to torture.

Figure 5: Categories of victims of arbitrary arrest and detention

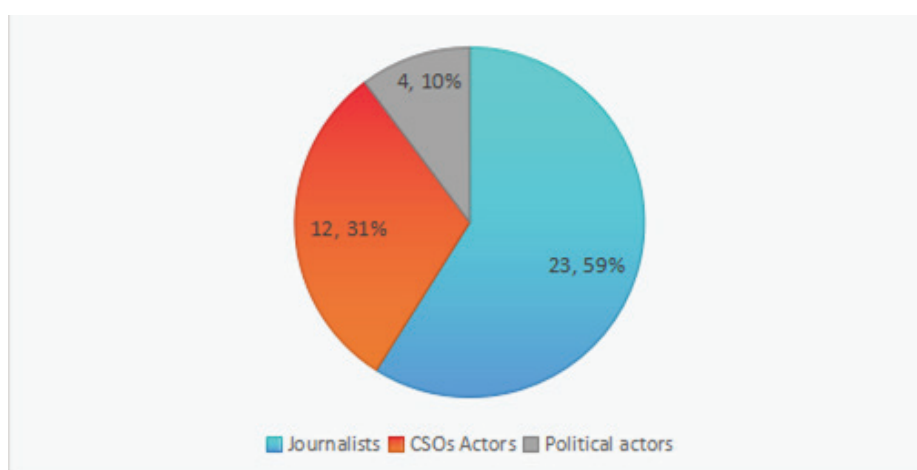
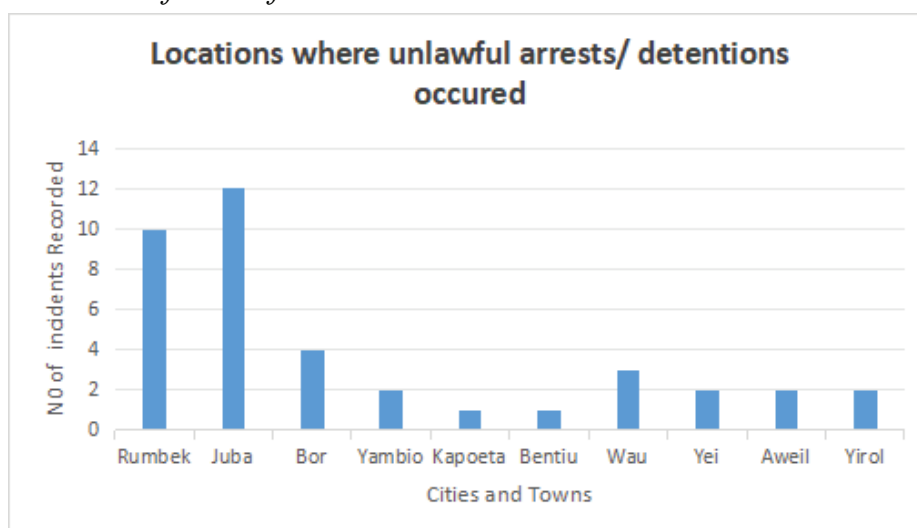


Figure 6: Locations of unlawful arrests and detentions



<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, March 7 2025, Lakes State

<sup>1</sup>  
Date of Interview, December 16 2024, Lakes State

Figure 5: Categories of victims of arbitrary arrest and detention

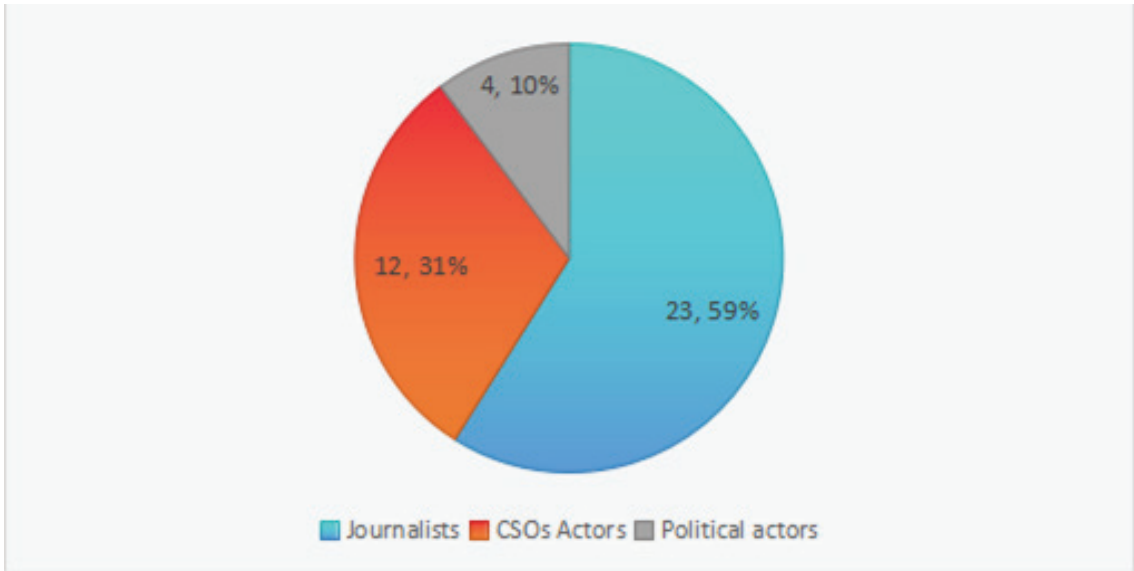
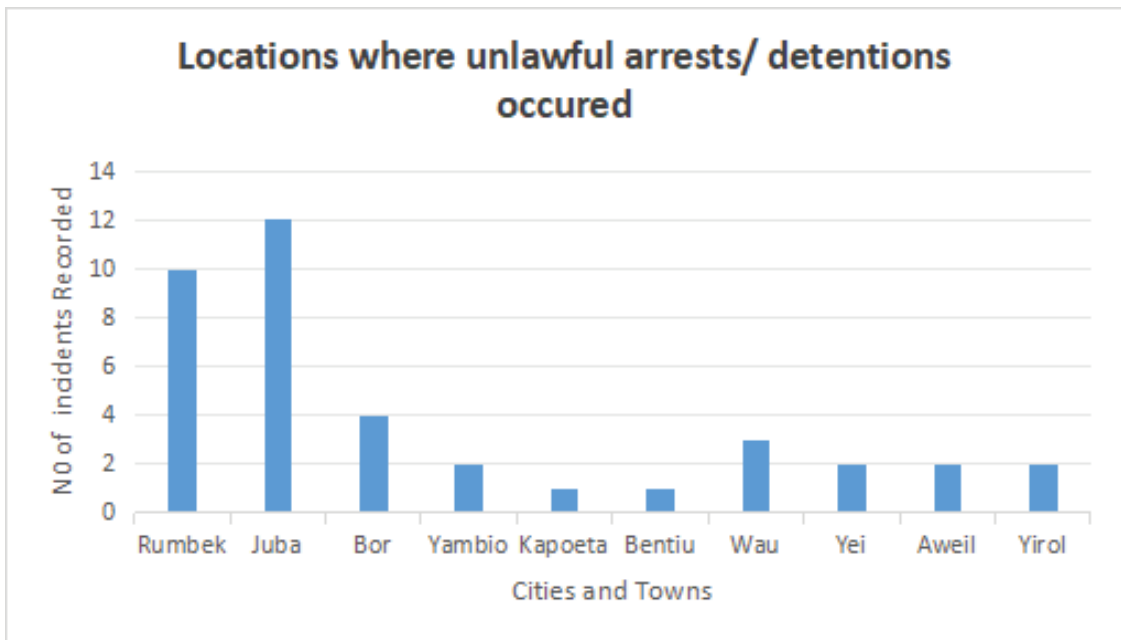


