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Framing Education-Civicness-Social Contract Nexus in Africa? The Case of South Sudan

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This article attempts to position education not only in the peacebuilding debate but also in the larger good governance debate about what makes a resilient social contract. We subscribe in this paper to a theoretical perspective that attributes the driver of civil wars to governance deficit that is manifested in absence of resilient social contract in terms of sustained agreement between citizens and state. We then ask the key question of whether and how education is linked to a resilient social contract. We found a wealth of evidence linking education and peacebuilding, and education and civicness, but a gap exists in the literature about the link between education and social contract. On the basis of a thorough review of theory and research on education, civicness, and social contract, we develop a theoretical framework to conceptually frame the nexus between education, civicness, resilient social contract, and sustainable peace. This framework is founded on the theory of state formation. Applying this framework to the case of South Sudan, we found that education through civicness makes students become key political stakeholders and more likely nurture a resilient social contract, which in turn sustains peace. The very low level of educated population in South Sudan might have contributed, among other factors, to limited demand for good governance that contributes to governance deficit, which perpetuates poor state-society relations, ineffective and exclusive institutions, and erosion of social cohesion, and interpersonal trust, factors central to resilient social contract.

Keywords: Education, civicness, social contract, peace, conflict, South Sudan

Introduction

The occurrence of civil wars in Africa is persistent and rising. In 2018, there were about 21 civil wars, the highest number since 1946 (Rustad & Bakkin, 2019). Also, the nature and dynamics of civil conflicts have been changing, becoming complex and interwoven with other security threats and megatrends. While inter-state violent conflicts are on decline or even vanishing, most violent conflicts in Africa are largely within states.

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Civil wars and violent conflicts have become the dominant threats to lives and livelihoods, and the main drivers of increased vulnerability, food insecurity, and recent resurgence of famines in Africa. For example, the overall economic cost of violent conflict in the Horn of Africa was estimated to be 18.29 percent of economic growth rate per capita from 1990 to 2010 and lost between USD $4,757.24 and $8,777.96 in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita between 1990 and 2007 (Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), 2011, p. 98). At the same time, autocratic regimes and misrule in Africa are increasingly confronted by peaceful civilian protest movements and popular uprisings.

In the case of South Sudan, which slid into civil war in 2013 and in less than three years of its independence in 2011, there has been massive forceful displacement inside and in neighboring countries, with the majority of the population experiencing severe food insecurity or even famine. It is estimated about 400,000 people died as a result of civil war between December 2013 and April 2018: half of the dead were killed in fighting and other half died from disease, hunger, and other causes exacerbated by violent conflict (Checchi et al, 2018). Since the eruption of civil war in 2013, some studies have found about 41 percent of people surveyed in South Sudan showed prevalence of post-trauma disorder that are comparable to the prevalence in countries that experienced genocide such as Cambodia and Rwanda (UNDP, 2015). The costs are enormous: if this civil war persists, its economic cost could be as high as US$ 158 billion to South Sudan, could respectively rise to nearly USD $57 billion and nearly USD 30 billion to regional neighbours, and the international community in terms of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance (Brekenridge, 2015).

This trend of persistent civil war and its concomitant immense costs necessitates a better understanding of its drivers and effective mechanisms for addressing its brute causes. The search for a better understanding of civil war will continue to pose a challenge not only in terms of conceptualisation and theorization of its root causes, but also in terms of appropriate policy intervention to prevent its occurrence. The belief that violent conflict is a product of greed or grievance or ethnicity is being questioned. There is growing evidence that shows the causes of violent conflict are more about absence or rescindment of agreements or social contracts as a foundation of state formation (Murshed, 2009; Kuol, 2020a).

There is an unsettled debate over whether education reduces violent conflict. Some studies have recognised the centrality of education, particularly secondary education, in preventing relapse into violent conflict (Collier & Hoffler, 2004), other studies challenged this generalisation and argued instead that the exclusive system of education and education inequality may contribute to and perpetuate violent conflict (Novelli et al, 2016). Generally, the critical peacebuilding literature has been criticised for not bringing education to the central debate of peacebuilding, while "liberal peace" literature has been criticised for avoiding discussion of the need for the kind of social transformation that education may bring (Daoust, 2018). Although violence is generally viewed as a problem rather than a solution, some scholars see the political utility and threat of violence as a solution to political problems and a major instrument of social and political change or a moral problem that can be addressed through education (Ginsberg, 2013). In the case of South Sudan, it has been shown in this paper the presence of an inverse relation between investment in education and the occurrence of violent conflicts with more investment in education reduces violent conflicts.

In both liberal and critical peacebuilding literatures, education is considered as a mere service to be delivered rather than a complex institution that involves political processes of power relations, and shapes access to resources (Mkandawire, 2004, p. 11). Daoust (2018) brings education into the peacebuilding debate, but there is limited research on the impact of education on state-society relations and social cohesion. There is also dearth of research on the impact of civicness in forging a durable social contract. This study looks at the link between education and social contract through the lens of civicness and within the framework of state formation.

This paper presents education as the demand side of good governance, and hypothesises that education may strengthen state-society relations and social cohesion through civicness. The main finding of this study is that education cherishes civicness through which students become key political stakeholders and are more likely to nurture a resilient social contract, which in turn contributes to sustainable peace. The paper is organised into four sections: first, this introductory section; second, a theoretical framework on the "education-civicness-social contract nexus"; third, a South Sudan case study which applies this framework; and fourth, the conclusion which captures thought-provoking and key ideas that strengthen the education-civicness-social contract nexus.

Theoretical Framework: Education-Civicness-Social Contract Nexus

The study uses three concepts; namely education, civicness, and resilient social contract, as pillars for understanding not only their links but also how they reinforce each other in eroding space for violence and expanding space for sustainable peace.

Education

Although education is generally defined as a process of development, this study subscribes to the definition that views *education* as a complex public service that involves political processes, influences power relations, and shapes access to resources (Daoust, 2018, p. 12). This definition reconceptualises education as a set of complex political choices, rather than a depoliticised public service. It is not simply a "service" but it "serves" to govern as well (Dupuy, 2008, p. 158). This definition situates education not on the debate of good governance and state-society relations, but also in the critical peacebuilding scholarship (Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW), 2011).

Civicness

There is lack of commonly agreed definition of civicness as well as ways of measuring it (Asserilli, 2016). Campbell (2006) provides dimensions of civic, political, and social engagements, while Kaldor (2019) provides broad definition of "civicness" as a logic of public authority that is based on consent. Asserilli (2016) uses the classification of dimensions of civic and social engagement provided by Campbell (2006) to measure civicness and its link to education. These dimensions include practices that sustain integrity, trust, civility, inclusion, dialogue, and non-violence. Evers (2010, p. 1) defines civicness as relationship between state and citizens in terms of quality of institutions, organisations, and procedures to stimulate, reproduce, and cultivate civility. The dimensions of civicness such as voter turnout, political engagement, interest in politics, political knowledge, institutional trust, civic engagement, interpersonal trust, and tolerance adopted by Asserilli (2016) are used in this study to assess the association between "civicness" and social contract. The antonym of "civicness" is "passivity", that is generally defined as a lack of active participation and engagement (Biringi, 2015, p. 18).

Resilient Social Contract

The concept of "national social contract" is defined as a dynamic agreement between state and society, including different groups in society, on how to live together, how power is exercised, and how resources are distributed (McCandless, 2018, p. 48). In relation to the concept of social contract is the concept of "sustaining peace" that is defined as a thoroughly endogenous process to institute national policies to address the root causes of conflict, forge inclusive national ownership, and lay the foundations for sustainable peace (IPI, 2017, p. 4). It is argued that sustainable peace can only be achieved through inclusive and responsive resilient social contract, while recurrent violent conflict is perpetuated by non-inclusive and non-responsive social contract (McCandless, 2020). This concept of resilient social contract provides a way to assess the inclusivity of peace agreements or other political settlements such as constitution-making and civicness-consent-based deliberative processes that have roots in human values and relations. The concept of "resilient social contract" stands out to be the appropriate framework with which to assess the education-civicness-resilient social contract nexus, particularly in conflict affected and fragile states. This concept has been conceptually revitalised and framed as a methodology that can be used to investigate what drives a resilient national social contract in fragile environment (see Figure 1).

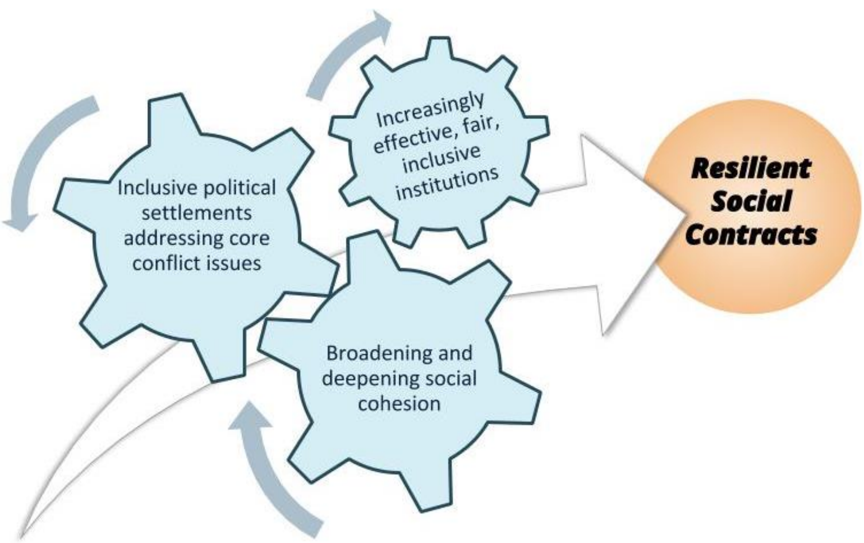

Figure 1. Three drivers of resilient social contracts.
Source: Adopted from McCandless (2018, p. 13).

It is postulated by McCandless (2018, pp. 14-17) that resilient social contract is the outcome of three drivers:

Driver 1: Political settlements and social contract-making mechanisms are increasingly inclusive and responsive to core conflict issues. It reflects how power and resources are distributed between different institutions and at different levels of government to address the core conflict issues. It captures the relations between state and citizens, and how states, societies, groups, and citizens live together, and how conflicting interests are addressed. It provides the foundation for sound constitution and the supremacy of rule of law and mechanisms for checks and balances;

Driver 2: Institutions (formal, customary, and informal) are increasingly effective and inclusive and have broadly shared outcomes that meet societal expectations and enhance state legitimacy. It provides mechanisms for how power is exercised and managed by institutions (formal, customary, and informal) at different levels of government. Drivers 1 and 2 reinforce each other and provide mechanisms for forging a functioning resilience social contract; and

Driver 3: Social cohesion is broadening and deepening, with formal and informal ties and interactions binding society horizontally and vertically. It is the concomitant outcome of Drivers 1 and 2 in strengthening and nurturing social capital and building bridges and links between and within societies, groups, and individuals.

