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Political Polarization and its Impacts on Governance in South Sudan

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of political polarization and its profound impacts on governance in South Sudan, a nation-state characterized by protracted conflicts, fragile institutions, and diverse ethnic constituencies. The research explores the roots and manifestations of political polarization, including ethnic divisions, competition for power, and external influences, and analyzes how these factors exacerbate governance challenges. Through a comprehensive review of political developments, peace processes, and institutional capacity, the study identifies the ways in which polarization undermines effective governance, hinders national reconciliation, and obstructs the implementation of developmental policies. Employing a mixed-methods

approach that combines qualitative analysis of political discourse and quantitative assessment of governance indicators, the research demonstrates that heightened polarization contributes to political instability, hampers service delivery, and deepens societal divisions. The findings highlight the critical need for inclusive political dialogue, institutional reforms, and conflict mitigation strategies to foster national unity and improve governance outcomes in South Sudan. Ultimately, the study underscores that addressing political polarization is vital for sustainable peace, stability, and development in the youngest state. The study concludes with recommendations aimed at fostering political reconciliation and promoting inclusive governance to mitigate polarization's diverse impacts.

Keywords: Political, Polarization, Impacts, Governance, South Sudan

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Political polarization is about the ideological divisions and increasing partisan animosity within a society, leading to a deepening divide between political factions. It is a complicated occurrence influenced by many factors, including socio-economic disparities, cultural differences, media fragmentations, and political tricks. The impact of political polarization extends beyond ordinary ideological differences, having significant challenges to democratic institutions. An influential work on the is "*Polarized America: The Party of Ideology and Unequal Riches*" by (McCarty et al (2006) [12]. The authors explore the origins and manifestations of political polarization in the United States, examining its relationship with economic inequality and the role of political elites in worsening divisions. The argument is that polarization affects the political elites and shapes public opinions and policy outcomes, potentially undermining democratic governance (McCarty et al, 2006) [12]. Historically in South Sudan, political polarization is deeply rooted in the country's history, separation from the Sudan and subsequent civil conflicts. The lack of progress in implementing key provisions of the 2018 peace accord has contributed to ongoing insecurity and impunity, exacerbating existing tensions and divisions. The polarization of ethnic and regional identities, coupled with weak governance and history of repression, further fuels polarization.

Political polarization, as the divergence of opinions within a society, significantly impacts governance by hindering compromise, undermining democratic norms, and potentially leading to instability. It can manifest as increased political hostility, decreased trust in institutions, and a weakening of the legislative process, ultimately making it difficult for governments to effectively implement policies and address societal needs. The phenomenon of political polarization, long a staple in the study of political behaviors, escalated in its intensity and effect, posing unique challenges to governance across various democracies. This escalation is not merely a matter of academic interest; it has profound implications for the

functionality of governments, impacting everything from legislative deadlock to public trust in institutions. As societies become increasingly divided, the fabric of democratic governance stretches thin, often leading to a paralysis in decision-making and a decline in the effectiveness of governmental policies (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2017) [8].

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In this thesis, political polarization refers to increased division and antagonism within society, particularly in political discourse, which hinders effective decision-making, compromises the legitimacy of government, and ultimately undermines democratic processes. Some of the key factors contributing to political polarization in South Sudan are; historical grievances, ethnic identity, weak governance and institutions, misinformation and hate speeches, and lack of progress in implementation of peace deal. These factors clearly explained the problem of polarizations and its impact on governance in South Sudan context. Historical grievances; The conflict in Sudan is usually presented as a product of the coalescing of long-standing ethnic differences and religious sectarianism. Furthermore, it is argued that the irrationality and primordial qualities of human beings were the root causes of civil wars. This perspective is owed to the apparent divides in a country consisting of the Arabs Muslim North and the contrasting African Animist and Christian South. However, as a basis of analysis, this perspective is flawed as it does not possess the necessary qualities to help explain what provides the impetus for belligerent mobilization as well explain the role of existent political and economic factors in the conflict (Chidima, 2017) [2]. South Sudan's struggle for independence and the subsequent civil war have created deep seated grievances and distrust between various ethnic and political groups. Politicization of ethnicity and ethnic polarization is the division of society into distinct, often opposing, ethnic groups, where the opinions beliefs, or interests of those groups become concentrated at extreme ends. It can be measured by the difference in attitudes or positions held by members of majority and minority ethnic groups on issues related to minority rights or other matters. Ethnic and regional identities have been used as tools for mobilization and conflict, leading to a fragmented and divided political landscape.

Weak governance and institutions such as the absence of strong institutions, corruption, and poor resource management have exacerbated existing divisions and created a sense of marginalization for certain groups. Similarly, there is Patron-Client Politics: patronage and clientelism, where political power is used to reward loyalists, further entrench social divisions and limit opportunities for inclusive governance. Another factor is misinformation and hate speech: the spread of misinformation and hate speech on social media has polarized communities and fuel conflict. There is lack of progress in peace implementation: failure to implement key provisions of 2018 peace deal, such as security sector reform, constitutional and electoral reforms, and transitional justice have created vacuum that allows violations to occur and reinforces political divisions. According to Ms. Yasmin Sooka, chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan the pursuit of elections runs the serious risk of fueling violence and polarization if the requisite institutions,

constitutional and electoral laws as well as logistic arrangements are not first in place (<https://news.un.org> accessed on 9th June 2026) [18].

However, there is little or no research that has been done to identify issues over which historical grievances, politicization of ethnicity, patron-client politics, weak governance/institutions, misinformation and hate speech as well as lack of progress in peace implementation are polarized and how the polarization unfolds negatively affecting governance in South Sudan. Therefore, this research sets out to explore the political polarization and its impact on governance in the Republic of South Sudan, using ethnic division and antagonism to give more insight into the sources of polarization and to fill the gaps.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how political divisions influence governance processes and stability, aiming to understand their effects on policymaking, social cohesion, and overall national development.

1.4 General/Specific Objectives

1.4.1 General Objectives

To assess the impact of political polarization on governance in South Sudan.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the causes and sources of political polarization in South Sudan.
2. To Evaluate how political polarization affects government stability and decision-making.
3. To examine the influence of political polarization on social and ethnic cohesion.
4. To identify challenges faced by governance due to political divisions.
5. To recommend strategies to mitigate negative effects of political polarization on governance.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the main causes of political polarization in South Sudan?
2. How does political polarization influence governance and policymaking in South Sudan?
3. What impact does political polarization have on social cohesion and national unity?
4. What challenges does political polarization pose to effective governance and development?
5. What strategies can be employed to reduce political polarization and improve governance in South Sudan?