Figure 6: Locations of unlawful arrests and detentions



As Juba City is a metropolitan and the capital city of South Sudan, many media actors and CSOs actors operate in this city and being the seat of the central government and Central Equatoria State government, it also experiences increased activities of the security operatives and therefore the highest number on incidents of arbitrary arrests and detentions.

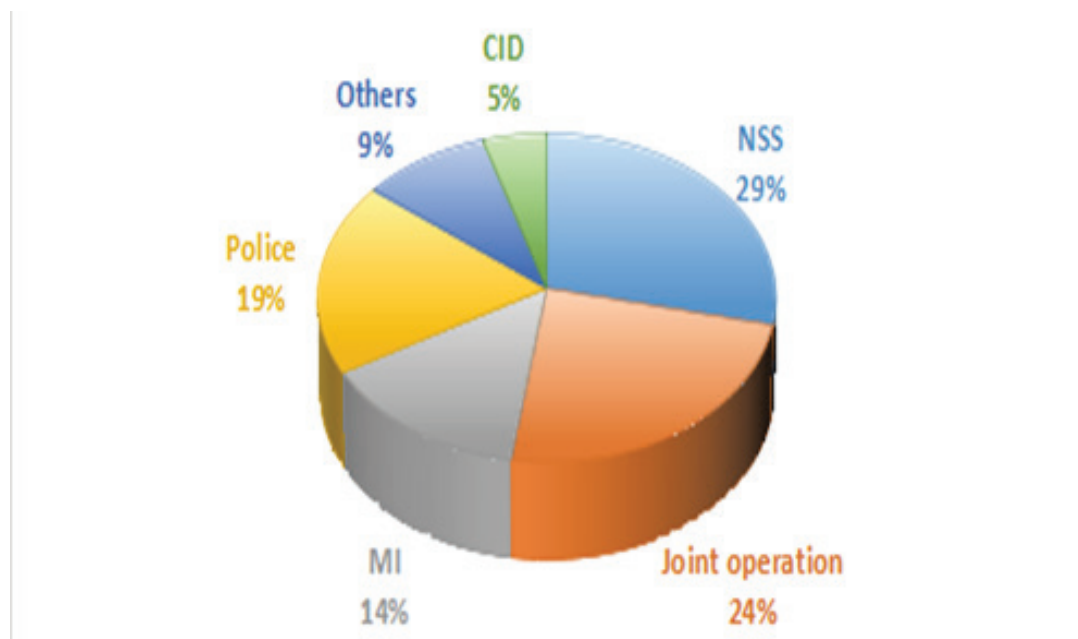
Though South Sudan has legal frameworks that govern the procedures for arrest and detention of individuals presumed to have committed crimes and in conflict with the law, security agents across the country constantly violate the legal procedures. Article 19 (2) of the Transitional Constitution 2011 prescribes that “Any person who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his or her arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him or her,” while article 19 (4) state that “A person arrested by the police as part of an investigation, may be held in detention, for a period not exceeding 24 hours and if not released on bond to be produced in court.

The court has authority to either remand the accused in prison or to release him or her on bail” .

Much as the law confers the power of arrest to the police with standard procedures to follow, several security units have consistently continued to unlawfully arrest and detain suspects without due process of the law. The NSS is notorious for arresting people, with or without an arrest warrant, which remains in their mandate according to the NSS Act as amended in 2024, but it is not in accordance with international human rights law, nor does it always follow their own standard procedures. In addition, public officials have often evoked their powers and ordered the arrest and detention of journalists and civil society actors, overstepping the procedures established by the law, to obstruct them from conducting their legitimate work.

From the 39 incidents of arrests and detention reported, only two cases were referred to the Courts and eventually in all the two cases, the victims were found not guilty and subsequently absolved from any wrongdoing and from the cases reported it's only in the same two cases the suspected were arrested with warrants from the police representing only 5.1% of the total cases reported on arrests and detentions where the due process of the law was followed.

Figure 7: Chart showing the proportion of unlawful arrests and detentions per perpetrator



In a number of cases, the arrest and detention of journalists had to do with articles they wrote or items they broadcasted, with which public officials are not happy.

For example, in November 2024, Andrew (pseudonym) a journalist and editor-in-chief of YY (pseudonym) newspaper received several phone calls from unknown people stating he should leave the country or otherwise he would face arrest. Despite the phone call threats, he said he is not leaving country because he doesn't know why he should move out. On 28th November, 2024, Andrew was picked from his office without a warrant by men wearing civilian clothes and detained allegedly due to the an old newspaper article written by Peter (pseudonym), another journalist and a colleague of Andrew working for the same newspaper, whose article presumably irked the Director General (DG) of the Internal Security Bureau of the National Security according to one of the interviewees. Andrew was later released without charges on June 12th, 2025 after six months in detention at the facility run by NSS just after when the DG of the NSS who ordered for his arrest was sacked from office. The prolonged detention of the victim did not meet the legal requirement for the period of incarceration of suspects for the purpose of investigations, and he was also not accorded full to access a lawyer as mandated by the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan 2011.

In the same pattern, on October 15th, 2023, Jonny (pseudonym), a journalist working for Radio KK FM (pseudonym) as news reporter and radio presenter, was apparently arrested without any arrest warrant by the military men wearing uniforms of the Tiger Division and taken to a military detention facility for covering and airing news on the radio station about a court trial against the Head of the Town B Court for adultery. The soldiers came in a black military pickup vehicle with a non-registered plate number into the compound of the radio station and asked the station manager where Jonny was and told him that he was summoned by the commander of the military unit. “On arrival to the office of their commanding officer, he told his soldiers to take me directly to cell one where I was detained for three hours. The cell was very small. I had to stand for all those hours without sitting down. Later on, the commander ordered me to be brought to his office and asked me “why did I cover the story of adultery in court and run it on air as news in the Radio Station?”.

While in most of the above cases there is an element of enforced disappearance, as arrested people could not contact their relatives or lawyers and their fates have been unknown for sometimes, there are also cases of HRDs and civil society actors who were abducted and did not resurface alive. There are often indications that security agencies were involved in these abductions, but do not give information about such cases. Even the police is not informed, and may start investigations without coming to conclusions.