The three drivers complement and reinforce each other, with Drivers 1 and 2 focusing on engineering sustainable vertical social contract, while Driver 3 strengthens and nurtures horizontal social contract.

The concept of resilient social contract is grounded on the theory of state formation, the process of state creation. On the basis of European experience, Tilly (1990), the best-known theorist in the area of state formation, argues that “war made the state and the state made war”. This popular aphorism has been criticized as Eurocentric and irrelevant to non-European contexts (Hui, 2017). It has also been challenged for focusing on the creation of state capacity rather than the creation of state (Spruyt, 2017). Contrary to European experience, it is argued that state formation in Africa is primarily explained not as a result of war, but as a result of decolonization that led to the proliferation of many weak states that lack effectiveness and legitimacy (Robinson, 2002). This generalisation is unhelpful and may mask the variation in the processes of state formation in Africa as decolonisation came through both armed struggle and peaceful means. Although there are competing theories for state formation, the voluntary theory for state formation is the foundation of much of social contract philosophical tradition (Service, 1978, pp. 21-23). Most African states came into being as a result of diverse communities voluntarily coming together to form their state based on shared rational interest.

This framework of resilient social contract is used for assessing the association between education-civicness-social contract-sustainable peace as shown in Figure 2 with arrows indicating impact. Education can serve as a vehicle for democratic education by developing skills (civic and political) and enhancing cognitive capacity. These skills and cognitive resources may in turn affect the level of education as well as being employed in social, civic, and political activities; the main dimensions of civicness. It is hypothesised in this framework that civicness, through political, civic, and social activities, nurtures resilient social contract, which in turn has positive impacts on sustaining peace.

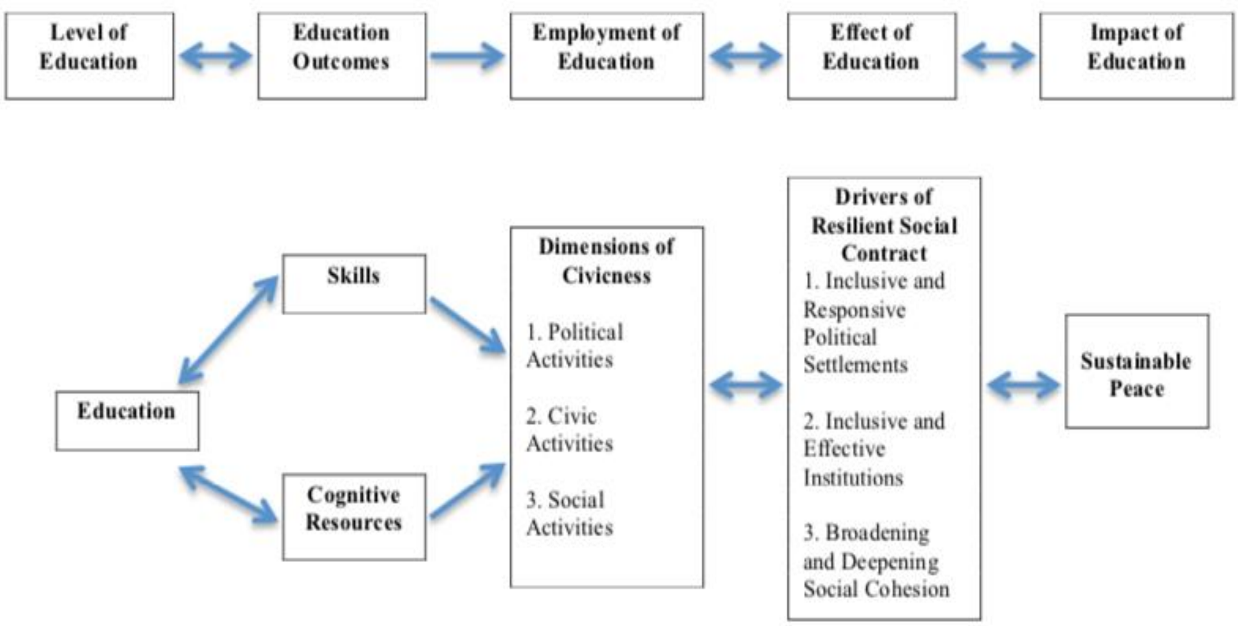

Figure 2. Education-civicness-social contract-sustainable peace nexus.

Education is likely to result in outcomes such as social and emotional skills in terms of critical thinking, collaboration, task performance, open-mindedness, and engaging with others (OECD, 2019), as well as cognitive skills in terms of general intelligence such as reasoning, understanding, problem-solving, and divergent thinking (Carlsson, Dahl, Ockert, & Rooth, 2015). While the level of education is positively associated with more skills and cognitive resources, it is difficult to establish whether such a relationship is causal, as cognitive ability could affect education and vice-versa (Carlsson et al., 2015, p. 533). These skills and cognitive resources are more likely to be employed in political, civic, and social activities (Asserilli, 2016) and further explain education-cognition relations (Parisi et al., 2012).

Education-Civicness Link

As there is a consensus about the positive role played by education in economic growth through the accumulation of human capital, there is also a growing recognition of the strong link between education and civicness. There is a wealth of evidence that shows a positive correlation between education and various dimensions of civicness (Putnam, 2000). Dee (2004) and Milligan, Morette, and Oreopoulus (2003) provide evidence of the causal relationship between education and civic and social engagement but without explaining whether the education is attributed to credential effects in terms of earnings/social status or the content of education (Campbell, 2006, p. 37). Campbell (2006) finds not only a strong link between the core dimensions of engagement (voter turnout, civic engagement, political engagement, interpersonal trust, tolerance, interest in politics, political knowledge, and institutional trust) with education but also a positive impact of high level of education on all dimensions of engagement—except political engagement.

Campbell (2006, p. 103) attributes the weak link between education and political engagement to the fact that rising levels of education would maintain the social structure that allows people at the top echelon of social hierarchy to participate in zero-sum activities. Asserilli (2016) adopts the eight dimensions of engagement suggested by Campbell (2006) as dimensions of civicness and provides evidence of a high and significant association between civicness in terms of political, civic, and social activities and absolute level of education, while relative education has stronger and significant associations with political dimensions of civicness (Asserilli, 2016).

Civicness-Resilient Social Contract Link

Despite the well-established link between education and civicness through skills and cognitive resources, there is dearth of studies on the link between education and civicness on the one hand, and social contract on the other hand. Evers (2003) establishes association between social capital; an element of Driver 3 of social contract and civicness. The link between civicness and resilient social contract can be established through the manifestation of civicness in terms of its core dimensions suggested by Asserilli (2016) and Campbell (2006) and the three drivers of resilient social contract as summarised in Table 1. Civicness can accelerate inclusive political settlements (Driver 1) through voting, political engagement, and active citizenship, as well as strengthening effective and inclusive institutions (Driver 2) through promoting trust in and improving quality of institutions and hastening social cohesion (Driver 3) by cultivating civility and improving trust and tolerance. On the other hand, the resilient social contract may positively affect civicness through the constitutional and legislation making process, inclusive institutions, and social cohesion.

Despite the utility of social contract framework to assess the link between civicness and social contract, it focuses on the supply side of good governance in terms of behaviour of ruling elites rather than the demand side for good governance in terms of behaviour and attitudes of citizens "civicness" and individuals' "civility". This supply-side approach to state legitimacy—improving state-society relations and increasing democratic participation through the provision of services such as education—has been questioned as such approaches see citizens as passive recipients of services (Daoust, 2008, p. 11, 23). The introduction of "civicness" as a link between provision of education and resilient social contract fits civicness/civility into a supply-demand governance model.

Table 1

Link Between Civicness and Resilient Social Contract

Drivers of resilient social contract	Elements of drivers of resilient social contract	Dimensions of civicness
Driver 1	• Inclusive and responsive political settlements including constitution-making process. • Inclusive and responsive social contract-making mechanisms.	• Voter turnout. • Political engagement. • Interest in politics. • Political knowledge. • Active citizenship
Driver 2	• Effective and inclusive institutions (formal, customary, and informal) with broadly shared outcomes that meet societal expectations and ensure state legitimacy.	• Quality of institutions, organisations, and procedures. • Institutional trust.
Driver 3	• Broadening and deepening social cohesion with formal and informal ties and interactions binding society horizontally and vertically.	• Cultivated civility in terms of the virtues and manners of individuals. • Interpersonal trust. • Tolerance. • Civic engagement

Resilient Social Contract-Sustainable Peace Link

Generally, the role of education in conflict situations is inconclusive and contradictory: with some scholars emphasizing the positive role played by education in reducing the causes of conflict (Collier & Hoffler, 2004), and others highlighting the negative role played by education in conflict situations (Breidlid, 2010). Despite this inconclusive role that education plays in the causation of violent conflict, the review of the empirical and quantitative literature on the relationship between education and violent conflict shows that education is not a threat and has a pacifying effect (Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW), 2011). Generally, the effect of education on sustainable peace is largely through civicness that strengthens, sustains, and accelerates the drivers of resilient social contract as a pathway to sustainable peace. There is growing evidence that shows the strong link between resilient social contract and sustainable peace (Kuol, 2020b; McCandless, 2020). Also, sustainable peace will have a positive impact on resilient social contract through institution of public policies that address the root causes of violent conflict.

Methodology and Data Sources

This study collected secondary and primary data during the period of December 2019-January 2020 in relation to three study groups: (i) secondary school students (final year, mixed church school), (ii) undergraduate students (final year, University of Juba), and (iii) post-graduate master students (final year, Institute of Peace, Development and Security Studies at University of Juba). In addressing the core research question of the role of education in forging resilient social contract, the following two main research approaches were used to collect the necessary data.

Deskwork

The first phase of the study was a thorough review of literature to concretely identify the gaps and to situate this study in the scholarly context. Literature related to education, civicness, social contract, and sustainable peace has been analysed in terms of association within the overarching theory of state formation. Besides literature review, the study collected and assessed the relevant secondary data for addressing the research question. Secondary data from the Ministry of Education and conflict incidents from Novelli et al. (2016) were analysed to establish the association between education and conflict. The findings from other studies (Kuol, 2020b; Biringi, 2015; UNDP, 2015; SSCSF, 2018; IRI, 2013) were used for comparison.