1.6 Scope of the Study

By geography, this research critically examined factors of political polarization and their impacts on governance in the case of South Sudan using political actors, ethnic groups represented by community associations (ethnic actors), legislators and elites in Juba city, the capital city of the Republic of South Sudan. Juba city is situated on White Nile and serves as the capital of Central Equatoria state. It is the most recently declared national capital and had a population of 525,953 in 2017.

In terms of time, the study seeks to explore and analyze the factors contributing to political polarizations leading to governance and institutions weaknesses in the Republic of South Sudan since independence in 2011 up to the present time, 2025. Content wise, the choice of political polarization

is based on the varying political groups opposing each other on matters of leadership, institutional reforms, social, economic and cultural development which has exacerbated national cohesion, increased ethnic tensions and violence as well as hampered public trust in the democratic system of government. To answer the main questions, the researcher examined theoretical and empirical data using ethnic cleavage, political stability, and governance in the country. It is assumed that this study is conducted without threats or restrictions to vital information or data by the political elites or political actors during data collection.

1.7 Significant of the Study

The significant of this research lies in its ability to uncover how deep division among political actors, ethnic groups, and institutions affect the functioning and stability of governance in the country. Below is a detailed breakdown of the significant of the study. Understanding root causes of instability: political polarization in South Sudan is closely linked to ethnic divisions, historical grievances, and the legacies of civil war. This study would help identify the specific political dynamics fueling discord, enabling a clearer understanding of why peace agreements often fail or remain unimplemented. Impact on state-building and governance: polarization weakens national institutions and undermines the government's legitimacy. This study sheds light on; How factional politics affects public administration, the erosion of checks and balances, and challenges in implementing inclusive governance.

Informing peace and reconciliation processes: by identifying the role polarization plays in hindering unity, the study can inform future peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives. It may suggest; Dialogue strategies to bridge divides, constitutional reforms promoting power sharing, and mechanisms for inclusive political participation. Policy Guidance for Local and International Actors: development partners, NGOs, and international institutions (like UN or AU) can use the study's findings to; tailor support programs toward reducing polarization, promote conflict-sensitive governance interventions, and encourage leadership accountability and reforms. Enhancing democratic practices: South Sudan's fragile democracy suffers from elite competition and zero-sum politics. The study highlights; How polarization limits political pluralism, the role of media and civil society in deepening or bridging divides, and the need for reforms to promote issue-based politics. On academic contribution and policy literature: the study adds to the limited body of knowledge on; Political behavior in post-conflict societies, governance under extreme political division in fragile states, and case studies for comparative political science in Africa and beyond. Finally, promoting national cohesion and understanding polarization is a step toward healing. The study intends to reveal perceptions of exclusion and marginalization and offer strategies to foster a shared national identity.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for understanding the intricate dynamics of political polarization and its effects on governance draws on several key theories from political science and sociology. This section delineates the foundational theories used to explore and interpret the

phenomena of polarization, while also discussing the inherent strengths and potential limitations of these theoretical perspectives.

Social Identity Theory posits that individual self-concept is partly derived from perceived membership in social groups, which often leads to an in-group/out-group mentality. This theory is instrumental in explaining why political affiliations can lead to strong group identities, fostering unity within groups while exacerbating conflicts between them. The strength of this theory lies in its ability to explain the psychological underpinnings of partisan behaviors and loyalty. However, its limitation is that it sometimes oversimplifies the complex socio-economic and historical factors that also drive political behavior.

Conflict Theory, derived from the broader fields of sociology and anthropology, provides another lens through which to view polarization. It emphasizes the role of power and economic disparities in creating and sustaining divisions within society. By applying this theory, researchers can examine how political polarization may be driven by underlying conflicts over resources, status, and power. The robustness of conflict theory is its framework for understanding the structural and material basis of political divisions, yet it may underplay the role of ideology and culture in shaping political perspectives and actions.

Systems Theory offers a holistic view, suggesting that societies function as systems with interdependent parts. From this perspective, political polarization can be seen as a symptom of broader systemic dysfunctions, which might include economic disparities, technological changes, and shifts in social norms. This theory is particularly useful for understanding the interconnected nature of societal issues and their impact on governance. While comprehensive, Systems Theory can sometimes be too abstract, making it challenging to apply specific policy solutions to the problems identified.

Interweaving these theories provides a robust theoretical framework that allows for a multi-dimensional analysis of political polarization. This approach acknowledges that no single theory can fully explain the complexities of political behavior and governance. Instead, each theory contributes a piece of the puzzle, highlighting different facets of the issue. By synthesizing these perspectives, the study gains a deeper understanding of both the causes of polarization and its myriad effects on governance. The interconnected nature of these theories ensures that the analysis remains grounded in a broad yet coherent scholarly discourse. This theoretical framework not only facilitates a comprehensive exploration of political polarization but also underscores the need for multi-pronged strategies to mitigate its effects on democratic governance.

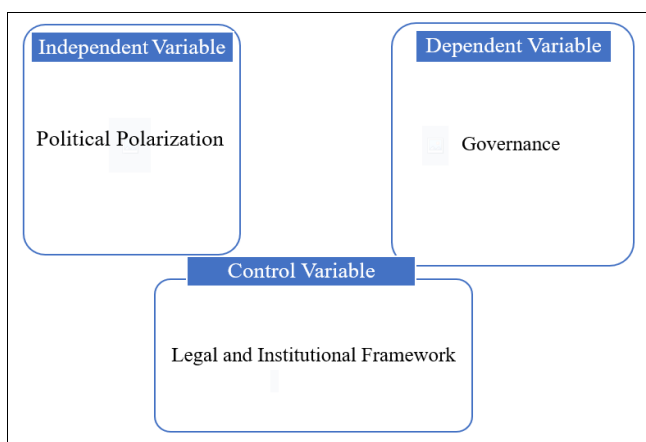
1.9 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework examines how political polarization influences governance in South Sudan. It is extracted from theories of political polarization such as the social identity theory, which suggests that group identities can deepen divisions, conflict theory, which explains how political elites may cause conflict to achieve their personal goals and system theory which argues that that a weak system always lead to corruption, ethnic politics and political polarization and ultimately bad governance.