<sup>1</sup> Interview held on 10th Dec, 2024, Central Equatoria State

<sup>1</sup> In-person interview with the victim, held on 14th December, 2024 in Lakes State

For example, On 18th October 2024, Mr. Juma (pseudonym), a former humanitarian worker and the owner of a medical centre in Yei Town, was abducted and his body was later found dead and dumped in a nearby bush along Juba-Terekeka Road. According to a close relative of the deceased, “Mr. Juma left home and headed to one of the banks in Juba to get money paid to him by one of the insurance companies. At around 1:00 PM when I called him, he said he's already leaving the bank and coming home. I waited. He did not reach home. When I tried to call around 3.30 PM again, this is when I realized his phones were switched off. I searched for him all around Juba and prisons but all in vain until his lifeless body was found on the 20 November 2024 along Terekeka road with burns all over his body, which appear to be effects of electrocution during his detention.” Ever since, no one has claimed responsibility for Juma’s death. While the law enforcement agents have failed to give information on investigations on the death of Mr. Juma, there are indications that he was abducted and murdered.

Similarly, on the 4th of October 2023, Mr. Kane (pseudonym), the Executive Director of a youth-led organization operating mainly in Bor, Jonglei State, went to his office in Juba city and since then he was never seen again. Later, the car he drove that day was found by law enforcement agencies parked nearby the new bridge known as Freedom Bridge Gumbo Area in Juba City. Though the police tried to investigate the sudden disappearance of Mr Kane, they have not found him, nor have they been able to apprehend the perpetrators, up till this month of July 2025.

Though the perpetrators in certain occasions are unknown and remain at large, independent police investigations in such cases have not been common and they are often overshadowed by interference from other units of the Security agencies to undermine the due process of the law.

Julius (pseudonym), a co-worker of Mr. Kane: “Just less than a week after our colleague and the Executive Director (ED) disappeared under unclear circumstances, my colleague Godwin (pseudonym) and I were summoned by the National Security Service (NSS) through phone calls to appear at Giada Military Barracks where the Tiger Unit Division V were stationed. There, we were seriously interrogated and forced to answer a series of questions about how, where and why our boss had disappeared. We were compelled to respond to their expectations, but we stood firm by telling them that we completely do not know anything about his disappearance. As a result, we were detained for days and had been blocked from talking to our parents, relatives and friends who tried to visit us at the detention facility.”

<sup>1</sup> Interview held on 20th November 2024, Central Equatoria State

<sup>1</sup> Ibid

#### 4.4. Permission and Monitoring of Events

In the previous chapter, we briefly mentioned the infiltration of the NSS. In this chapter, we will talk more on the deliberate policy NSS has imposed on civil society, HRDs and journalists that gives them the gateway to infiltrate.

The work of HRDs, activists and journalists in South Sudan continues to unfold against a backdrop of intense scrutiny and systematic constraints. One of the most pressing challenges facing the civic space is the requirement—both formal and informal—to seek permission from the NSS before undertaking activities, not only related to human rights activities but of any form, as long as one is bringing together a group of people larger than ten in number. This practice, often compounded by covert and overt monitoring, undermines not only the right to freedom of assembly and expression but often also leads to HRDs and journalists being summoned, intimidated, harassed and arbitrarily detained.

This section looks into the patterns and implications of NSS interference in human rights work, drawing on documented incidents in the last 36 months.

The NSS has majorly used the NSS Act 2014 (amended 2024), particularly the two contentious sections on their arrest mandate (articles 54 and 55), to negatively affect civic space. The two sections were seen as the major hindrances to freedom of expression and association, because of the deliberate numerous arbitrary arrests, arbitrary summons, detentions and disappearances-to mention but a few of CSO members and journalists.

However, not only the two arrest mandate sections in the NSS Act 2014 (amended in 2024) have enabled the NSS to restrict civic space, section 6 on the guiding principles in the NSS Act mandates the NSS to ‘pre-empt and control’ threats—language that has or can be used to justify pre-approval requirements for public gatherings and workshops. Equally, section 13 authorizes the agency to monitor, investigate and gather information for the purpose of providing security assessments on persons and places and to some extent, information if reasonably suspected to cause a risk in relation to national security of the country.

Civil society organizations are often asked by the NSS to pre-share the agenda of the event in question, the venue, the number of attendees—sometimes the names of the attendees including those that will speak and what will they be talking about. In recent cases as of early 2025, the central organizing person is requested to take the security clearance letter by him/herself to the NSS office, which makes it easy to arbitrarily arrest or detain the person as a ‘person of interest’. At the end of the process of verifying if the requirements are met, one is either given or denied the clearance. If permission is given, the NSS agents will (almost) always attend the event—whether formally or informally. This enables them to monitor the event. These actions contravene several provisions of the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan, 2011 (as amended) —particularly those enshrined in chapter 2 (Bill of Rights) as well as international human rights law, for example the African Guidelines on Freedom of Association and Assembly state that “Participating in and organizing assemblies is a right and not a privilege, and thus its exercise does not require the authorization of the state”.

While the data collection did not directly highlight permission-seeking as a consideration for violations with regards to civic space, analyzing the over 100 documented incidents revealed that many events are not given approval, so public participation and civic space are already curtailed with the refusal to grant permission. When given approval, the in-person attendance of NSS officers has a chilling effect, making people fear about topics in meetings and what they can say. The appearance of NSS officers is often followed by threats, intimidations, summons with unnerving interrogations, as described in the above sections.

*“You are required to write an official letter to the National Security, stating what the meeting is about, while attaching the programme”,* said a human rights defender

Monday (pseudonym) recalls that he had a good programme activity with no ‘controversial’ topic. In October 2023, he had his organization’s activity approved by the NSS but was surprised to see two uninvited attendees. He was able to check out with them and found out they were officers of the National Security Service. According to Monday, the two continued sitting in for the entire event, contributing to the discussions, and thereafter demanded to be reimbursed transport costs for their attendance. Their presence sent a chill in the room so that the participants did not freely participate in the discussion.

Kevin (pseudonym), a journalist working for an independent media house, also said that in March 2025, he got permission from the Media Authority for holding an event at a public hotel, but ended up having members of the National Security Service amongst the participants. The media and journalists are required by law to have their issues addressed by the Media Authority, and not the NSS. The NSS presence in Kevin’s activity confirms further how the NSS has expanded its operations by having presence across all employment sectors in South Sudan—confirming the agency’s advanced monitoring capacity.

In some cases, you cannot easily know that the workshop or the event has NSS agents in the room because of the large number of attendees, this is common with multi-stakeholder dialogues and public discussions. However, from the cases where HRDs were summoned, it became clear how HRDs and journalists are being monitored in every engagement at all levels.

For example, in August 2024, Judas (pseudonym) was summoned to the NSS facilities. As a rule-abiding citizen not wary of any wrongdoing, he went only to be played an audio clip of his intervention in a workshop that was organized a few days before. Judas had in the played clip suggested that the NSS was deliberately violating human rights. He had particularly pointed at the rampant media censorship in the country.