Interviews

The study conducted 191 interviews with students. Fifty-seven percent of interviewees were male and forty-three percent were female. Sixteen percent were at secondary school level, thirty-five percent at undergraduate, and forty-nine percent at postgraduate. The students were randomly selected based on their availability and willingness either to voluntarily fill the questionnaire or be interviewed. Thirty-eight percent of interviewees were from Equatoria region, thirty-six percent from Upper Nile region, and twenty-six percent from Bahr el Ghazal region; three regions that were once administrative units and which have become increasingly socio-political entities (particularly the Equatoria region) (Kuol, 2020b). These interviews were guided by a simple and short questionnaire that was self-administered by undergraduate and postgraduate interviewees: interviewers administered the questionnaire with secondary school students. The questionnaire attempted to capture the perceptions of students in relation to some of the dimensions of civicness that are connected to the drivers of resilient social contract as presented in Table 1; particularly their association with the state and interaction with other ethnic groups. The Software Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Excel were used for the analysis of primary data, which provided cross-tabulation, simple descriptive statistics, and graphic presentation of the findings.

Focus Group Discussions

On the basis of the deskwork, an appropriate checklist was developed to guide the focus group discussion to generate primary data for the analysis and triangulation of primary data generated from the individual interviews. The study conducted seven focus group discussions (eight students in each discussion group) with each level of education having two separate discussion groups (female and male) and one mixed discussion group. The students who participated in these discussion groups were randomly selected from the students who were interviewed or filled the questionnaire.

Ethics, Risk, and Safety

Conducting research in South Sudan's difficult political environment posed risks to interviewers and interviewees, as well as diluted the quality of primary data. In order to address some of the ethical concerns the research might raise, the questionnaire was carefully designed to minimize the exposure of interviewers and interviewees to physical or psychological harm. In conducting interviews, we obtained the verbal informed consent of the interviewees and undertook to respect their anonymity and confidentiality. In the case of undergraduate and postgraduate students, having interviewees fill the questionnaire by themselves minimized the exposure to risks. In avoiding such a risk for secondary school students, the administrations of various schools were informed and one of the teachers was trained to conduct focus group discussions and interviews with students.

Caveats

Since the study aims at finding a link between education, civicness, and social contract, the findings of this study may not claim to have established the causal relationship but have shed light of how education has the potential of fostering civicness that shapes the resilient social contract. One glaring omission in this study is that the focus has been on the level of education rather than the content and system of education. Some studies found strong links between the content of education and conflict within the broader political economy dynamics (Novelli et al., 2016). One of the limitations of this study is that the sample of people interviewed is extremely low and it gathered information only from educated citizens from secondary school and above and with no information from those who did not attend school. The information from non-educated citizens would have provided good data for the comparison between the perspectives of those educated and those who did not attend school. This gap is in a limited way addressed by using data from the general public perception surveys (UNDP, 2015; SSCSF, 2018; IRI, 2013) and other researches (Kuol, 2020b; Bringi, 2015). Despite these limitations, the findings of this study may provide trends and may not be taken as generalised conclusions.

Education-Civicness-Social Contract Nexus: The Findings

South Sudan provides a good case for testing the education-civicness-social contract nexus. Before its independence in 2011, it experienced two civil wars as a region of Sudan (1955-1972, 1983-2005). Although the birth of South Sudan came with great hope, it unfortunately slid into its first civil war in 2013, within less than three years of its hard-won independence and a second war began in 2016, after the collapse of a peace agreement. Many scholars have attributed the eruption of civil war to type and quality of governance (De Waal, 2014; Rolandsen, 2015; Frahm, 2015; Kalpakian, 2017; Johnson, 2016; Wassara, 2018). Recently some scholars ascribed the brute cause of the violent conflict in South Sudan to the failure of the ruling elites to forge a resilient social contract that sustains peace, builds inclusive institutions, and nurtures social cohesion (Kuol, 2020b).

Trajectory of Limited Education Access and Conflict Trends

The history of education in South Sudan has largely been shaped by the trajectory of recurrent violent conflicts and misrule since 1955, which left South Sudanese as the most uneducated population in the world (Sommers, 2005). At its independence on 9 July 2011, South Sudan had the worst indicators for education in the world, with second-to-bottom in the world ranking for net enrolment in primary education, and bottom for enrolment in secondary education and illiteracy rate (UNESCO, 2011).

The genesis of this catastrophic education situation in South Sudan can be traced back to the British colonial period when education in southern Sudan was intentionally underdeveloped to maintain the perceived "purity" of the Southern Sudanese and resulted in the rise of isolated "islands" of education in southern Sudan (Sommers, 2005, p. 16). During the British colonial administration (1898-1956), education in southern Sudan was naively left for Christian missionaries who focused on evangelisation with exceedingly low investment in education (Collins, 1984). By 1945, there were 388 bush schools with teacher-student ratio of 1:300 in 1944, 57 elementary vernacular schools, and four intermediate schools. The first secondary school was founded in 1948 (Gravey-Williams & Mills, 1976).

This neglect of education in southern Sudan during the British colonial administration was followed by the post-independence period (1956-1972) that saw the nationalisation of schools, the closure of Christian missionary schools, and the "Arabisation" and "Islamisation" of Southerners through formal education (Sommers, 2005, p. 61). With the eruption of the first civil war that commenced with the military mutiny by Southerners in southern Sudan garrison town of Torit in 1955, the meagre education facilities came to a standstill (Ahmed et al., 1988) with over 90 percent of the population of Southern Sudan never attending school (Save the Children UK et al., 2002). A leading Sudanese historian attributes the underlying cause of the eruption of the first civil war to the nationalisation of mission schools in Southern Sudan in 1957 and fateful Islamic and Arabisation education policy launched by the post-independence northern Sudanese ruling elites (Beshir, 1969, p. 187). With the high level of uneducated people in the population, students from the few schools in Southern Sudan made them centres for resistance to the misrule of the post-independence northern ruling elites in Khartoum (Poggo, 2009, pp. 96-98).

During the brief 10-year period of peace after the signing of the Addis Ababa Peace Accord (1972-1983), southern Sudan witnessed a considerable increase in access to education with 650 primary schools and 25 secondary schools by 1983 (Sommer, 2005, p. 62). Despite this increase in access to education in Southern Sudan in absolute terms, the relative indicators for education in terms of net primary school enrolment and teacher-student ratio were far lower than those in northern Sudan (Deng, 2003). Besides this apparent inequality in access to education, the northern ruling elites once again tried to forge a unified Sudanese identity around the Arab-Islamic paradigm, with education as a tool to implement this policy (Deng, 2003, p. 5). This inequality in access to education and the Arab-Islamic hegemony pursued by the northern ruling elites was a factor contributing to the second civil war in Sudan (Yongo-Bure, 1983).

Dr. John Garang, the leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) that heralded the armed struggle against the ruling elites in Khartoum, argued that under such conditions of inequality in access to education and the Arab-Islamic hegemony policy, the marginal cost of rebellion in Southern Sudan became very small, zero, or negative, that is, it pays to rebel in Southern Sudan (Garang, 1987, p. 21). This argument by Dr. Garang is consistent with that of Ginsberg (2013) and the findings of Novelli et al. (2016) that non-inclusivity and inequality in the provision of education can contribute to violent conflict. Although many education facilities were destroyed during the 21 years of the second civil war (1983-2005), access to education through humanitarian assistance paradoxically increased during prolonged civil war compared to the pre-war period before the eruption of the second civil war in 1983 (Deng, 2003).

The transitional period of six years (2005-2011) after the conclusion of the 2005 Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) witnessed considerable improvement in access to education. However, since its independence in 2011 and before the eruption of first civil war in 2013, access to education in South Sudan deteriorated with gross enrolment rate in primary and secondary schools declining from 72 percent and 6.2 percent in 2009 to 62 percent and 5.1 percent in 2013 respectively (MoEST, 2015). In comparison to other countries, South Sudan had in 2013 the lowest level of education access in terms of net enrolment rate; particularly in secondary education (1.9) compared to the world average (66) and in relation to fragile and conflict-affected countries (36.9) as shown in Figure 3. These statistics make the population of South Sudan, as rightly mentioned by Sommers (2005), the most uneducated in the world.

Besides this decline in access to education, there was apparent inequality in access to education within Southern Sudan with states having the lowest provision of educational resources and the lowest percentage of students in upper primary school having the highest occurrence of conflict events since 2011 (UNICEF, 2015). The correlation between access, investment, and outcome in education and the occurrence of conflict is summarised in Figure 4. The lower investment in education in terms of high student-teacher ratio and student-class ratio is positively associated with occurrence of conflict, while investment in education facilities in terms of drinking water access and access to latrines is negatively associated with conflict. Interestingly, the education outcome in terms of students in upper primary school is negatively related to the occurrence of conflict. These findings show, at least in the case of South Sudan, more investment in education is likely to reduce violent conflicts.

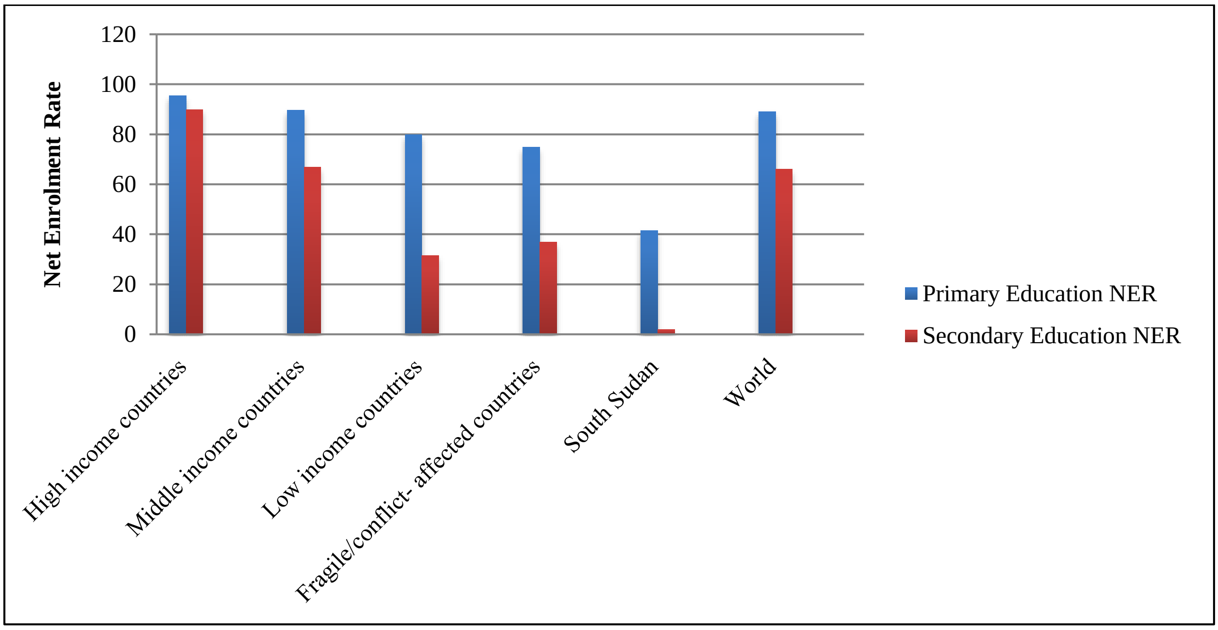

Figure 3. International comparison of education access in 2013.
Source: Based on statistics of MoEST (2015).