Key concepts include

- **Political Polarization:** Division of political attitudes and loyalties among different groups.
- **Governance:** The processes and institutions through which a country is managed.
- **Impact on Governance:** Effects such as policy-making challenges, government stability, and social cohesion.
- **Legal Framework:** Checking on adherence to policies, laws and regulations to enhance social cohesion and stability.

The framework posits that heightened polarization leads to weak governance, increase conflict, and reduce policy effectiveness. Legal and institutional framework, if done well, can curb political polarization. The framework guides the analysis of how political divisions shape governance outcomes in South Sudan.

The variables of the study

Source: Authors

2. Literature Review**2.1 Degree of Political Polarization**

Political polarization examines the extent to which attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of citizens and political elites diverge along ideological lines. Studies such as McCarty *et al.*, (2006) ^[12] quantify polarization through measures like ideological distance and party sorting, finding that increased polarization leads to more divided political landscapes. South Sudan's political landscape is heavily polarized, characterized by intense competition between political elites, weak institutions, and ethnic-tribal fragmentation. This polarization has led cycles of violence and conflict, hindering peacebuilding and state-building efforts. The politicization of ethnic identities, particularly during periods of political stalemate or conflict, has exacerbated divisions within the population. Layman and Carsey (2002) ^[11] highlight that polarization manifests at both elite and mass levels, with elites often exhibiting more extreme positions, which then influence public opinion. It is important to note that media, especially partisan outlets and social media, amplify polarization by exposing individuals mainly to viewpoints aligned with their own, reinforcing ideological divides. Consequences of high polarization, including legislative gridlock, reduced cross-party cooperation, increased social division (Florina and Abrams, 2008). Recent studies explore the rise of affective polarization-antipathy toward opposing parties-rather than ideological differences alone, as discussed by Campisi, J. (2018) ^[6]. South Sudan's political polarization is rooted in ethnic

divisions, competition for power, and the legacy of protracted civil conflict. Since South Sudan gain independence in 2011, it has experienced and continue to experience tensions primarily between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups, which are closely associated with nation's dominant political factions. Historically, the ethnic roots of the polarization in South are often framed through the lens of ethnic politics, particularly the rivalry between President Salva Kiir Mayardit (a Dinka) and his Vice President Riek Machar (a Nuer). Their split in 2013 led to a brutal civil war marked by mass atrocities and ethnic violence. According to Douglas H. Johnson (2014) ^[9], the politicization of ethnic identity has long been used as a tool for mobilization, and exclusion fueling cycles of violence, and mistrust. Due to this, the conflict has fragmented the political landscape, with numerous armed groups and splinter factions emerging, often aligning along ethnic lines. Alex De Waal (2014) ^[5] argued that South Sudan's political elites often manipulate ethnic loyalties to maintain power, exacerbating polarization and undermining nation-building efforts.

2.2 Ethnic Identity

The construct 'ethnic identity' can be understood through an examination of its etymological origins. The term ethnic has been Latin and Greek origins ethnicus and ethnika both meaning "nation." It can be and has been used historically to refer to people as heathens. Ethos, in Greek means "custom," "disposition," or "traits." Ethnikas and ethos taken together therefore can mean a band of people (nation) living together who share and acknowledge one custom. The second part of the construct 'identity' has Latin origins and is derived from the word identitas: the word is formed from idem, which means "same." Thus, the term is used to express the notion of sameness, likeness, and oneness. More precisely, identity always means the sameness of a person or thing in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else (Riak, 2024). Combining the definitions and interpretation of identity and ethnicity, it can be concluded they mean or at minimum imply the sameness of a band of people who share common customs, traditions, historical experiences, and in some instances, geographical residence. At one level of interpretation, the combined definition is sufficient to capture the way identity is generally conceptualized and used to understand ethnocultural influences on its formation and development. At another level, identity is almost synonymous with ethnicity, prompting some comparative political scientists such as Jacob Riak (2021) ^[19], to suggest that identity is no longer a useful term as it is contentious and often taken out of context (Riak, 2021) ^[19]. Additionally, Jacob Riak and Isaac Garang (2025) ^[20] argued that the increasing popularity of the term 'identity' has made it become a cliché and made it increasingly difficult to understand (Riak and Garang, 2025) ^[20].

2.2.1 Ethnic Identity in South Sudan

Ethnic identities in South Sudan are complex, shaped by both pre-colonial social structures and colonial administrative policies. The country is home to sixty-four (64) plus distinct ethnic groups, with the Dinka and Nuer being the largest. During colonial rule, the British adopted an indirect rule system that reinforced tribal identities through native administrations. This system inadvertently entrenched ethnic distinctions and hierarchies. Today, in the modern South Sudan, Ethnic identity plays a pivotal role in

political, social, and economic life. It is one of the influential forces shaping the country's historical trajectory and post-independence challenges. The legacy of colonialism, the liberation struggle, and post-independence state-building efforts have all contributed to salience and politicization of ethnicity. Douglas H. Johnson (2014) [9] argued that the colonial policy of tribalization contributed to the rigidity of ethnic boundaries, which were later exploited by both colonial and post-colonial governments (Johnson, 2014) [9]. Scholars like Riak (2024) and Abdullahi (2020) [1] noted that the manipulation of ethnic identities was a common feature of governance in both Sudan and later South Sudan fostering exclusion and marginalization.

2.3 Political Ideology

South Sudan's governance is significantly impacted by a complex interplay of political ideologies, particularly those stemming from its liberation struggle and the subsequent challenges of state-building. The dominant ideology, rooted in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), has evolved from socialist ideals to a more pragmatic approach, but struggles with internal divisions and the legacy of conflict continue to shape its governance. This has resulted in a centralized presidential system with a decentralized structure that faces challenges in implementation. Furthermore, the influence of traditional authorities and the ethnic dimensions of politics also play a crucial role in shaping governance dynamics. The South Sudan's political ideology is primarily shaped by its history of liberation, ethnic diversity, and the struggle for independence. Since independence in 2011 after prolonged civil war, its governance has been significantly influenced by ethnic loyalties, and the desire for self-determination. The dominant ideology revolves around nationalism and ethno-political identities, with efforts to promote unity while managing ethnic divisions. This focus impacts governance by often prioritizing ethnic-based power structures and alliances, which can lead to challenges like corruption, conflict, and institutions. The government's reliance on ethnic patronage has affected policies, resource distribution, and stability, often hindering democratic development and effective governance.