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, May 21 2025, Juba

<sup>1</sup> *The Media Authority is the body established to have the mandate to oversee the media works in South Sudan. Its mandate goes beyond managing the freedom at which the media houses should operate.*

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, May 26 2025, Juba

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, March 21 2025, Juba

These cases reveal a pattern where legitimate, lawful civic activities—even those officially sanctioned by relevant authorities—are infiltrated by the National Security Service (NSS) operatives, often without transparency or justification.

The covert and overt presence of NSS officials at public forums, media engagements, and even closed-door workshops has effectively eroded trust, curtailed open dialogue, and instilled a pervasive fear among civic actors. Kevin’s case starkly highlights the NSS’s overreach into regulatory domains beyond their legal mandate. Judas’s experience, being confronted with recorded audio from a workshop, exemplifies the extent of surveillance and the use of such evidence to shame and deter freedom of expression.

To safeguard the fragile gains like the engagement of the NSS leadership in activities of the SSHRDN and other policy dialogues, there is an urgent need for legal and institutional reforms that clearly delineate the role of security agencies and protect the sanctity of public discourse. Dialogue, not surveillance; protection, not punishment—these are the principles that must guide South Sudan’s journey toward sustainable peace and justice.

#### 4.5. Disruption of Protests and Events

Apart from requesting permission for events, such events, especially public gatherings and demonstrations but also trainings and workshops, are sometimes disrupted by security agencies, often without legal justification. These disruptions range from forceful dispersals and surveillance to intimidation of organizers and participants, creating a climate of fear that stifles civic engagement. The National Security Service (NSS), in particular, has been known to intervene informally, citing vague national security concerns while bypassing established legal procedures. This practice not only contradicts South Sudan’s constitutional guarantees under Article 25 and its obligations under international human rights law, but also undermines the democratic space necessary for public accountability and inclusive governance. The cumulative effect is a chilling environment where civil society actors self-censor, and citizens are discouraged from exercising their right to peaceful assembly.

In 2021, during the rise of the People’s Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA), the Government of South Sudan employed a range of repressive tactics to suppress civic mobilization and dissent. The PCCA, which emerged as a peaceful movement advocating for democratic reforms and accountability, was met with swift retaliation. Authorities, particularly the National Security Service (NSS), intensified surveillance, detained key organizers, and labeled activists as “social media criminals.” Public events and processions linked to the movement were obstructed through informal demands for prior permission. Public gatherings thereafter were met with unnecessary forceful disruption of events across the country. For example, a civil society forum’s panel discussion on the constitution history of South Sudan was disrupted in July 2021 where the NSS officers stormed the venue chasing everyone out of the venue and closing the event stating that ‘only the parliament is mandated to discuss matters of constitution.’ Equally in Jonglei and Wau, peaceful public processions were disrupted on claims of ‘lack of prior permission’. In Wau, Western Bahr el Ghazal State, a distribution of T-shirts by a group of women activists with messages to commemorate the start of 16 days of activism against GBV was disrupted.

This section of the report sheds light on the nature, frequency, and impact of such violations. By highlighting these occurrences, SSHRDN aims to underscore the chilling effect they have on civic participation—and to some extent political participation as well. Democratic dialogue and community organizing especially in the period leading to presidential elections in South Sudan are also threatened by such violations.

Over the past three years, SSHRDN has looked at 11 cases of disruption of events across South Sudan. All these events, including very private ones in organizational office spaces, whether organized by humanitarian workers, women’s groups, youth leaders, educators, and even opposition parties, have been disrupted by security forces, of the NSS, Military Intelligence, local police and Joint Operations. While they were all peaceful, they were still disrupted, often accompanied by threats, surveillance, physical assault, and arbitrary detention. The table below shows how different events have been disrupted, the patterns, and the most common affected events.

Figure 8: A table depicting a few disrupted events, the disrupted groups, and the violations noted.

| <i>Case</i>                                                | <i>Targeted Group</i>                                                 | <i>Location</i>                | <i>Violations Noted</i>                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Disrupted Non-Food Items Distribution</b>               | <i>Humanitarian Workers</i>                                           | <i>Lakes State</i>             | Armed interference, physical assault, extortion, obstruction of aid                                      |
| <b>Training Shutdown by NSS</b>                            | <i>CBO</i>                                                            | <i>Juba</i>                    | Armed disruption, threats, confiscation of property, forced suspension                                   |
| <b>Women’s Peace Meeting Raid</b>                          | <i>Women’s Union</i>                                                  | <i>Lakes State</i>             | Beatings, office lockdown, intimidation, surveillance                                                    |
| <b>Youth Election Meeting Blocked</b>                      | <i>Youth Association</i>                                              | <i>Northern Bahr El Ghazal</i> | Meeting shut down, detention, forced political control                                                   |
| <b>University Protest Crushed</b>                          | <i>Academic Staff</i>                                                 | <i>Lakes State</i>             | Beatings, protest blocked, deployment of security forces                                                 |
| <b>Civil Society workshop</b>                              | <i>Civil Society Members</i>                                          | <i>Juba</i>                    | Armed presence, sudden cancellation                                                                      |
| <b>Multi-stakeholders gathering stormed at and stopped</b> | <i>Multiple groups (CSOs, international and government officials)</i> | <i>Juba</i>                    | Deployment of security personnel, abrupt stop, forced evacuation of attendees, forced political control. |

Florence (pseudonym) a meeting attendee who witnessed the ordeal, recounted how 15 armed NSS men stormed a women's union meeting in May 2025, breaking into the compound of the women center, beating the women using bamboo sticks and black rope made out of car tyres (locally called the black leather whip). The women's meeting was a planning meeting for a peaceful protest to condemn the arbitrary arrest of women who were detained in the Kaar military detention facility. The County Commissioner regarded the meeting as 'the women having breached the mandate, by wanting to cause chaos in the County'. Not far away from the County where the women's meeting was disrupted, a youth meeting, also in Lakes State, was in the same style disrupted with beatings and forceful eviction of the youth who had gathered to deliberate on their upcoming elections.

"The security officer said he only wanted to have someone elected who is loyal to the SPLM and one that will do his will...", reported the organizer

In some cases, extortion by security personnel has also been reported during the disruption.

For example, in June 2025, the NSS and the SSPDF violently disrupted a humanitarian organization's distribution of non-food items in Lakes State. According to Fiona (pseudonym), 7 armed men stormed their distribution site, forcefully demanding to be given a dozen of the distributed items of mosquito net, gumboots and buckets or they 'risk being stopped and beaten'. She and her colleagues were beaten, using sticks and batons, roughed up and taken to the base of the armed forces. They were later released, at 4 pm in the evening, after 5 hours of hard stance that eventually led to the humanitarian organization giving in—giving them the items.

In a similar pattern where the authorities use their power to forcefully exert control, Tom (pseudonym) found a workshop his organization had organized being forcefully shut down by the National Security Service. In May 2025 in Lakes State, Tom had organized a training on community health for the organization's health workers, when two pick-up cars came full of NSS men with pistols and AK 47s who stopped the training, citing orders from above. Upon inquiring, Tom was told that the training was closed because he had refused to allow participants forwarded by the State Minister of Health to take part.