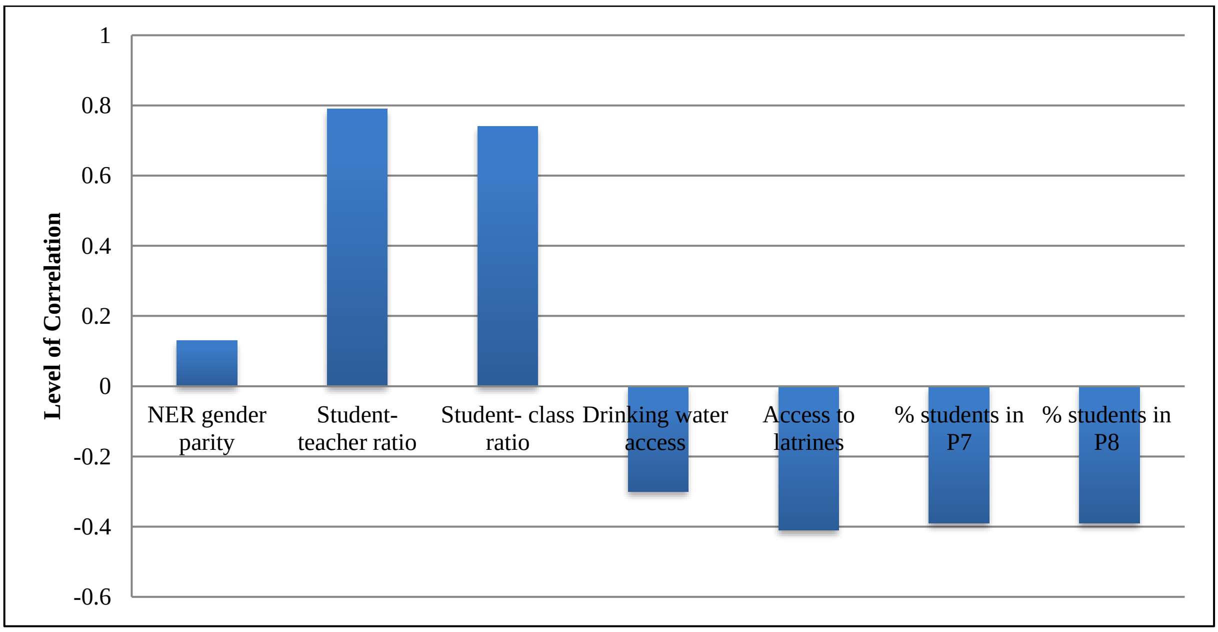

Figure 4. Link between conflict and education in Southern Sudan, 2011-2014.
Source: Calculated from the data from Novelli et al. (2016, p. 38).

Civicness and Political Settlements (Driver 1)

The existence of the link between civicness and political settlements (Driver 1) can be assessed through the manifestation of civicness in terms of *political knowledge*, *interest in politics*, and *political engagement* as presented in Table 1.

Political Knowledge: It is captured by the level of awareness of citizens about political institutions and processes (Campbell, 2006, p. 31). It has been established that the quality and the quantity of participation of citizens in a democratic system is largely improved by knowledge of citizens about politics (Milner, 2002). However, education and knowledge are not substitutes for one another as there are conspicuous differences between them (Zaller, 1992). The students at three levels of education were asked about their knowledge of different aspects of politics such as drivers of conflict, peace agreements, and the constitution. The overwhelming majority of students (82 percent) attributed the primary cause of conflict to "power struggle". This power struggle is reflected in political rivalry within the SPLM, the ruling political party, that resulted not only in the eruption of the first civil war in 2013 but also renewed violent conflict in 2016 after the conclusion of 2015 peace agreement (Kuol, 2020b).

One student in a focus group discussion stated that

> those in power do not care about the people under them—even they do not consult the local people once in power and yet there are some educated people in communities that should be consulted in anything that concerns communities, so power is a major problem in my view.[1]

Interestingly, during the focus group discussions, one student attributed the root causes of violence to lack of respect for the rule of law and constitution by stating that

> nobody including the government is respecting the constitution of South Sudan; the government in particular does things which are totally unconstitutional. I think South Sudan has the best constitution in East Africa; but the problem is respecting the laws; all conflicts in South Sudan are caused by lack of respecting the constitution, take for example 2013 and 2016; those were purely lack of respect for the constitution.[2]

Indeed, the genesis of the civil war in 2013 was linked to attempts to resist the democratisation of the constitution of the SPLM, and to the enactment of the 2011 South Sudan transitional constitution through a process that undermined checks and balances and gave excessive powers to the president. The second civil war in 2016 was caused, among other factors, by the creation of more states contrary to the provisions of the transitional constitution and the 2015 peace agreement (Kuol, 2020b, p. 69).

Rather than subscribing to the simplistic attribution of the cause of conflict in South Sudan to ethnicity, only five percent of students consider tribal competition as the reason for the violent conflict. This shows not only a high level of awareness but also an impressive level of reasoning, critical thinking, and understanding among students. Interestingly, students are almost three times most likely to attribute the causes of violent conflict to lack of education than to tribal competition.

Interestingly, when students were asked why people joined the various armed groups, almost half (49 percent) of respondents identified "access to power" as the main reason with "poverty" (10 percent) considered the least important reason, followed by "ignorance" (15 percent) and "fear" (23 percent). These answers are striking as they confirmed that political factors rather than economic factors are the main reasons attracting people to join armed groups. With the eruption of the first civil war in 2013, the parties to the conflict resorted to ethnicity as an effective political means of sustaining war by mobilising youth to protect their communities.

When students were asked about their knowledge of the peace agreement, the overwhelming majority (96 percent) had information about the peace agreement. Secondary students seemed to be more knowledgeable than

[1] Focus group discussion conducted on 6 January 2020.
[2] Focus group discussion conducted on 7 January 2020.

students at other levels, with no student knowing nothing about the peace agreement (see Figure 6). The level of knowledge among students about the peace agreement is slightly higher than that of the general public (SSCSF, 2018, p. 8).

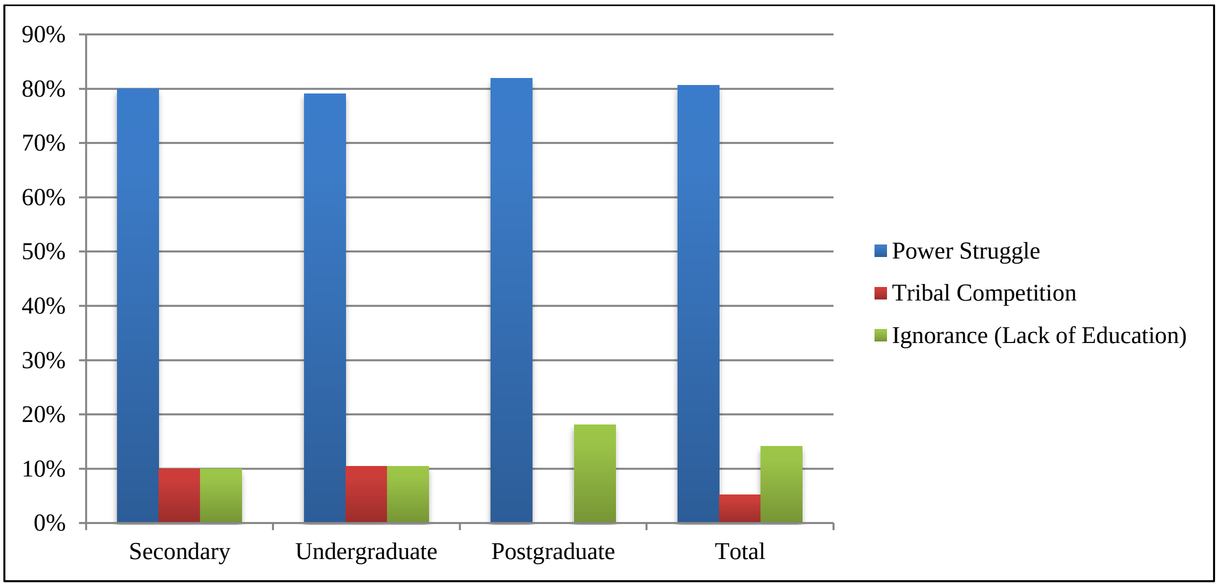

Figure 5. The reasons for violent conflict in South Sudan.

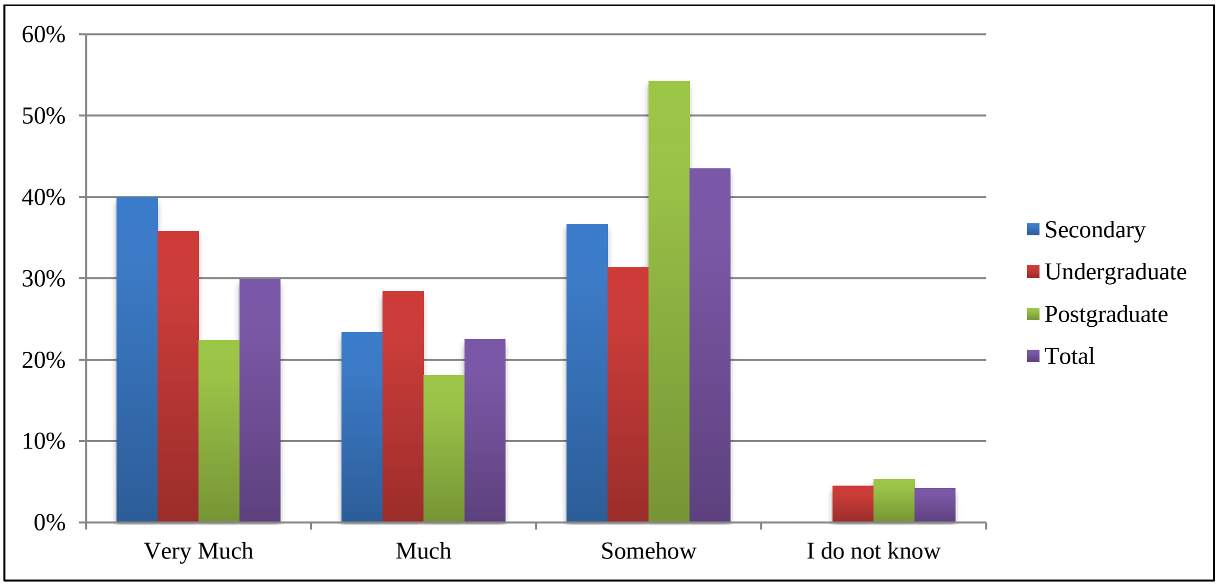

Figure 6. The level of knowledge about the peace agreement.