2.4 Media Influence/Polarization

Millard, J. (2023) [14] argues that media has frequently played a vital role in today's conflict (Millard, 2023) [14]. Media can choose to play an active part in conflict thereby having a responsibility for spreading violence. On other cases, the media can distance itself from the conflict hence, contributing to conflict resolution and alleviation of conflict. On the other hand, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2017) [8] observes that the role taken by media on any given conflict depends on set of factors limited to the relationship the media has with the actors in the conflict and the independence the media might have to the power holder of its society. Research indicates that media plays a significant role in shaping political attitudes and perceptions. Studies show that exposure to partisan media outlets can reinforce existing beliefs and contribute to ideological polarization, as individuals tend to consume information aligning with their preferences. Some researchers like Riak (2021) [19] emphasize that partisan media can deepen divisions by creating echo chambers, where audiences are rarely exposed to differing viewpoints. It is important to note that social

media has accelerated polarization by enabling selective exposure and algorithm-driven content, which often amplifies extreme views. Conversely, some studies suggest that media alone is not the sole cause of polarization.

2.5 Institutional Effectiveness

Institutional effectiveness in South Sudan is significantly challenged, impacting governance and development. Weak institutions, characterized by corruption, a lack of capacity, and political instability, hinder the delivery of public services and erode public trust. Efforts to build effective institutions are hampered by ethnic divisions, weak rule of law, and limited resources. This study focuses on how well government institutions, such as legislatures, executives, and judicial systems perform their functions. Scholars like Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) emphasize that effectiveness involves achieving policy goals efficiently, responsiveness to public needs, and maintaining legitimacy. Studies also examine factors that influence institutional effectiveness, including organizational structures, leadership quality, resource availability, and political environment. Drenschler (2014), for instance, discusses how political polarization can hinder effectiveness by creating gridlock and reducing cooperation among institutions.

Transparency, accountability, and public participation are identified as critical to improving institutional performance. Researchers such as Kauffmann (2018) highlight that strong institutional frameworks and clear rules enhance effectiveness, especially in transitioning democracies. Institutional effectiveness remains a major challenge, shaped by weak governance, systemic corruption, and fragile frameworks in South Sudan. South Sudan's reliance on oil exacerbates poor institutional quality-patronage and corruption spread among elites, undermining rule of law, government effectiveness, and investment (Riak, 2021) [19]. It is important to propose a framework emphasizing trust-based service leadership and institutional performance-centered on human capital, accountability, transparency-but not political fragility hinders reforms. Institutional effectiveness remains weak across governance, judiciary, security, and accountability in South Sudan. Scholarly consensus points to entrenched corruption, oil-rent dependency, fragile institutions, and underinvestment in infrastructure as key barriers. While transitional governance frameworks and judicial reforms show promise, progress is uneven. International support plays a dual role- as enable but also, at times, an accomplice to institutional fragility.

2.6 Political Instability

Political instability in South Sudan is significantly influenced by political polarization, which hampers effective governance. When political groups are heavily divided, it leads to conflicts over power sharing, delays in decision-making, and challenges in implementing policies. Such divisions can cause violence, undermine trust among stakeholders, and obstruct peace processes. As result, governance becomes fragile, and progress towards stability and development is hindered.

According to Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, (2017) [8] polarization often manifests deep-seated ethnic ideological or factional divisions, which diminish the capacity for collaborative governance and compromise. In South Sudan, these divisions have historically been rooted in ethnicity and competition for power, as noted by Abdullahi (2020) [1],

leading to recurrent conflicts and weak state institutions. Studies by Mirra (2018) ^[13] highlight that political polarization hampers the development of inclusive governance structures, fostering a pattern of elite dominance and marginalization of certain groups (Mirra, 2018) ^[13]. This stratification weakens national unity, undermines trust in government, and exacerbates conflict dynamics. Moreover, the works of Nyaba (2020) suggest that polarization exacerbates post-conflict fragility, impeding peacebuilding efforts, and delaying sustainable governance reforms. Research also shows that polarized political environments hinder effective policy implementation (Smith, 2018), resulting in governance paralysis and increased public dissatisfaction. In the context of South Sudan, this polarization has been linked to persistent violence, difficulty in consolidating peace agreements, and challenges in establishing functioning institutions, as documented by the UNMISS reports (2021).

2.7 Policy Gridlock

Policy gridlock refers to a situation where political disagreements prevent the passage or implementation of policies, often leading to governmental stalemate. In the context of political polarization, especially in countries such as South Sudan, it occurs when intense divisions among political groups hinder effective governance and decision-making. In South Sudan, the ongoing conflict, ethnic divisions, and competing interests have all contributed to severe polarization, resulting in policy gridlock. This impasse hampers efforts for peace, development, and implementation of reforms, worsening governance challenges.

Study by Abdullahi, S. (2020) ^[1] indicates that polarization intensifies political conflicts, and in fragile states like South Sudan, it undermines institutions, delays essential policies, and fosters mistrust (Abdullahi, 2020) ^[1]. Studies by McCarty *et al*, (2006) ^[12] highlight how polarization prevents consensus and stalls progress on national agreements, further entrenching instability. Policy gridlock in South Sudan, driven by polarization, significantly impairs governance, making it difficult to address pressing nationwide issues effectively.

2.8 Voter Behavior

Voter behavior in the context of political polarization means how voters' choices are influenced by identity, partisanship, and social affiliations, often leading to increased divisions and partisanship. In South Sudan, ethnic identities, historical conflicts, and loyalty to political leaders heavily influence voter behavior, reinforcing polarization (Mirra, 2018) ^[13]. Scholars like Chidima, (2017) ^[2] argues that in fragile states like South Sudan, voters often prioritize ethnic and communal loyalties over policy issues, which sustains divisions and impacts governance negatively. This segmentation can lead to voter support for leaders or parties that reinforce polarization, thus hindering national unity and effective policymaking (Riak and Garang, 2025) ^[20]. It suffices to say, polarizing voter behavior exacerbates political divides, making governance more challenging and undermining efforts toward peace and development.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Site Description and Scope

Juba city is the capital of South Sudan. The city is situated on the White Nile and serves as the capital of the Central Equatoria state. It is the most recently declared national capital and had a population of 535,953 in 2017. It has an area of 52 km (20 sq mi), with the metropolitan area covering 336 km (130 sq mi). Juba was established in 1920-21 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in a small Bari village also called Juba. The city was made as the capital of Mongalla Province in the late 1920s. The growth of the town accelerated following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, which made Juba the capital of the Autonomous Government of South Sudan. Juba became the capital of South Sudan in 2011 after Independence, but influential parties wanted Ramciel, but it is yet to occur (Riak, 2021) ^[19]. This study recognized the challenges encountered in study. Most political elites are inaccessible and too secretive to open for interviews; thus, there was a huge challenge in getting respondents. Consequently, the study was partially a desktop study although corroborated by limited primary data gathered from questionnaires randomly answered by government officials, political activists, opinion leaders, and residents of Juba city.