Gordon (pseudonym), a youth leader in Unity State, spoke of how he was arrested during a protest against the governor in late 2022, when the youth in Bentiu

protested against the extrajudicial killing of 4 people who were burned alive by orders of the State Government. During the protest, the group was infiltrated by non-uniformed persons believed to be security details of the governor. The non-uniformed personnel were quick to arrest Gordon when their counterparts in uniform arrived to disrupt the protest a few minutes later.

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, June 7 2025, Lakes State

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, May 9 2025, Lakes State

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, June 23 2025, Lakes State

<sup>1</sup> Date of Interview, May 9 2025, Lakes State

In Juba in July 2022, a peaceful protest in Konyokonyo market against the skyrocketing food prices was infiltrated. According to Judith (pseudonym), who witnessed the entire ordeal, there were individuals in the protest who could later identify all the protesters. The protest ended with 8 arrests, arbitrary prolonged detention and intimidations thereafter. Other protestors suffered gunshot wounds from the live bullets used.

Events have also been disrupted in an alarming trend of securitizing control over civic and policy discourse that is ‘deemed threatening’ to the ruling party’s popularity.

A consortium of a national ministry under the opposition party, international development corporations and civil society had their workshop disrupted and shut down by the NSS in Juba. In mid-March 2025, the consortium had convened a 3-day workshop on peacebuilding and good governance with a particular focus on policy reforms and collaboration of the CSOs and the government. The vice president was to be the guest of honor. A security clearance was obtained but the meeting was disrupted by 20 to 35 heavily armed security personnel from the NSS. The workshop was forced to be rescheduled to another week.

These documented incidences of disruption of events across multiple states in South Sudan reveal a systematic and escalating pattern of repression by state actors, notably the NSS and the SSPDF. From the violent storming of humanitarian aid distributions in Yirol East to the forced closure of civil society events and peaceful gatherings in Lakes, Unity and Central Equatoria States, these actions underscore a deliberate strategy to dismantle civic space and silent dissent. The accounts by the victims and witnesses illustrate not only the excessive use of force and harassment but also the normalization of intimidations and surveillance as tools of control. These violations, often marked by arbitrary arrests, beatings, and the use of live ammunition, point to a hostile environment where the right to freedom of assembly, association, and expression is routinely undermined with impunity.

<sup>1</sup> Report of Konyokonyo protest in 2022:

<https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/police-confirm-arrests-made-after-konyo-konyo-protest>

This section captures the findings from twelve incidents reported on the closure of non-governmental organizations and media houses from 2022 to 2025 across South Sudan.

Figure 9: Graph showing the categories of perpetrators involved in closure of CSOs & media institutions

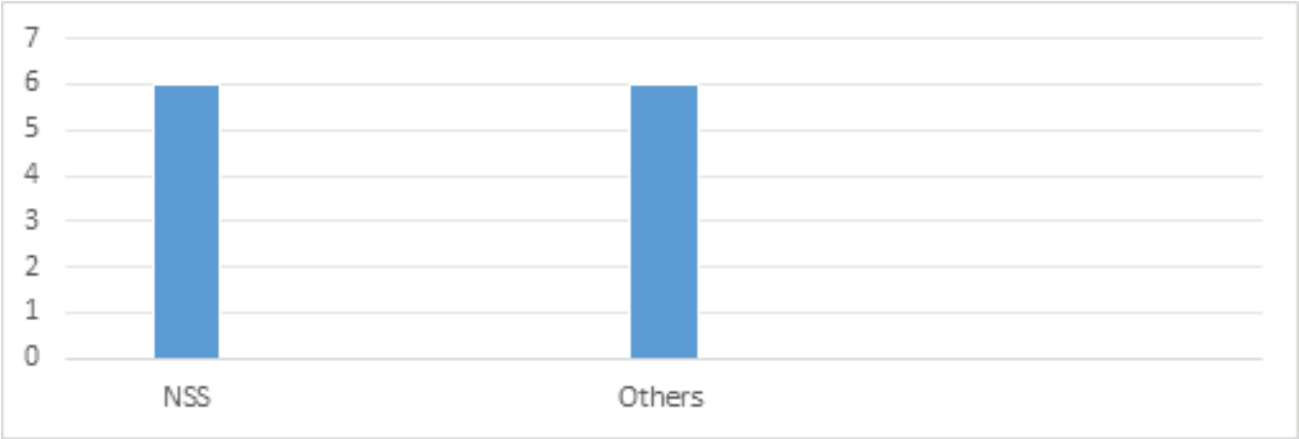
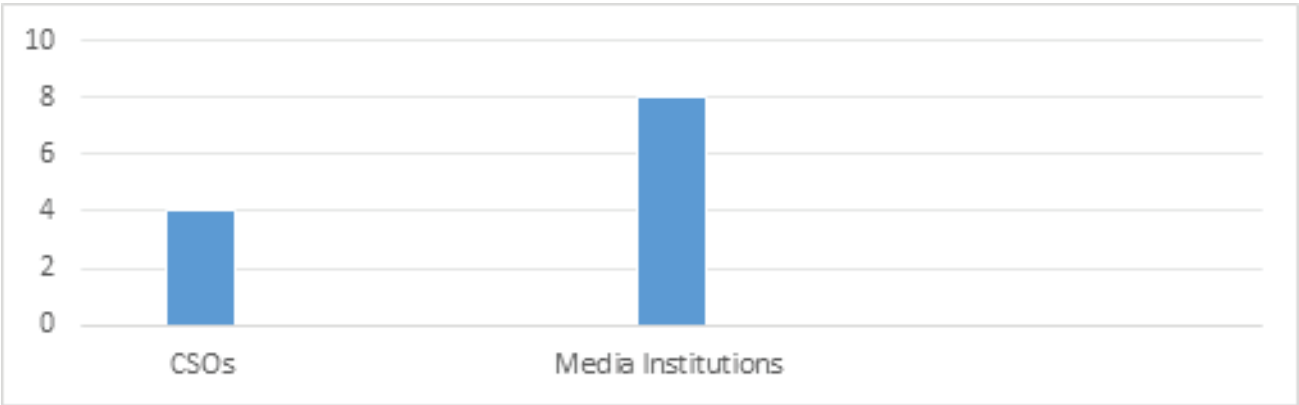


Figure 10: Graph showing the victims involved



4.6.1. Shutdown of media institutions

From the cases reported, it becomes clear that some media houses were shut down by the NSS as ordered by senior government officials who get infuriated by the publications issued by those media houses.

The victims and witnesses interviewed indicated that the NSS agents usually storm their facilities without prior warnings and without any warrant or order to from any competent court to close down their entities. The phenomenon appears to have become a practice by senior government officials with political power to take the law in their own hands by issuing orders for closure of media houses without following due process of the law. The actions of the senior government officials not only violate the Constitution of South Sudan but also represent the extent to which power and authority is abused in the country.