Despite their knowledge about the peace agreement, the respondents were divided as to whether the full implementation of this agreement would address the root causes of conflict in South Sudan, with 50 percent feeling positive and 37 percent feeling negatively about the peace agreement. Compared to some studies that showed about 17 percent of South Sudanese do not see that the current peace agreement will bring a lasting peace (SSCSF, 2018), more than one third (37 percent) of students do not see hope in the current peace agreement; particularly and surprisingly among secondary school students (57 percent).

The short experience of South Sudan with peace agreements shows that such agreements are dishonoured. The peace agreement signed in August 2015 did not become effective until the formation of the government of national unity towards the end of April 2016: violent conflict erupted less than four months later, in July 2016. The conflict happened because parties to the peace agreement, particularly the incumbent government, failed to respect the provisions of the agreement. The implementation of the second peace agreement signed in September 2018 was delayed until the transitional government of national unity was formed in March 2020, as parties differed on the number of states and allocation of state governors. Despite the formation of a transitional government, many provisions of the 2018 peace agreement, such as the formation of the national legislature, have not been implemented; and the ceasefire agreement was not respected in most states. As expressed by students, the 2018 peace agreement is unable to silence guns and may reach the same fate of the 2015 peace agreement.

One student lamented that

> many times people make agreements and those agreements are never followed by anybody, even the agreement that led to separation from Sudan was not fully implemented I think and that is why we continue to have many problems in South Sudan. The government even does not respect any agreement so it will be hard for other parties to respect what they agreed; I feel we should give the responsibility of following the implementation of any agreement to independent body like the USA.[3]

When students were asked whether they have seen the 2011 constitution, about two-thirds (65 percent) saw the constitution, while about 80 percent of secondary students saw the constitution. This is exceptionally high compared to only 3 percent of respondents who saw the constitution in another public survey (IRI, 2013, p. 47). Interestingly, an overwhelming majority of students (78 percent) are aware that an act of the government in relation to constitution can be challenged in a court of law. This indicates that the secondary school curriculum includes constitution as part of civic education. However, their level of knowledge about the constitution increases with the level of education (see Figure 7).

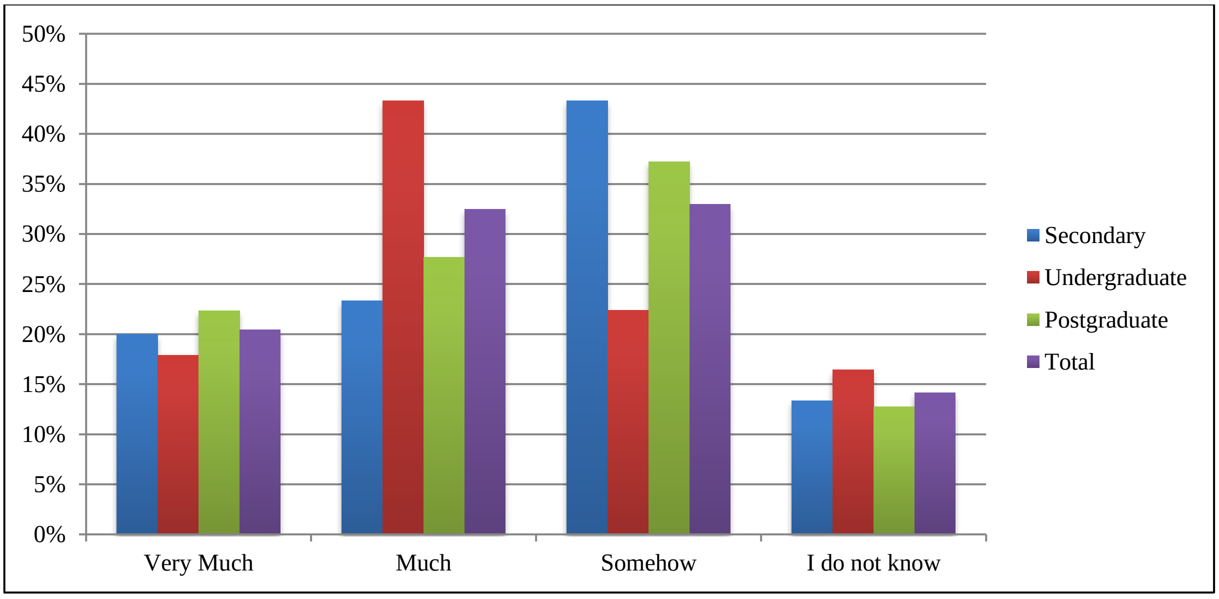

Figure 7. The level of knowledge about the national constitution.

[3] Focus group discussion conducted on 7 January 2020.

Political interest and engagement. These are activities aimed at influencing public policy and whether education may contribute to making such engagement cooperative rather than a competitive zero-sum political engagement. In assessing their interest in politics, students were asked whether the government is respecting the constitution. The overwhelming majority of students (81 percent) said “no”, particularly among undergraduate students (91 percent). This high interest of students in politics may be attributed to the content of the curriculum and importantly to the initiative of the government to establish a student’s parliament. Interestingly, about 60 percent of the students know the name of their representatives in parliament but only 24 percent of them had met their representatives. Having one-quarter of students meeting their representatives in parliament shows their keen interest in politics. As such, this may not reflect the reality of South Sudan as a majority of the rural population, including students, are detached from their politicians in Juba.

In assessing their activities or intentions to influence the public policies, students were asked what they would do if the parties to the peace agreement failed to implement the agreement. Interestingly, three-quarters of students (76 percent) would prefer peaceful actions such as peaceful demonstrations rather than violent actions such as armed struggle (14 percent) (see Figure 8). Also, male students are twice more likely (18 percent) to resort to violent actions than female students (9 percent). Also, students would prefer peaceful actions if the government violates the constitution. These findings suggest that more education in South Sudan is likely to reduce armed conflict with a possibility of creating opportunities for more peaceful actions as effective means for correcting the behaviour of government.

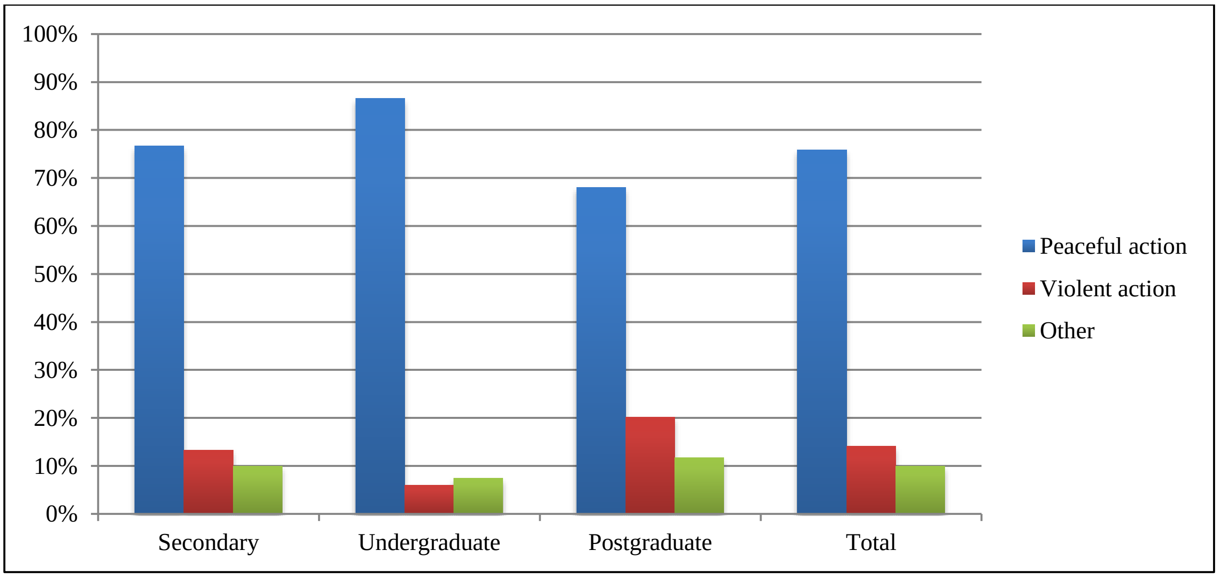

Figure 8. Failure to implement peace agreement and possible actions.

Students from Equatoria are more likely to opt for peaceful actions (81 percent) than students from Upper Nile (79 percent) and Bahr el Ghazal (65 percent). Interestingly, students from Upper Nile (21 percent) are more likely to resort to violent actions, nearly double than students from Bahr el Ghazal (12 percent), and about triple than students from Equatoria (8 percent) (see Figure 9). This might reflect cultural variation as sedentary peasantry livelihood in Equatoria region is relatively more peaceful than the agro-pastoralist livelihood in Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal region that is characterised by persistent conflict over natural resources such as water and pastures.