3.2 Sampling Techniques

The study employed a stratified sampling technique in selecting respondents. The main reason for choosing this method is to allow the researcher to obtain samples from minority/underrepresented populations and to equally allow the researcher to obtain an effect size from each stratum separately as if it were a different study. Sixty-five (65) respondents were selected from different institutions across Juba, particularly knowledgeable individuals who have vast experience in the political and governance settings for years. Ten (10) respondents were selected from each stratum to ensure data representation. To gather views from all strata within the country, the study further employed purposive sampling. Three representatives were from youth, women and traditional leaders respectively across each of the ethnic groups. The choice of the youth, women, and traditional leaders was largely influenced by the need for accurate information because they are conversant with issues affecting their respective groups/associations. Finally, three (3) were drawn from experts on South Sudan's political and governance issues to get comprehensive views about political polarization and its impacts on governance.

3.3 Methods of Data Collections

The study collected data from both primary and secondary sources. The study mainly used secondary data from written sources such as books, journals, magazines, and newspapers among others. The choice of secondary data was informed by the availability of academic literature and policy documents on the political polarization and its impacts on governance in South Sudan. The study took cognizance of the fluidity and changing circumstances on the ground. However, the study on the period from 2011 to 2025 as this period marked the birth of the Republic of South Sudan. In the interest of

academic rigor, this study tried to update information by corroborating primary sourced data and secondary sourced data on the issues of concern. The study used in-depth interviews with political scientists and experts who are of special interest to this study.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data collected from documentary sources was subjected to content analysis guided by research questions. This was done by grouping them into thematic areas or recurring variables. The outcomes of content analysis were presented in table form to produce descriptive statistics for discussion.

3.5 Data Quality Control (Validity and Reliability)

This deals with the validity and reliability of the instrument used in data collection. Data quality control ensures that the instruments used in the collection of empirical data can elicit information that is reasonable enough to realize the set-out objectives and answer the research questions.

3.6 Validity

Validity is the ability of a research instrument to produce accurate results and able to measure what it is needed to measure (Mugenga and Mugenda, 2003). Thus, it is the adequacy with which an instrument correlates with the study objectives, variables, and research questions. The validity of the instrument used for this study was measured using two levels of analysis: face validity and content validity.

3.6.1 Face Validity

The initial draft of the questionnaire was first discussed with graduate students as part of piloting it, after which adjustments were made based on their feedback before carrying out fieldwork. While the chosen 7 graduate students for piloting test assessed the instrument based on the appropriateness of sentence construction and language clarity, the length of the questionnaire (in terms of the anticipated time to answer it), and the privacy of the respondents. Based on feedback from experts, the instrument was revised and resubmitted back to them for another round of validation and then to the field for data collection.

3.6.2 Content Validity

To further validate the instrument, the content validity was used to test the validity of the questionnaire based on the result of the experts' judgement. The experts that were mentioned above examined the correlation between the questions contained in the instrument and the study objectives, their suitability to answer the research questions, and correctly tested the hypothesis advanced by the study. After the judges had evaluated the instrument, the validity was then determined by calculating the Content Validity Index (CVI). According to Mugenga and Mugenda (2003), if the coefficient of CVI is 0.70 or above, the instrument is valid.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The researchers upheld the principles of informed consent, anonymity, and objectivity. By the informed consent, the researchers informed the participants about the objectives of the study, the benefits of participating in the study, and that there were no risks associated with participating in the study. Only participants who consented were engaged in the study. Regarding anonymity, the researchers did not capture any identifying details of the participants such as names,

contact numbers, and direct positions. No data was linked to a single participant, but all views were treated as general findings of the study.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Demographic data presentation and analysis

Table 4.1: Age of the Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18–25 years	18	27.7%	27.7%	27.7%
26–35 years	25	38.5%	38.5%	66.2%
36–45 years	14	21.5%	21.5%	87.7%
Above 45 years	8	12.3%	12.3%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

As shown in Table 1, the most actively engaged age set is 26-35 years according to this study. This group not only participated in the study but has full knowledge of the interplay between politics and governance in the republic of South Sudan. Most of these groups were born during the struggle for independence and have the strongest sense of belonging to a nation free of divisiveness and bad governance. The second group of respondents is aged 18-25 years. Most of these respondents are graduates and have desire to know more about the political and social problems of their country. The third and the last groups are the elderly who are at the heart of politics and governance. Their participation is limited as majority of this group are preoccupied with work and others at the realm of power cannot be reached by the researcher at the time of data collection. Basically, the highest percentage of the respondents is 38.5% with people aged between 26 and 35 years. At this age set, individuals are usually politically and socially conscious and therefore, the information obtained from this group is essential for scholars and policy makers to rely on and make decisions.

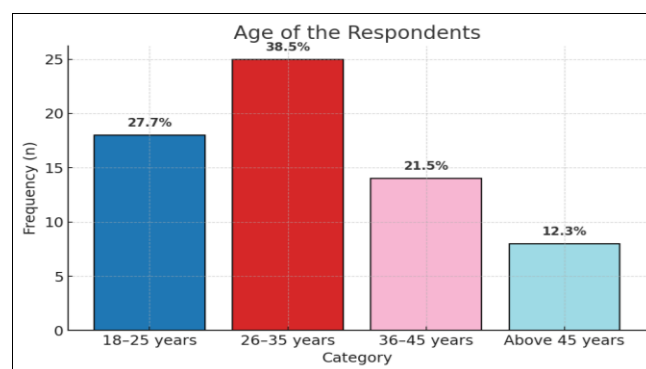


Fig 4.1: Age of the Respondents

Table 4.2: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	39	60.0%	60.0%	60.0%
Female	26	40.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 2 above shows the gender of the respondents with female representation at 38.5%. The gap between both male and female is narrowing due increase in girl-child and the gender sensitive political representation in the Republic of South Sudan. At the time of doing this research, the Rt. Honorable Speaker of the Transitional Legislative Assembly

was a woman. This was a great shift in the political representation, and this encourages young woman/scholars to participate in political science research. In the light of the above participation, women’s views on political polarization, factors contributing to the polarization and how governance is affected were captured and contributed to the study greatly. The gender gap between male and female in political representation is visibly reducing and expected to reduce in the nearest future as many females are as interested in politics as their male counterparts.