All the 8 cases of closure of media institutions concerned local radio stations. Some of them were later allowed to resume their operations, but many have experienced repeated shutdowns and harassment by the authorities.

The closure of media houses is normally followed by arbitrary arrests and detention of the staff of such institutions, ostensibly for investigations purposes, which are sometimes prolonged beyond the legal time-frame of 24 hours as prescribed by the law. At least in seven occasions reported, some media workers were summoned to appear to the NSS offices and were told to write a vindication declaration never to repeat such mistakes. It is also imperative to note that shutting down media institutions as per the law is the prerogative of a competent court, while such a court decision was not shown in any of the incidents reported.

“We were scared and surprised when National Security Service (NSS) personnel stormed our Radio offices. They did not explain their actions at the time, they simply ordered everyone out, locked the studio, and instructed four of us, including our Managing Director to follow them to the NSS office for questioning on Monday, June 9, 2025, at around 1:00 pm” said a respondent.

In another State, members of ABC (name withheld) organization were stunned one morning in the month of June 2024, when they found a foreign note on their door with the writing ‘Closed until further notice’. Timothy (pseudonym), a journalist working with the institution, said that the NSS through the State leadership of the intelligence-gathering mandated institution were responsible. The NSS had already accused the leadership of the organization for allegedly leading the protests that were held the previous day in the town. Members of the public and traders on the previous day had gone to the streets, staging a peaceful demonstration demanding for better services amidst skyrocketing market prices of the commodities. Timothy stated that the State government had used the NSS to silence voices and to permanently deny the opportunity to work to any institution or person found to be vocal/supportive of the protest. Mr. Timothy lost his job at the local radio station for having reported about the protest.

Another prominent example concerns Radio Jonglei which was closed multiple times including in 2022 after which the Media Authority, the independent media regulator in South Sudan, stepped in and wrote a letter to the Jonglei State government with a demand for the reopening. The radio was reopened on Tuesday, May 24, 2022, after nearly a week-long suspension by the Jonglei State government. The closure had stemmed from alleged breaches of media ethics during coverage of a public event.

<sup>1</sup> Media report on the reopening of Radio Jonglei in 2022:  
<https://www.eyeradio.org/radio-jonglei-reopens-after-a-weeks-shutdown-by-authorities/>

#### 4.6.2. Attacks and Closure of Non-Governmental Organizations

Article 25 of the Transitional Constitution of the South Sudan 2011, provides that every person shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form or join political parties, associations and trade or professional unions for the protection of his or her interests. South Sudan enacted the Non-Governmental Organizations Act, 2016 and the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) Act, 2016. The latter is an institution that regulates the conduct of all Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the Republic of South Sudan. These laws regulate and protect NGOs/CSOs, including those working in the governance, anti-corruption, and human rights fields.

The law imposes a range of legal barriers, including, onerous registration requirements, and unsubstantiated fines for noncompliance. Human rights groups and civil society representatives continue to report about NSS officials' continued surveillance and threats against civil society organizations. The most severe measure imposed is the closure of these organizations.

From 2022 to 2025, we documented four cases of attacks and subsequent closures of civil society organizations by security operatives, though their identity is sometimes unknown. The perpetrators stormed the offices of these CSOs and instantly closed the offices, mostly on the orders of some senior government officials.

On one occasion, after such a break-in, a CSO director found written notes of threats left on the floor of the office, which forced the organization to temporarily shut down for fear of new attacks.

On July 1st 2024, the office of a national non-governmental organization based in Bor town, Jonglei State, was shut down by security operatives. The Executive Director of the organization, Robinson (pseudonym), stated that” on Friday June 28, 2024, at around 9:00 hours, four security operatives went to my office in Bor town, Jonglei State, looking for me and on Monday July 1, 2024, at around 3:00 PM, five NSS men in plain clothes also came in a Landcruiser asking for me. In the same afternoon, they came in a Landcruiser to my house. I decided to hide as they clearly wanted to arrest me. Later I managed to escape the State to exile in the neighboring country. I came to hear from my friend that it was the Governor of Jonglei State that issued the orders to NSS officers for me to be arrested.”

In an interview, Patrick (pseudonym), the Director of Jamus Civil Society Organization (pseudonym), said: “On the 2nd of May 2024, Thursday night, unknown people broke into our office, vandalized it and left two life-threatening notes. One read “You will see, this is just the beginning” and another one that was left in the corner of the office read “This town will be too small for you, idiot”. I reported the incident to the Police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and to the National Security Service (NSS). They started their investigation but there is not any feedback from the two institutions to date.”

*“I think the incident happened because I had been following cases of human rights violation in the State. I paid a visit to the Military detention facility called Malual (pseudonym) on 28th April 2024 after I received a report from a parent of three kids that were picked up in their compound in Malakia residential area by five armed men dressed in military uniform” narrates Patrick.*

Jackson (pseudonym) recounts that he was busy at his workplace one Monday morning of November 2024, preparing to arrange for the distribution of basic health-kits to the community when a pick-up car with SSPDF soldiers went to their office and the soldiers asked him for confirmation if these were the XXX organization (name of the organization withheld for safety reasons) offices. Jackson, after affirming, was then asked to usher all staff out of the premises before it being closed by the army men. The only reason Jackson and colleagues were given is that orders came from the office of the State Governor. No further clarity was given when he and colleagues made further inquests .

## 5.7. Media Censorship

Media censorship in South Sudan has been a persistent issue, with the government employing various tactics to suppress journalistic activities and control information dissemination. The constitution guarantees as per Article 24 (2), that all levels of government shall guarantee the freedom of the press and other media as shall be regulated by law in a democratic society. In contravention of this provision, the media is being censored and persecuted in various way, as exemplified by our investigations.

### 5.7.1. Removal of Newspaper Articles

The government has frequently intervened to halt the publication of certain articles deemed unfavorable. After achieving independence from the Sudan in 2011 the new South Sudan government embarked on establishing a legal regime with a strong security sector. Unfortunately, after the conflict erupted in December 2013, the security apparatus started to purge on the media, and raids on media houses such as the printing presses became apparent. In addition, copies of publications from the print media are constantly confiscated. From the aftermath of the civil war in 2013 to date, the South Sudanese government, through the National Security Service (NSS), has been engaged in practices to remove articles to be published from the print media.

<sup>1</sup> Interview held on May 13th 2024 in Lakes State

<sup>1</sup> Interview held on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2024

<sup>1</sup> For example, see <https://cpj.org/2019/01/south-sudanese-media-regulator-bars-newspaper-from/>

In an interview with one journalist in Juba, Lual (pseudonym) said: “There was an order by the National Security Service to our printing press on Wednesday March, 12, 2025 for the removal of the newspaper article entitled “UPDF presence, government denies, creates confusion”. That story was about the presence of the Uganda Peoples’ Defense Forces [UPDF] in the country. I tried to contact the UPDF but there was no response and also, I tried several other sources but no response. However, I managed to get a Tweet posted by a Ugandan Military General, the commander in chief of the UPDF, and I wrote a story about that. Nevertheless, that article was also later on removed from publication, and replaced by an article called “SPLM-IO confirms release of officials””.