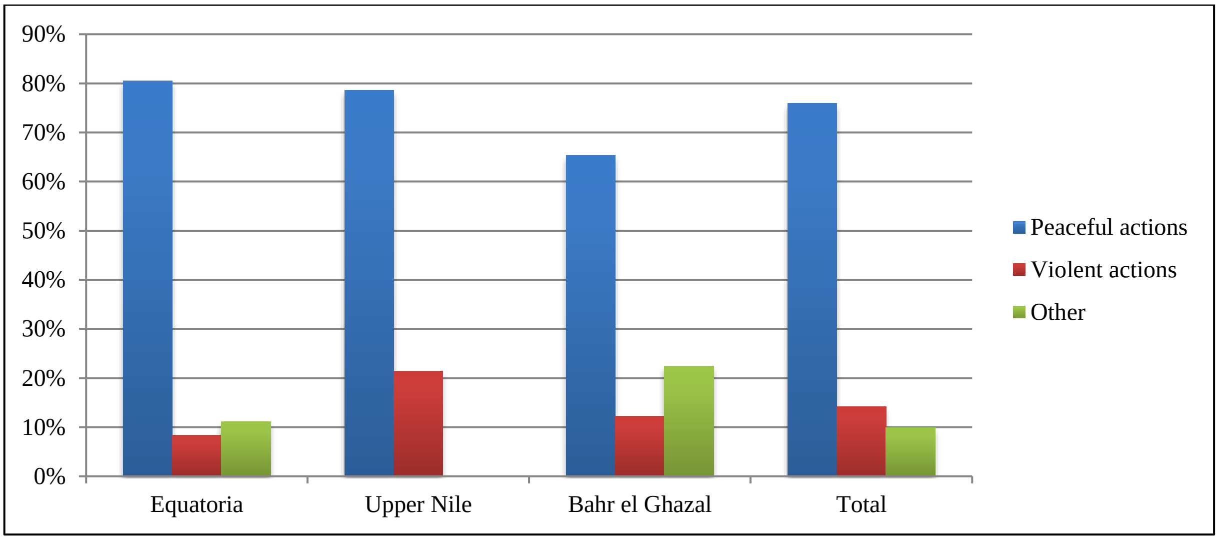

Figure 9. Failure to implement the peace agreement and regional actions.

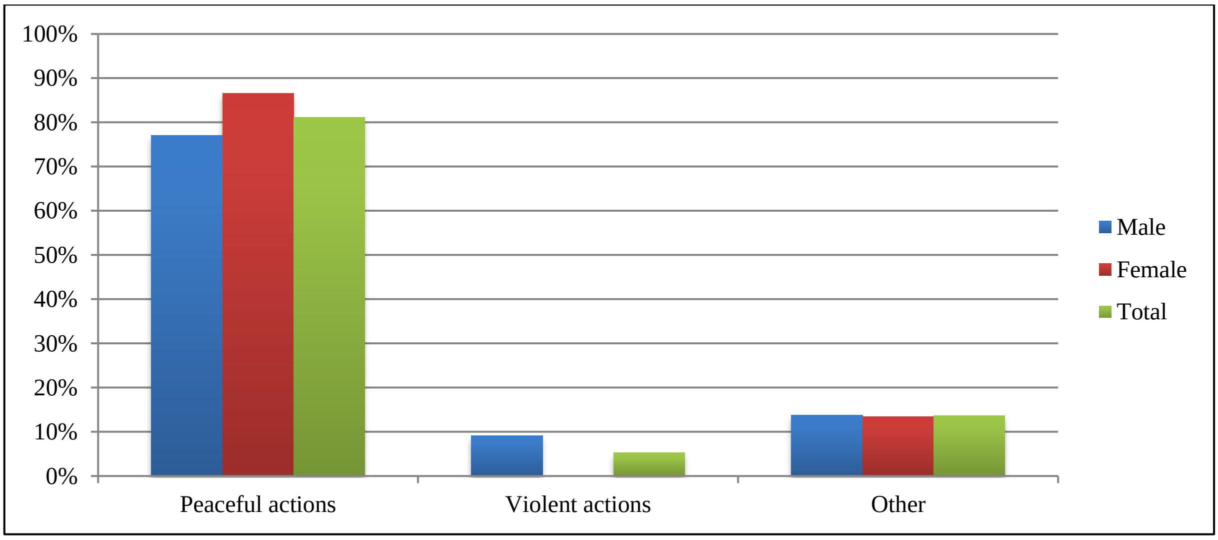

Figure 10. Failure to respect and abide by the constitution and possible actions.

The students were asked about the actions they would take to make the government abide and respect the national constitution. An overwhelming majority (81 percent) would prefer peaceful actions and only 5 percent would opt for violent actions; particularly secondary and postgraduate students (7 percent). Interestingly and not surprisingly, the female students much less likely to prefer violent actions (0 percent) than male students (9 percent) (see Figure 10) largely because of the way girls are socialized during the early informal education.

Civicness and Institutions (Driver 2)

Institutions play important role in affecting how the powers which are provided for in political settlements and in the constitution are exercised and managed to address the core conflict issues and nurture resilient social contract. Trust in institutions and their legitimacy are necessary conditions for a healthy and stable democracy (Campbell, 2006, p. 30) and there is a wealth of evidence that shows a close link between trust in government and its institutions and stable democracy (Inglehary, 1997, p. 174). Exiting the vicious cycle of violence and fragility requires restoration of confidence and trust in government and its institutions as a prerequisite for transforming those institutions to make them capable of delivering citizen security, justice, and jobs (World Bank, 2011, p. 12). It is argued in the case of South Sudan that trust and confidence in the government and its institutions can be nurtured through inclusive coalitions of state and non-state actors and the establishment of rule-based and accountable foundation for the new state (Knopf, 2013). The impact of civicness on institutions can be assessed through the level of trust in government and its institutions, legitimacy, and feeling of affiliation with government.

Trust in government and its institutions. When students were asked about their level of trust in government and its institutions, about two-thirds (67 percent) of students trust the government and its institutions, with 28 percent not trusting at all the government and its institutions, particularly secondary school students (33 percent). However, students from Equatoria (36 percent) are more likely not to trust government and its institutions than students from Bahr el Ghazal (22 percent) and students from Upper Nile (23 percent).

When students were asked about the level of inclusivity in government and its institutions, the majority of students (56 percent) did not consider government and its institutions to be inclusive and representative and only 24 percent viewed the government as inclusive and representative. Interestingly, students from Bahr el Ghazal region are more than twice less likely (27 percent) to see the government and its institutions as inclusive and representative than students from Upper Nile (63 percent) and Equatoria (69 percent) (see Figure 11). When students were asked about the quality of their representation in government and parliament, the overwhelming majority (78 percent) of students were not satisfied with the quality of their representation in the government and parliament.

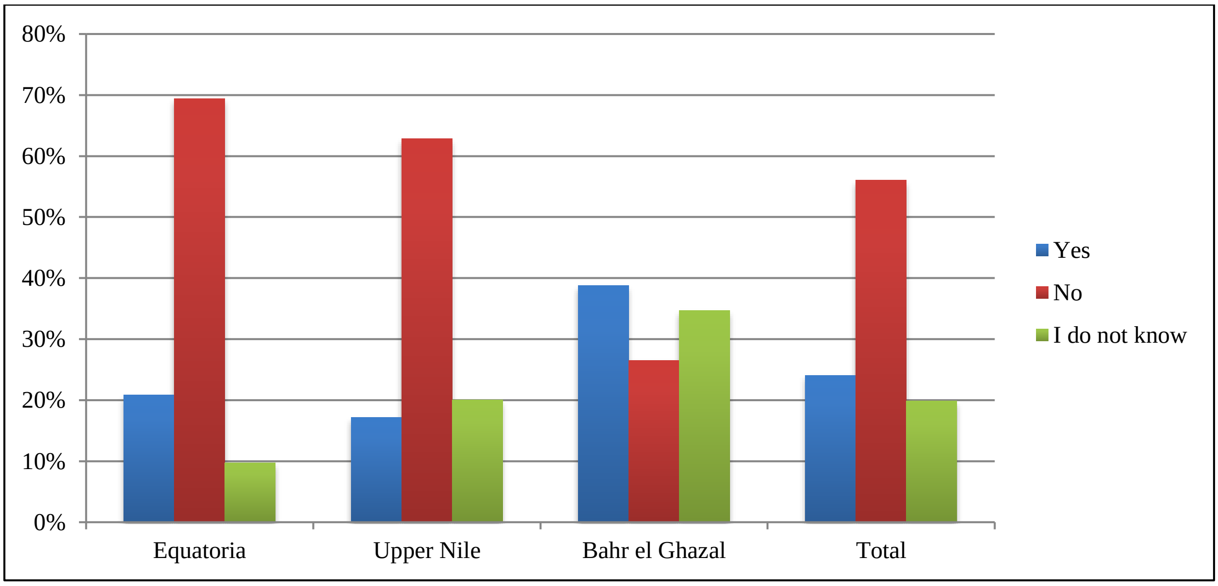

Figure 11. The level of inclusivity and representation in government and its institutions.

These findings reflect the fact that representation in government (cabinet, parliament, and public institutions such as security sector) is not based on merit or through elections but rather by power-sharing agreements that reward those who have participated in civil wars and are predominately from Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile regions (Kuol, 2020b, p. 67). One student eloquently described the lack of inclusivity in public institutions by stating that

> please note that inclusivity is still far in South Sudan. I mean in all our institutions we have people who are educated but no job just because they belong to minority ethnic groups so can we talk of inclusive institution, and that is why even

in public offices people still talk in their mother tongues even in an official meeting, then that tells you that our institutions are still not inclusive.[4]

Legitimacy and affiliation with government. The legitimacy of government and its institutions can indirectly be assessed through citizens' feeling of affiliation with the state relative to their feeling of affiliation to other institutions such as sub-national levels of government or community groups. Students were asked about their feelings of affiliation with the state before and after independence. Almost half of students (49 percent) affiliate with the state and about one-fifth (19 percent) affiliate with their ethnic groups. However, the feelings of affiliation with the state declined considerably after independence (61 percent to 49 percent), while their affiliation with their ethnic groups increased significantly after independence (7 percent to 19 percent) (see Figure 12). Although students did not attribute conflict to ethnicity, the use of ethnicity by the ruling elites as basis for accessing power made many students affiliate more to their ethnic groups. One student described his feelings of affiliation to South Sudan by saying that

some of us feel now more associated with our tribes, even if we are all South Sudanese; before independence of South Sudan in 2011 most of us were in the same camp… we always talked about South Sudan as our home that means we were feeling South Sudanese.[5]

Female students (50 percent) are more likely to affiliate with the state of South Sudan than male students (48 percent). Also, students from Equatoria (36 percent) are more likely to affiliate with their regions than other students, while students from Upper Nile (23 percent) are more likely to associate with their ethnic groups than other students. This finding is consistent with previous findings as students from Equatoria region feel less represented and marginalised in the new state of South Sudan. Despite the shrinking sense of affiliation with the state, almost about half of the students (49 percent) still affiliate themselves with the state.