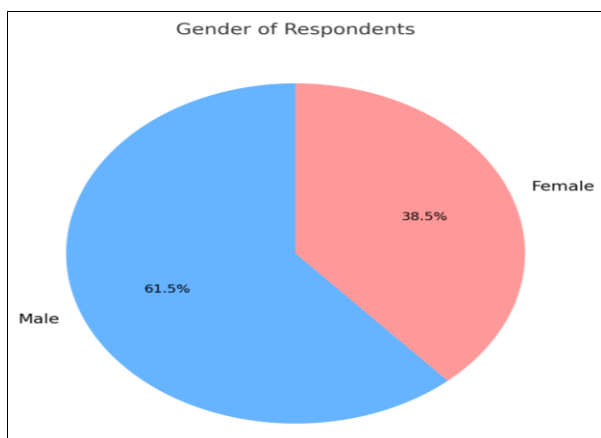


Fig 4.2: Gender of Respondents

Table 4.3: Educational Level of the Respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Diploma	17	26.2%	26.2%	26.2%
Bachelor’s Degree	30	46.2%	46.2%	72.4%
Master’s Degree	13	20.0%	20.0%	92.4%
PhD	5	7.6%	7.6%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

Most importantly, Table 3 above shows the educational background of the respondents. Thirty (30) of sixty-five respondents hold bachelor’s degrees which clearly indicates that they are well informed about the politics and government structure of the country.

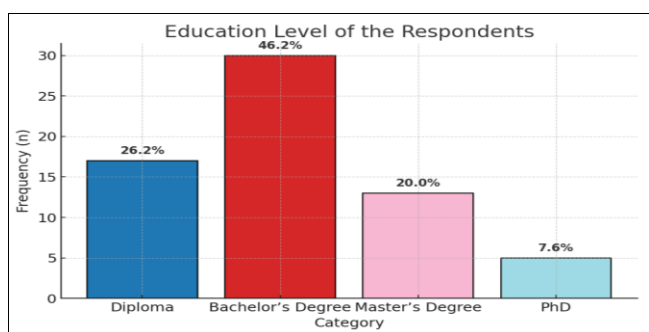


Fig 4.3: Educational Level of the Respondents

Table 4.4: Occupation of the Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Government employee	26	40.0%	40.0%	40.0%
NGO worker	15	23.1%	23.1%	63.1%
Private sector employee	12	18.5%	18.5%	81.6%
Self-employed	12	18.5%	18.5%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 4 above shows the varying occupations of the respondents, and it is important for several reasons namely: It helps in understanding perspectives. Different occupations often reflect varying social, economic, and political experiences. For instance, 40% of the respondents are government employees with unique experience from that of Non-governmental Organizations workers who may have differing views on political polarization and governance. This demographic representation helps the researcher to assess influence. In this case, the occupation can influence respondents’ perceptions and attitudes towards political issues. For example, politicians/government employees or military personnel have insights into the impact of polarization on policymaking and stability unlike the NGOs and Private Sector/Self-employed individuals.

The above category aids the researcher to identify the impact of polarization on sectors in the country. This approach helped the researcher identify how political polarization affects specific sectors like security, economy, or civil service, based on the respondents’ inputs.

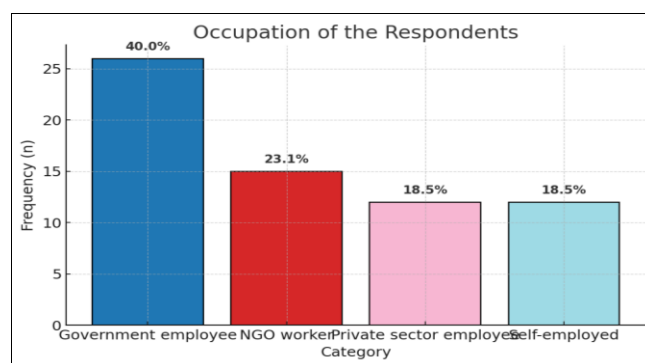


Fig 4.4: Occupation of the Respondents

4.2 Adequacy of legal and institutional measures in addressing political polarization

In South Sudan context, the adequacy of legal and Institutional measures in addressing political polarization is generally limited. Legally, South Sudan has some laws aimed at promoting peace and stability, such as peace agreements and transitional constitution. However, these laws often lack specific provisions targeting political polarization directly, and enforcement can be equally weak. Secondly, institutions responsible for governance, justice, and conflict resolution face challenges like limited resources, lack of capacity, and political interference. Hence, it limits their effectiveness in mediating and reducing polarization.

Several peace accords have sought to promote reconciliation, but their implementation has always been inconsistent. They often focus on power-sharing rather than addressing underlying political divisions, which can perpetuate polarization. There is a need for more comprehensive laws to encourage political inclusiveness, dialogue, and conflict prevention which are currently insufficient.

Table 4.5: Are the current legal and institutional measures adequate to address political divisions

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	21	32.3%	32.3%	32.3%
No	44	67.7%	67.7%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

In Table 5 above, sixty-seven-point seven percent (67.7%) of the respondents believe that some legal and institutional measures exist but are not adequate on their own to effectively address the existing political polarization in the country. This is so because most of the institutions in the republic of South Sudan are politically polarized and ethnically divided which makes it difficult for the legal and institutional frameworks to function.

Political affiliation seems to be stronger than any legal or institutional settings and this undermines the rule of law and weakens the strength of legal jurisdictions in South Sudan. Strengthening these frameworks, ensuring consistent enforcement, and fostering inclusivity and dialogue remain key areas for improvement to reduce polarization's impact on governance in South Sudan.

4.3 The degree of Political Polarization in South Sudan

The issue of political polarization in South Sudan is quite serious. It has significantly impacted the country's stability, governance, and peace process. It often reflects ethnic, regional, and historical divisions which intensify conflict and hinder national unity.