From the year 2022 to 2023, several pages of the newspapers published by media houses appeared blank, an indication that news articles were being removed from the print media before their publication. Recently, the NSS has resorted to ordering the editors-in-chief of such media houses to replace the removed articles with other stories from international media outlets.

Dudukwe (pseudonym), a journalist working for one of newspapers in Juba, stated that an article for Monday, March 10, 2025, with a headline of Detentions, linked to Nassir clashes was ordered to be removed by NSS officer Mr. Peter (pseudonym), a director at the NSS.

In at least 6 incidents, it was reported that several newspaper articles from different media houses were removed and replaced with different stories at the printing press. One concerned a newsletter that was barred from publication by the Media Authority for being inconsistent with authority’s requirements. Consequently, due to the threats and warnings exerted on the editors by the NSS and also from the Media Authority, the removal of news articles from publication appears to be a normal practice in South Sudan, which is absolutely contravening Article 24 of the South Sudan Transitional Constitution 2011 (as amended 2015).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/south-sudan-newspaper-closed-after-story-on-corruption/646673> accessed on 19 May 2025

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/08/south-sudan-end-media-restrictions/> accessed on 19 May 2025

<sup>1</sup> In-person interview, Central Equatoria State, held on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2025

<sup>1</sup> Entrenched repression: systematic curtailment of the democratic and civic space in South Sudan. Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, Human Rights Council, Fifty-fourth session

<sup>1</sup> In-person interview, Juba, Central Equatoria State, held on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2025

Both the National Security Service (NSS) and the Media Authority have been engaged in summoning journalists for questioning. Between the year 2022 to 2025, our team recorded fifteen (15) cases of journalists being summoned by either the Media Authority or the National Security Service (NSS) for covering events like protests, parliamentary sessions, publication of news perceived controversial, public comments or even personal opinions on social media posts questioning the decisions of authorities. Such summonses exemplify the government's fear over media content and its curtailment of coverage on topics of public interest.

Simpson (pseudonym), a journalist in Juba, Central Equatoria State, recounted in an interview with our team: “On August 5th 2024, when I went to the office I found a summons notice from the South Sudan Media Authority. The notice requested me to appear before them on 07/August/2024 at 2:00 pm to clarify key issues in my reports of media incidents in South Sudan. When I reached their office, they said that before anything, they wanted to play for me an audio. They played a recording of a public event and then after the recording had ended, inquired whether it was me. Yes, I confirmed it was me. Where in the public event I questioned the removal of news articles from the printing press by the authorities, they asked me to provide evidence to that which I gave to them”.

#### 5.7.3. Confiscation of Equipment from Media Practitioners

On four occasions, our team recorded incidents where security agents confiscated journalists' equipment to prevent their work. For example, in August 2023, during a parliamentary session of the South Sudan Transitional National Legislative Assembly (TNLA), security personnel threw out two journalists from two media institutions and confiscated their equipment as the journalists were covering a contentious salary increment debate. These removals and confiscations were already elaborated in the above section on “Restrictions”. The removal of the journalists and the seizure of their equipment highlight the government's intolerance towards media coverage of sensitive issues.

<sup>1</sup> *In-person interview, Juba, Central Equatoria State, held on 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2023*

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

### *To the Ministry of National Security, Directorate of Internal Security Bureau*

- The NSS should stop targeting journalists, NGOs, HRDs and other activists and respect fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of expression, assembly and association.
- Separate the gathering of intelligence and law enforcement functions from the National Security Service (NSS) in accordance with Article 159 of the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan 2011, with strong civilian oversight and accountability mechanisms.
- The Ministry should close down unauthorized detention facilities and transfer detainees to official detention centers which can be monitored by independent national and international bodies such as the South Sudan Human Rights Commission (SSHRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and are known to and can be visited by families and legal representatives of the detainees.
- The NSS should ensure that they obtain a warrant of arrest for any suspect from a competent court, involve the police in such arrests and produce detainees under their custody before a magistrate within 24 hours as stipulated by law, with full right to challenge all aspects and grounds of detention.
- Grant parliamentary oversight committees the right to conduct unannounced inspections of NSS facilities, review internal files, hear testimony from detainees.
- Integrate legal obligations such as; non-discrimination, due process of the law into NSS standard operating procedures.
- Protect human rights defenders and journalists by criminalizing arbitrary detention, surveillance, threats and ensuring swift and impartial investigations
- The Minister of National Security should return the National Security Service Act, 2014 to the Transitional National Legislative Assembly (TNLA) to amend section 13(15), 54, 55 & 57 that allow undue surveillance, arbitrary detentions, and crackdowns on assembly and dissent.
- Educate the public about the mandates of the NSS, limitations, and complaints mechanisms.
- Make the complaints mechanisms in the NSS Act effective and report regularly about complaints made and how they were dealt with.

***To the South Sudan Media Authority & Ministry of Information, Communication, Telecommunications and Postal Services***

- Repeal criminal defamation provisions in Media Authority Act 2013 and Penal Code Act, 2008, shifting to civil law remedies only.
- Prohibit blanket social media shutdowns and adopt targeted penalization through due process overseen by a competent Court.
- The Media Authority should establish fast-track processes for journalists detained or prosecuted unfairly to appeal and receive remedy under the laws.
- The Media Authority should set up monitoring mechanisms, investigations, and safeguards for physical safety, legal protection, and equipment seizures for the journalists.

***To the South Sudan Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs and the Director of Public Prosecution***

- Strengthen the NGO Act of 2016 to ensure clearer protections for civil society and humanitarian actors.
- Categorically bind NSS procedures to the Criminal Procedure Code, ensuring that arrest, detention, investigations, and prosecutions are handled via the standard judicial process.
- Accelerate judicial reforms through the Judicial Reform Committee (JRC), ensuring independence, accountability, and efficiency of courts at all levels
- Strengthen Constitutional frameworks to uphold freedom of expression, assembly and association.
- Implement existing national, regional, and international frameworks that protect freedom of assembly, expression, association and political participation.
- Amend the Penal Code to decriminalize defamation, remove vague “security” or “incitement” offenses, and align legislation with constitutional rights.
- Implement transitional justice mechanisms as outlined in the Revitalized Peace Agreement.

***To the special standing committee for information, communication, telecommunications and postal services at the South Sudan Transitional National Legislative Assembly (TNLA).***

- Prohibit unregulated social media shutdowns by legislating a statutory framework requiring any digital platform suspension order to be mandated by a competent court, and that any such suspension is time-limited, in order to prevent arbitrary censorship.
- Introduce comprehensive data protection legislation to create stronger data privacy laws aligned with Article 22 of the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan 2011.
- Mandate telecommunication companies to limit retention and surveillance and require judicial oversight over metadata storage, warrant requirements, and surveillance access to prevent NSS abuse.
- Recommend for the review and amendment of the NSS Act, 2014 and the Media Authority Act, 2013.