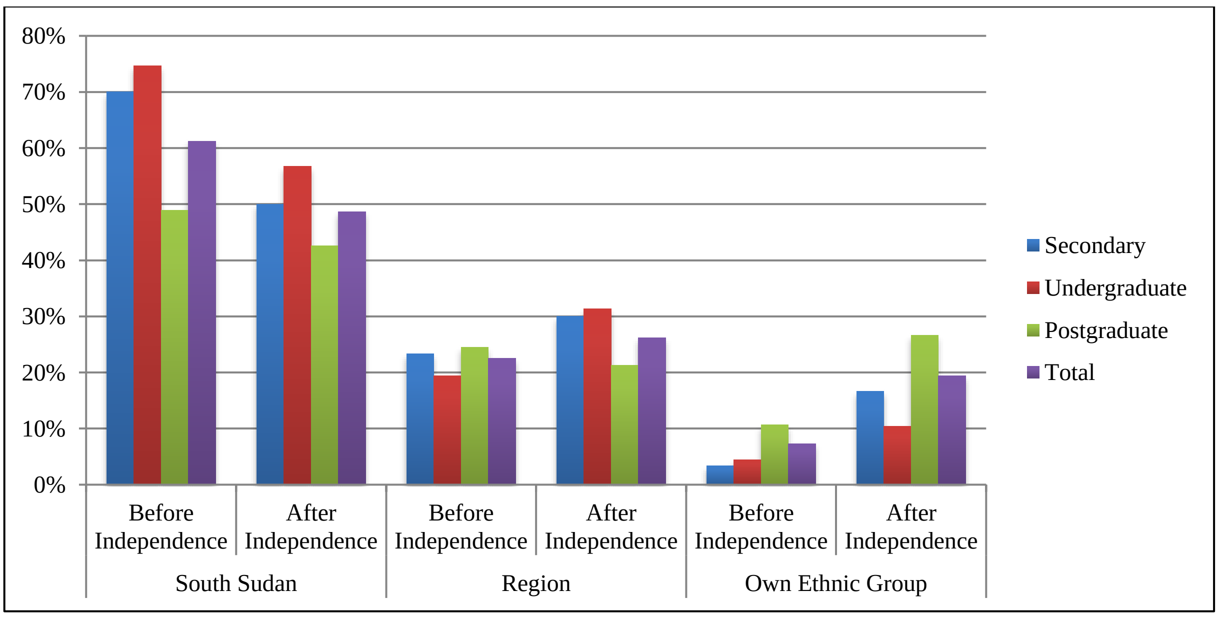

Figure 12. Students feeling of affiliation with state before and after independence.

[4] Focus group discussion conducted on 7 January 2020.
[5] Focus group discussion conducted on 11 December 2019.

Civicness and Social Cohesion (Driver 3)

Social cohesion is the outcome of how power is distributed through political settlements (Driver 1) and how power is exercised through institutions (Driver 2). The way civicness in terms of political, civic, and social activities enhances and nurtures social cohesion and can be assessed in terms of the level of interpersonal trust, tolerance and civility, inter-ethnic interactions, forging national unity and national identity, and feelings about the future. Also the existing social cohesion may also strengthen civicness.

Interpersonal trust. Trust is a key element of social capital and it serves as "lubricant" for social cohesion and reciprocity (Campbell, 2006; Kuol, 2020b). Building trust among various stakeholders is a necessary precondition for any attempt to transform institutions to deliver security, justice, and jobs to citizens (World Bank, 2011). While it is difficult to measure levels of trust, students were asked to gauge their level of trust of other people in comparison to the period before the independence of South Sudan in 2011. The overwhelming majority (65 percent) of students trust less other ethnic groups, while only 15 percent of students trust more other ethnic groups after the independence. This shows again the politics of ethnic patronage adopted by the ruling elites after the independence eroded trust between different ethnic groups. However, this loss of trust was particularly more evident among secondary and undergraduate students (73 percent) than among postgraduate students (57 percent), while the growing of trust of other ethnic groups is more prevalent among postgraduate (15 percent) and undergraduate (16 percent) than secondary (13 percent). This finding indirectly suggests that more education is likely to nurture trust among different ethnic groups (see Figure 13).

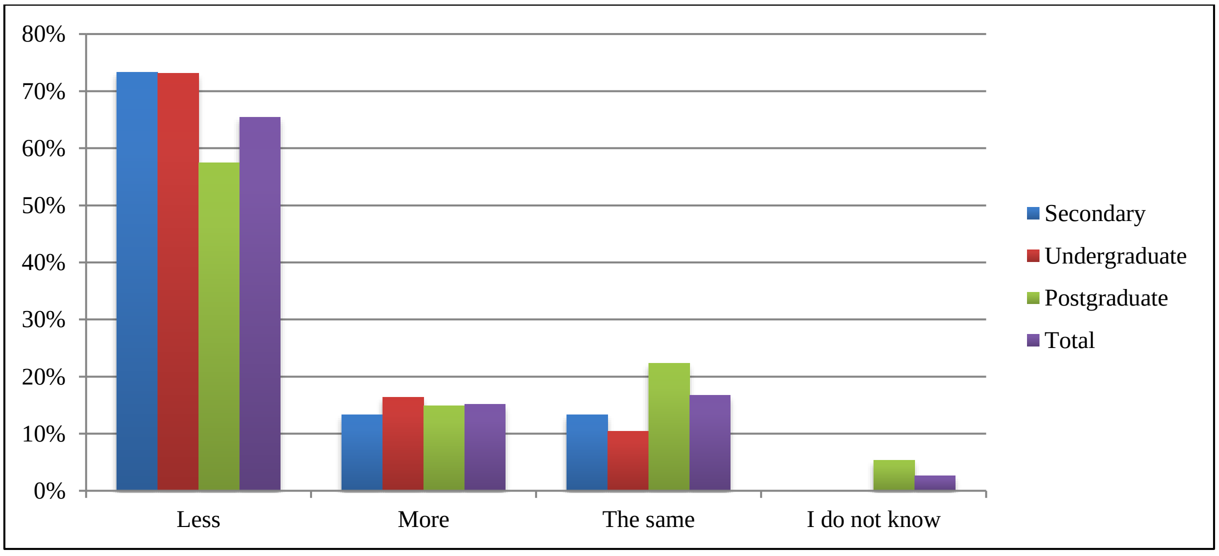

Figure 13. Level of interpersonal trust compared before independence in 2011.

Level of interaction with other people. The level of interaction between and among people is an important "emollient" for social cohesion and social capital. Despite weakening interpersonal trust, South Sudanese have formal and informal relations, ties, and interactions that hold them together across different divides (Kuol, 2020b, p. 78).

Students were asked about their daily interaction with other students not from their ethnic groups and an overwhelming majority (78 percent) of students confirmed their inter-ethnic interaction with other students very often, particularly among female students (84 percent) compared to male student (73 percent) (see Figure 14).

Students from Bahr el Ghazal (88 percent) are more likely to interact with students from other ethnic groups than students from Upper Nile (78 percent) and Equatoria (71 percent) with students from Upper Nile (13 percent) more likely not to meet students from other ethnic groups compared to Bahr el Ghazal (0 percent) and Equatoria (1 percent). One student appreciates his daily interaction with others by stating that

> I daily meet and interact with people who are not from my ethnic group, especially in school we are free always with any group; we eat together and even at home I normally play with people who are not from my ethnic group; as youth we have no problem with any ethnic group in South Sudan.[6]

When students were asked about their level of inter-ethnic interaction outside educational institutions, about 60 percent of students confirmed that they did engage in inter-ethnic interaction. Secondary students reported less interaction, and were more likely not to interact at all with others ethnic groups (27 percent). Interestingly, female students (66 percent) are more likely to interact very often with people from other ethnic groups outside educational institutions than male students (55 percent). This shows that educational institutions provide conducive social environments for inter-ethnic interactions that nurture social cohesion by building social bridges, links, and ties.

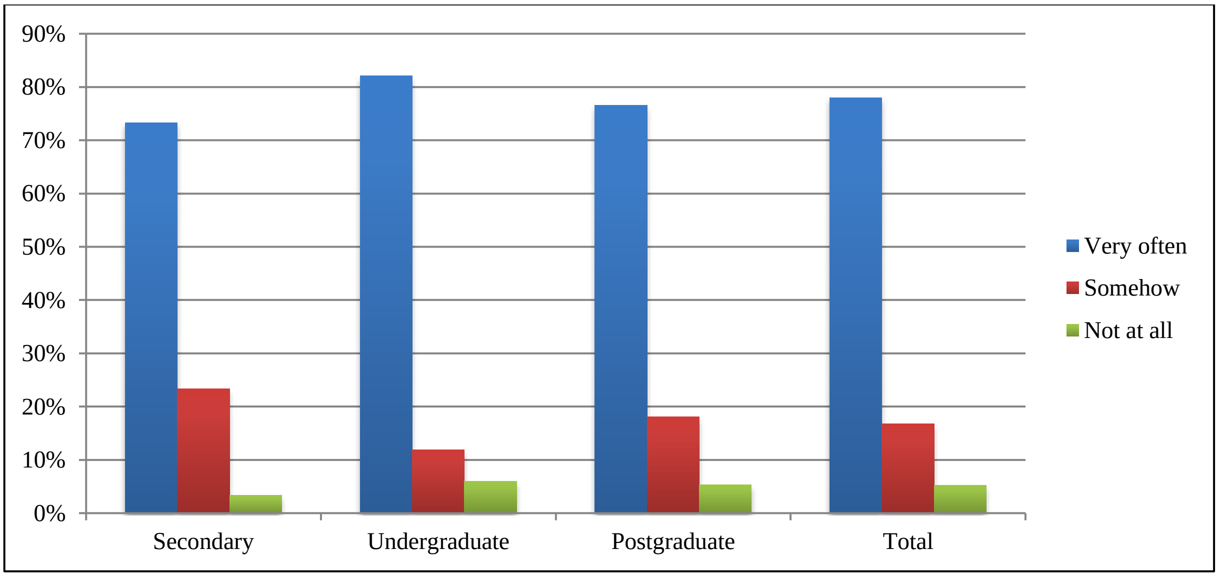

Figure 14. The level of inter-ethnic interactions in education institutions.

There is a strong link between inter-ethnic interactions and interpersonal trust by reducing fear, anxiety, and stereotypes (Kuol, 2020b, p. 79). In assessing this link, students were asked whether such inter-ethnic interactions improve interpersonal trust. About 62 percent of students confirmed the added value of inter-ethnic interactions in building interpersonal trust, particularly among undergraduate students (72 percent) and female students (66 percent) compared to male students (60 percent) (see Figure 15). This finding confirms further that education matters in providing a trusted platform for building interpersonal trust and nurturing social cohesion.

[6] Focus group discussion conducted on 11 December 2019.