Table 4.6: Do you believe political polarization is currently a major issue in South Sudan

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	55	84.6%	84.6%	84.6%
No	10	15.4%	15.4%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

In the above Table 6, 84.6% of the respondents believe that political polarization has contributed to ongoing conflict, and disputes over power-sharing, making peace difficult to sustain. They believe that it has hampered effective governance by fostering distrust among political actors, undermining institutions, and obstructing inclusive decision-making. Despite peace efforts, political polarization remains a major obstacle to implementation of agreements and long-term reconciliation. Political Polarization equally diverts attention and resources away from developments priorities, affecting economic growth and service delivery in South Sudan thus, making it a serious issue.

4.4 Impact of Political Polarization on Policy Implementation

Table 4.7: Do political divisions prevent effective policy implementation in South Sudan

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	52	80.0%	80.0%	80.0%
No	13	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

As indicated in the Table 7 above, majority of respondents (80%) affirmed that political polarization in South Sudan hampers effective policy implementation as it creates obstacles such as lack of consensus, weakened government authority, and insufficient cooperation among different factions. On the other hand, few respondents believe that political divisions may not be the cause of ineffective policy implementation since non-political entities do fail to

implement their policies effectively. When political groups are divided, they often prioritize their interests over national goals, making it difficult to develop and enforce cohesive policies. This division can lead to conflicts, delays, and lack of trust, which ultimately disrupts efforts to improve security, economic development, and social services. Such fragmentation prevents stable governance and reduces the government's capacity to implement policies effectively for the benefit of the entire country.

Table 4.8: Are political parties in South Sudan willing to work together for national development

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	28	43.1%	43.1%	43.1%
No	37	56.9%	56.9%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

In South Sudan, according to the data presented above in Table 8, 56.9% of respondents disagree with the fact that political parties work together for national development. They believe that political parties are often faced with challenges in working together for national development due to ongoing conflict, mistrust, and differing interests. Although there are efforts toward unity and peace agreements that encourage cooperation, deep-rooted political divisions and past conflicts sometimes hinder genuine collaboration. However, 43.2% of the respondents agreed that some leaders and parties recognize the importance of unity for stability and development and are willing to work together, especially in the context of peace processes. The overall progress depends on building trust, fostering dialogue, and prioritizing the country's development over individual or factional interests.

Table 4.9: Do International organizations influence efforts to reduce polarization

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	40	61.5%	61.5%	61.5%
No	25	38.5%	38.5%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

In Table 9, 61.5% of the respondents affirm that indeed international organizations play a significant role in influencing efforts to reduce polarization in South Sudan. They provide support through peacebuilding initiatives, mediation, and facilitating dialogues among different factions. These organizations- such as the United Nations, African Union, and various NGOs- offer technical assistance, funding, and expertise to promote reconciliation and build trust among diverse groups. Similarly, 38.5% of the respondents disapprove that international organizations influence efforts to reduce polarization. They believe that local and South Sudanese stakeholders can influence polarization and their commitment can overcome divisions. Most importantly, the influence of international organizations helps create platforms for dialogue, encourage political stability, and support initiatives aimed at national development. However, the success of these efforts also depends on the cooperation of local leaders and the commitment of South Sudanese stakeholders.

4.5 Mitigation of Political Polarization

Table 4.10: Would greater political dialogue help in reducing polarization

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	35	53.8%	53.8%	53.8%
Agree	20	30.8%	30.8%	84.6%
Neutral	6	9.2%	9.2%	93.8%
Disagree	4	6.2%	6.2%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

The above data presented in Table 10 indicates that 53.8% of respondents strongly agree that greater political dialogue help in reducing polarization in the republic of South Sudan if it is inclusive, credible, and backed by institutions that can implement agreements. By inclusivity, the dialogue must involve major political actors, civil society, women, youth, and marginalized groups to prevent elite bargains that exclude others. Further acknowledgement is taken from 30.8% of respondents that agree to political dialogue being helpful in reducing polarization. This group has reservation based on trust-building. They believe repeated, verifiable commitments and transparent processes help convert dialogue into genuine cooperation.

The last two groups of neutral and disagree both score 9.2% and 6.2% respectively. These groups believe that if there is institutional backing sustained by tangible leadership, rule of law reforms, and security guarantees needed to translate dialogue into policy and governance changes then, it is possible to reduce polarization. The latter group completely disagrees to the usefulness of dialogue in reducing polarization in absence of the above processes.

Table 4.11: Would national reconciliation efforts be effective in reducing political polarization

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	48	73.8%	73.8%	73.8%
No	17	26.2%	26.2%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

According to the data obtained and presented in Table 11, majority of respondents (73.8%) agree to the fact that national reconciliation efforts can be effective in reducing polarization in South Sudan especially when paired with credible governance reforms and security guarantees to achieve real impact. The other 26.2% of respondents bluntly disagree to national reconciliation without clear, verifiable outcomes agreed on concrete, monitorable steps with timelines. This group cites recent attempts that failed due to unwillingness of the ruling elites to accept the outcomes of the national reconciliation and healing exercise carried out nation-wide.

Table 4.12: Do you think the current government is effectively managing political disagreements

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	22	33.8%	33.8%	33.8%
No	43	66.2%	66.2%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 12 above presents 33.8% of respondents who think that the government of South Sudan is effectively managing political disagreements. This is so because there has been a

political consensus reached despite recurring political conflicts across the country. However, majority of respondents 66.2% believe that that current government has failed to manage political disagreements citing dysfunctionality of the signed peace accords. Moreover, the exclusion of local in the national development has led to political divisions fueled by ethnic rivalries throughout South Sudan.

4.6 Consequences of Political Polarization

Table 4.13: Is public trust in government decreasing due to political polarization

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	49	75.4%	75.4%	75.4%
No	16	24.6%	24.6%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

There is growing decrease in public trust in government as shown above on Table 13 with affirmation of 75.4% of the respondents. The citizens of the republic of South Sudan have long waited for government’s promise of peace, unity, economic development and rule of law to no avail due to ever increasing political polarization and have therefore lost trust in government promises. On the other hand, 24.6% of the respondents still believe there is public trust given the fact that citizens still hope for political solutions to the crisis the country is grappling with and the full implementation of the already signed peace deals among the rivaling political parties and the ruling elites.