### ***To the South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF) Chief of General Staff***

- Scale up General Court Martial (GCM) to handle serious offenses of SSPDF officers/personnel including sexual violence and abuse of power across all units, supported with civilian counsels and victim participation.
- Enhance Military Justice Directorate by providing resources and train this directorate to independently investigate and prosecute all credible human rights violations/abuses by SSPDF Personnel.

### ***To the South Sudan Human Rights Commission (SSHRC)***

- Systematically document censorship, intimidation, and arbitrary detentions, especially by the NSS.
- Advocate for revision of the NSS Act, including removal of (warrant-less) arrest powers and secret detentions, in line with human rights defender calls.
- Support victim journalists, human rights defenders and civic actors with legal aid referrals and follow-up on complaints.
- Collaborate with the judiciary to fast-track cases involving violations of civil and political rights, ensuring lawful arrest and due process.
- Provide training to local HRDs, CSOs and duty bearers on peaceful assembly, freedom of speech, and legal avenues for redress.
- Issue periodic “state of civic space” evaluations, especially leading up to and during elections, to encourage preventive measures.

### ***To Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)***

- Establish or integrate a regional civil society platform under IGAD's auspices to amplify CSO influence across ministries, communities, and political processes.
- Provide a legal and operational environment for civic participation including facilitation of CSO forums.
- Encourage the South Sudanese government to refrain from harassment or intimidation of activists and journalists.

### ***To the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)***

- The African Commission Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) should pressure for swift operationalization of the Hybrid Court, Truth & Reconciliation Commission, and Reparations Authority for accountability and deterring future repression.
- Adopt a strong resolution reaffirming the importance of civic and political freedoms for South Sudan...
- Issue regular press releases and early-warning alerts on civic space violations. Leverage the Country Rapporteur role to conduct periodic missions, engage media, and issue findings to raise awareness and sustain international attention.
- Ensure SSHRC, South Sudanese human rights defenders, journalists, and South Sudanese leaders have direct access to ACHPR mechanisms and directives.

### ***To the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders***

- Undertake a country mission to South Sudan to assess threats facing Human Rights Defenders journalists, lawyers, activists documenting unlawful detentions, surveillance, and violence.
- Publish regular thematic and country-specific reports highlighting patterns of reprisals such as arbitrary arrests, defamation suits, or threats to journalists & HRDs to raise awareness and apply international pressure.
- Coordinate with OHCHR and the Human Rights Council to ensure cases are raised and monitored.
- Push for the formation of a National Protection Mechanism within the South Sudan Ministry of Justice to receive and respond to threats against journalists and human rights defenders.
- Promote review and repeal of repressive laws, such as NSS and Media Authority Acts, that criminalize civic work and impede association and expression.

### ***To the UN Human Rights Council (HRC)***

- Issue HRC resolutions condemning arbitrary arrests, media censorship, and rights abuses documented by the Commission for Human Rights on South Sudan (CHRSS) and civil society.
- Renew the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (CHRSS) for another two years, ensuring continued monitoring, reporting, and evidence collection of human rights violations relating to media repression, civic restrictions, and abuses by security organs.

### ***To International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)***

- Allocate increased financial resources to support protection initiatives focusing on the holistic protection of journalists and human rights defenders.
- Support national networks and CSO coalitions to unify civil society voices when challenging repressive laws, policies and practices.
- Facilitate mentorship visits to NGOs in other countries to contextualize effective strategies like legal drafting, advocacy, and public mobilization.
- Fund legal empowerment programs that aim to train local NGOs and defenders to challenge limitations on free speech, assembly, and civic participation, using targeted litigation and policy advocacy.
- Support monitoring mechanisms by working with local CSOs to collect and report data on detentions, harassment, surveillance, speech restrictions, and election-related violations.

### *To South Sudanese civil society organizations*

- Amplify advocacy efforts and push for legal reforms like the NSS and NGO Acts, and support respect for civil and political rights.
- Invest in organizational capacity-building, including legal training, accounting, digital systems, and advocacy skills.
- Empower citizens on constitutional and civic rights, including participation in peace processes and elections.
- Deploy systematic civic space monitoring to track threats like censorship, office closures, arrests, intimidation, and surveillance.
- Advocate for the finalization of the permanent constitution, laws, electoral reforms and development of National Election Commission (NEC) capacity.

### *To the media*

- Commit to objective, accurate, and balanced reporting, particularly during sensitive political periods, to counter hate speech and misinformation.
- Develop protection protocols for staff at risk and provide secure housing, emergency helplines, legal aid, and partnerships with NGOs for rapid response.
- Launch public campaigns and opinion pieces demanding the implementation of media laws, such as the Media Authority and Access to Information Acts.
- Regularly report on threats and censorship attempts, including journalist arrests and surveillance.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This report is based on a review of more than 100 documented incidents of civic space repression in South Sudan over the period from July 2022 to July 2025. It highlights concerning patterns where security personnel and government institutions have impeded the ability of media and civil society actors to perform their legitimate roles of mobilizing and informing the public effectively.

Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that the period from 2022 to 2025 has been marked by a troubling regression in South Sudan's democratic development. The systematic repression of media and civil society undermines constitutional provisions, including freedom of expression, assembly and association, and threatens peace, accountability, and other rights of its citizens.

HRDs and CSOs have over the past three years increasingly had to deal with repression of their freedom to speak out and organize activities that mobilize community members for participation in governance and accountability issues. As we saw in a number of cases described above, even humanitarian NGOs have faced restrictions in their operations. Civil society has been repressed through threats, intimidation and harassment, such as during repeated summons, restrictions of access to places and information of interest, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and even closure of offices and obstruction of NGO operations. A pervasive hindrance is the permission procedure for public events and the subsequent monitoring by NSS agents.

Similarly, media houses and journalists have been obstructed in independent reporting on issues of concern to their communities. Journalists have been threatened, regularly removed from public events, their equipment confiscated, radio stations have been closed, and articles have been removed before publishing. Journalists also faced arbitrary arrests, and detention conditions amounting to torture.

The review of the cases has shown that the National Security Service (NSS) has been the main perpetrator of the repression, though the armed forces, the military intelligence and the police are also playing their part in intimidating and cracking down on free speech, the freedom to gather and discuss and the freedom to provide services to community members.

To safeguard freedoms of expression, assembly, association and political participation, the law enforcement agencies and security apparatus need to be restrained and transformed. Unchecked surveillance, arrests, and intimidation today suppress civic life and threaten credible elections. Implementing the above recommendations will help to attain institutional reform so that the security apparatus could transition from repression to protection, securing legitimacy both domestically and internationally.

Reforming the legal and institutional frameworks for media regulation, to protect constitutional rights and international commitments, is also urgently required. Empowering independent media, preventing censorship, and safeguarding journalists foster a vibrant civic and political environment. These reforms not only rein in harmful practices like shutdowns and arbitrary arrests, but also build trust, support democratic development, and position South Sudan as a society upholding the rule of law and respecting its human rights obligations.



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