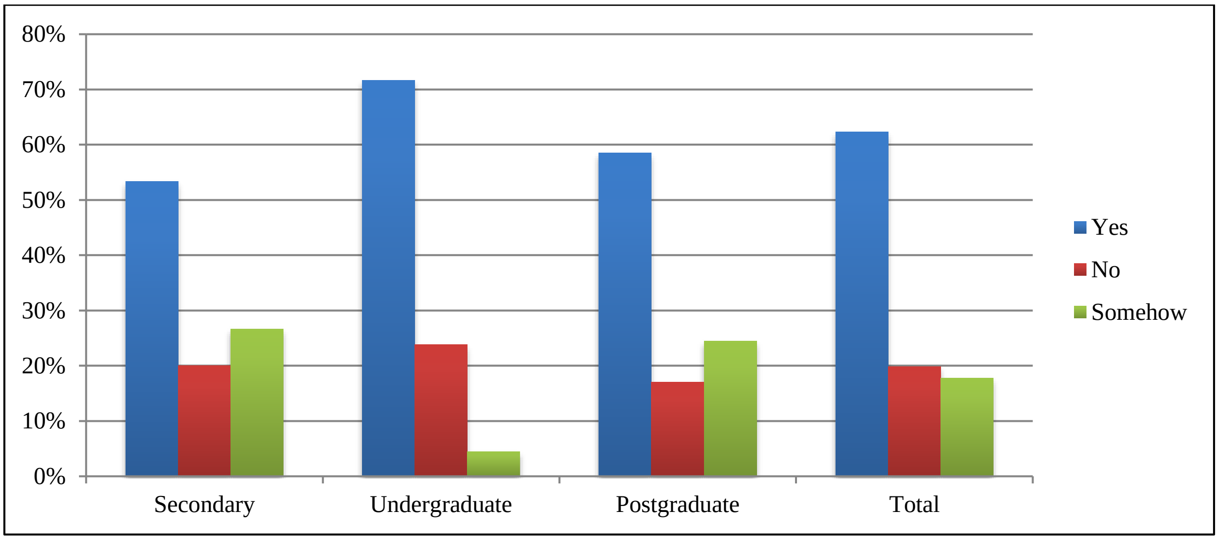

Figure 15. Link between inter-ethnic interactions and interpersonal trust.

Forging national unity and national identity. There are some symbols and elements that may provide the basis for building national unity and a common national identity. The people of South Sudan do have some commonalities, shared values, and ties that provide a solid foundation for forging national unity and national identity (Kuol, 2020b, p. 78). Students were asked about the elements and symbols that would make them feel more South Sudanese. 46 percent of students considered the national flag and national anthem as key symbols for forging national identity. Among secondary students, the flag and anthem were particularly important: 63 percent saw them as key symbols. Other things that made students feel more South Sudanese were shared history (24 percent), education system (10 percent), quality of leadership (7 percent), inter-marriages (6 percent), and sports (5 percent) (see Figure 16). Interestingly, female students are likely to attach more importance than male students to the role of leadership (15 percent), education system (13 percent), and inter-marriages in forging national unity and national identity. These findings are relevant in the design and development of curriculums, extracurricular activities, and syllabi.

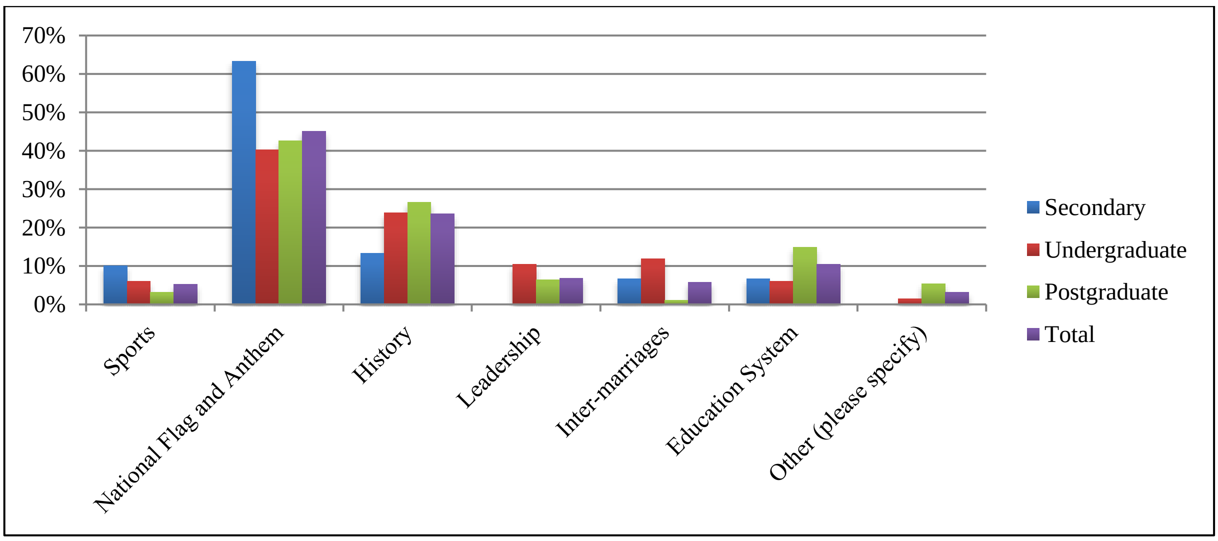

Figure 16. Elements and symbols for national unity and national identity.

Visioning the future. Education plays a critical role in shaping how students see the future of the nation. Students were asked how they see the future of South Sudan. The majority of students (59 percent) saw a good future for South Sudan; particularly among secondary students (67 percent) (see Figure 17), students from Equatoria (68 percent), and male students (62 percent). However, female students were more pessimistic about the future of South Sudan than male students. This optimism about the future of South Sudan is stronger than the results from other public surveys (IRI, 2013, p. 6). These results show that education does play a positive role in creating optimism and seeing a better future for South Sudan; despite its current challenges.

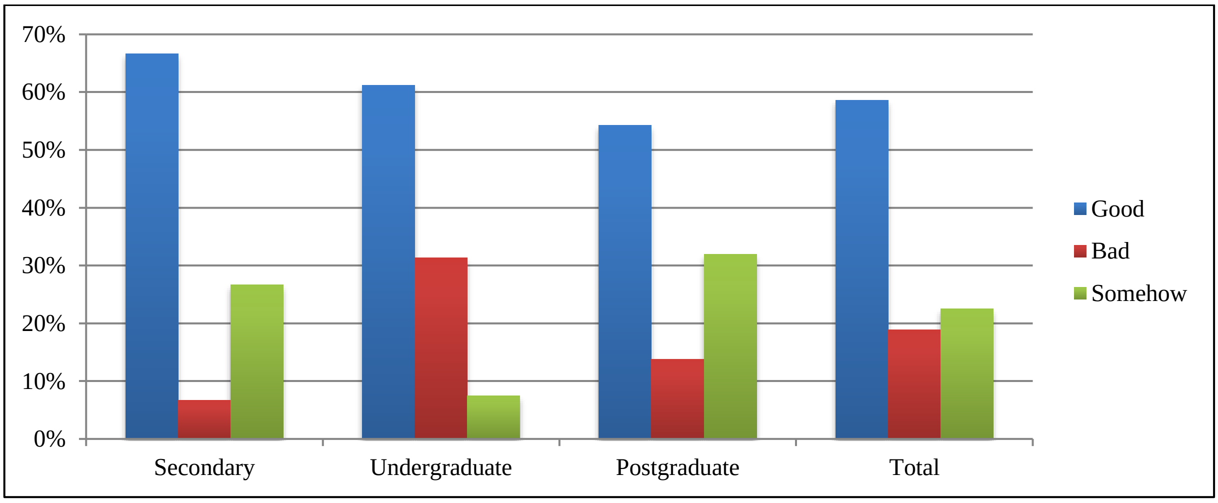

Figure 17. The future of South Sudan.

Conclusions

One of the purposes of this paper is to provide a theoretical framework to conceptually frame the link between education, civicness, and social contract, as a gap exists in the literature of peacebuilding. The empirical findings from this study may not be conclusive, however they have helped in explaining the nexus between educations, civicness, and social contract, which in turn contributes to sustainable peace. As there is growing evidence that shows the influence of education on “civicness” through skills and cognitive resources, it is argued in this paper that education influences the resilient national social contract through promoting values associated with civicness, which in turn provides a basis for sustainable peace. Unlike other studies on peacebuilding and civil wars that suggest the direct link between education and peacebuilding, the theoretical framework provided in this paper and its empirical findings suggest that education contributes to peacebuilding through civicness and resilient social contract.

The main finding of this study is that education through its impact on civicness as presented in Figure 2 plays a critical role in nurturing or lubricating the core drivers of resilient social contract. In other words, the study finds that education through civicness makes students become key political stakeholders and more likely to foster a resilient social contract, which in turn contributes to sustaining peace. Although this study did not assess the content and quality of education at different levels, its findings suggest that students are likely to develop civic values and engagements that contribute to driving resilient social contract and sustainable peace.

As South Sudan is home to one of the lowest levels of educated population in the world, this might have contributed among other factors to limited demand for good governance and a general governance deficit that perpetuates poor relations between state-citizens, untrusted, ineffective, and exclusive institutions, and the erosion of social cohesion and interpersonal trust. The findings from this study suggest that more schooling in South Sudan is likely to nurture, through civicness, a resilient social contract, sustainable peace as well as increasing demand not only for good governance but also schools might become centres for political change and resistance to any misrule through peaceful means.

The findings of this study may have the following implications for the way education is perceived, planned, managed, and delivered:

Female Education

The preliminary findings show that female students are less likely to engage in zero-sum competitive violent actions and are a powerful force, not only for win-win peaceful actions, but also in nurturing inter-ethnic interactions and interpersonal trust. The curricula and pedagogical methods in various educational institutions may need to be designed to reflect the role of women in peace and trust-building by providing stories and examples from various communities.

Civic Education

The curricula of various educational institutions should reflect civic education in a syllabus that spurs social, civic, and political engagement among students, such as teaching of constitutions and political settlement, tools, and skills for interpreting political issues, and methods for their effective participation in the governance of educational institutions (Campbell, 2006). Student parliaments have been effective ways of making students interested and engaged in political issues. Other efforts to promote open discussion of social and political issues such as student debates are important elements of civic education.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Although sports dominate such activities, there is a need to promote traditional sports and traditional cultural dances that bring together male and female students. In some countries, students are encouraged to engage in charitable volunteering connected to their classroom work (Campbell, 2006, p. 60).

Views of Students

The context matters in planning, managing, and delivering education. The findings from this study show regional variations in the level of influence of education on civicness and social contract. Although the national curricula for primary and secondary schools reflect such regional variations, the process of drafting such curricula is often less informed by the views of students. There is a need for inclusive and students-centred process for drafting national curricula, planning, managing, and delivering education in South Sudan.

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