Table 4.14: Do you feel that political polarization hampers economic development in South Sudan

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	53	81.5%	81.5%	81.5%
No	12	18.5%	18.5%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 14 indicates that majority of respondents (81.5%) feel that political polarization has hampered economic development in South Sudan as it fuels civil strife and ethnic clashes disrupting local food production due to insecurity and displacement of the local. South Sudan’s economy now relies on foreign donations due to institutional failures caused by polarization hampering any economic growth.

Table 4.15: How strongly do you agree that political polarization affects the effectiveness of government in South Sudan

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	39	60.0%	60.0%	60.0%
Agree	18	27.7%	27.7%	87.7%
Neutral	5	7.7%	7.7%	95.4%
Disagree	3	4.6%	4.6%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

In Table 15, 60% of the respondents strongly agree that political polarization has affected effectiveness of the government of South Sudan since political leaders work towards meeting the goals of their parties and not the common good for the country and its people. Notably, political polarization has significantly affected south Sudan’s governance by creating divisions, hindering

cooperation, and delaying decision-making processes. The country has historically suffered from political tensions, conflicts and high polarization which has undermined efforts for peace, stability, and effective governance. Therefore, political polarization profoundly impacts the effectiveness of government in South Sudan, making it more challenging to achieve unified policies and progress.

Table 4.16: Do you think media plays a role in increasing political polarization

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	50	76.9%	76.9%	76.9%
No	15	23.1%	23.1%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

The Table 16 above presents 76.9% of respondents who affirmed that media plays a significant role in increasing political polarization, often by shaping public perceptions and attitudes. Most respondents believe that media outlets in South Sudan may cater to specific political audiences, reinforcing existing beliefs and creating echo chambers where viewers are exposed only to one perspective. Similarly, media frames issues in a biased way, emphasizing certain viewpoints while ignoring others, which in turn deepens political divides.

Media uses sensationalism or emotionally charged contents to attract more viewers and this can exaggerate conflicts, fueling hostility and division, hence, play a serious role in increasing polarization. On social media dynamics, algorithms on social media platforms tend to promote content that aligns with users' preferences, further isolating different political groups and intensifying polarization. Finally, media can influence the degree of political polarization by shaping narratives, emphasizing division, and limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints. This, in turn, can impact negatively social cohesion and the functioning of government.

Table 4.17: Is political polarization affecting community relationships in South Sudan

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	37	56.9%	56.9%	56.9%
Agree	20	30.8%	30.8%	87.7%
Neutral	5	7.7%	7.7%	95.4%
Disagree	3	4.6%	4.6%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

In Table 17 above, 56.9% of the respondents strongly agree that political polarization is affecting significantly community's relationships by fueling divisions and mistrust. When political tensions increase, communities may align themselves with different factions or sides, leading to conflicts and fragmentations. On the same note, 30.8% of respondents agree that communities have lost trust in each, especially when they are associated with opposing political groups or ethnic backgrounds linked to political conflicts. Divisions fueled by polarization can escalate into violence between communities/groups, disrupting social harmony. Due to political polarization, cooperation and mutual support among communities has been hindered, making it harder to rebuild peace and unity. Stronger communities may force the weaker ones to flee their homes to escape

violence or conflict rooted in political polarization, leading to displacement and humanitarian crises. Contrary to the above, 4.6% of respondents believe that political polarization has nothing to do with community's relationships citing no link between politics and societies. They believe communities are not involved with polarization or divisions among ruling elites. This observation is attributed to the ignorance of many citizens about political affairs of the country and separating ethnicities from political polarization in South Sudan. The remaining 7.7% of respondents have no comments on the matter. Therefore, political polarization in South Sudan exacerbates existing social divides, undermining community relationships and making peacebuilding efforts more challenging.

Table 4.18: In your opinion, political polarization has contributed to the ongoing conflict in South Sudan

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	51	78.5%	78.5%	78.5%
No	14	21.5%	21.5%	100.0%
Total	65	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 18 presents 78.5% of respondents whose opinions suggest that political polarization is the major contributor to the ongoing conflict in South Sudan. The role of media in exaggerating and inciting people has made political polarization major cause of conflict as it fuels the ongoing conflict in the country. Other respondents (21.5%) disagree that political polarization contributed to the ongoing conflict. These respondents think other factors such as inter-communal violence, erosion of trust, among others could have contributed and led to conflicts across the country.

5. Conclusions

This study has systematically examined the profound impact of political polarization on governance, revealing its detrimental effects on legislative productivity and public trust. Through a robust mixed-methods approach, the findings highlighted the urgency of addressing this issue to maintain effective governance and democratic stability. The quantitative data provided a solid empirical basis for these conclusions, while the qualitative insights offered a deeper understanding of the societal repercussions of polarization. Despite the inherent limitations of the research methods used, the study contributes significantly to the discourse on political polarization. It underscores the need for thoughtful interventions that can mitigate polarization and foster a more inclusive political environment. As societies continue to navigate the complexities of an increasingly polarized world, the insights from this study should guide future research and policymaking, aiming to enhance the resilience of democratic institutions.

6. Recommendations

While this study provides insightful analyses into the effects of political polarization on governance, several limitations warrant consideration for future research. The primary limitation arises from the inherent complexities of quantifying political polarization and its impact. While the quantitative data utilized in this study was robust, they represent a simplified model of the multifaceted nature of political dynamics. Political polarization is influenced by numerous, often interrelated factors—cultural, economic,

and technological—that this research could only partially address. Additionally, the qualitative insights, though valuable for their depth and personal perspectives, were drawn from a limited sample. These narratives may not fully represent the diverse experiences of populations in different geographical or socio-political contexts. As such, the generalizability of these findings may be restricted.

Future research should aim to incorporate broader and more varied datasets, potentially exploring polarization in non-Western contexts to enhance understanding of how different political and cultural environments influence polarization and governance. Longitudinal studies could provide a more dynamic view of how political attitudes and behaviors evolve over time, offering insights into the cyclical nature of polarization mentioned in theoretical discussions. Moreover, further studies could explore the effectiveness of specific interventions aimed at reducing polarization. Experimental designs or case studies of recent electoral reforms, communication strategies, and educational programs could yield practical insights into mitigating the adverse effects of polarization. Addressing these limitations will not only refine the existing understanding of political polarization but also enhance the practical applications of research findings in policy-making and civic engagement strategies.

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