

# BRIEF ON VIOLENCE AFFECTING CIVILIANS

## HIGHLIGHTS

- In the first half of 2021, at least 1,859 civilians were directly affected by violence. This represents a decrease of 52 per cent as compared with the same period in 2020, largely attributable to an overall decline in violence in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA).
- The vast majority of violence was geographically concentrated in 46 *payams* (9 per cent of the 510 *payams* in the country), where more than 89 per cent of victims were documented.
- Violence involving community-based militias and/or civil defence groups remained the predominant form of violence affecting civilians, accounting for 87 per cent of victims.

## CONTEXT

This brief presents an overview of trends in violence affecting civilians in the first half of 2021, by assessing four major forms of individual harm (killing, injury, abduction, and conflict-related sexual violence/CRSV). While the impact of violence extends beyond these forms of harm, they have been the most common incidents documented throughout the conflict in South Sudan.

Sources of information include victim and eyewitness accounts, as well as reports from secondary sources identified during field

missions by the UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD). All reported incidents, particularly those involving sub-national violence, are deconflicted with incidents documented by the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division (CAD).

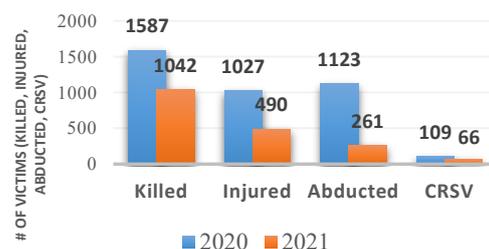
In accordance with its UN Security Council mandate, UNMISS has issued this brief as an advocacy tool to reduce the impact of armed violence on civilians. UNMISS also continues to urge national authorities to hold all perpetrators accountable.

## GENERAL TRENDS

In a departure from the same period in 2020, the first half of 2021 saw a decrease in both the overall number of violent incidents as well as civilian victims. Between January and June 2021, there were 513 incidents (689 in 2020) involving at least 1,859 civilians (3,846 in 2020) subjected to one of the four major forms of harm. This represents a 26 per cent decrease in the number of incidents and a 52 per cent decrease in the number of victims as compared to the first half of 2020. It is important to note, however, that HRD's capacity to comprehensively document the number of victims affected by armed violence was impacted by access denials and, to a lesser

extent, COVID-19 movement restrictions, which may have led to some under-reporting in the number of incidents and victims.

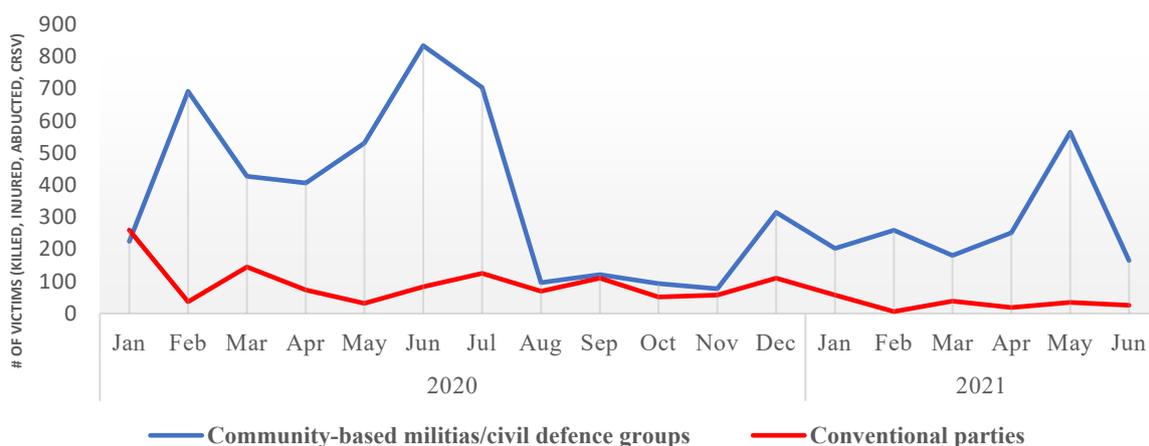
*Number of victims,  
January – June 2020/2021*



Mirroring the broader decline in violence overall, each form of harm affecting civilians decreased as compared with the same period in 2020. As illustrated by the above chart, killings declined by 34 per cent (from 1,587 to 1,042), cases of injury by 52 per cent (from 1,027 to 490), abductions by 77 per cent (from 1,123 to 261) and CRSV by 39

per cent (from 109 to 66). As was the case throughout 2020, sub-national violence involving community-based militias and/or civil defence groups continued to exact the greatest toll on civilians, accounting for more than 87 per cent of victims (1,626 of 1,859) in the first half of 2021.

*Trends in the number of victims, January 2020 to June 2021*



Large-scale violence involving community-based militias from the Dinka, Nuer and Murle communities in Jonglei and the GPAA accounted for 23 per cent of all victims in the reporting period. Between 7 and 20 May, armed elements from the Dinka (Duk), Gawaar Nuer and Lou Nuer (Uror) communities carried out at least 36 attacks on 29 villages and civilian settlements in Likuangole, Gumuruk and Verteth in the GPAA. These attacks resulted in at least 145 civilian casualties (90 killed and 55 injured). In addition, 133 women and children were abducted, and ten women were subjected to CRSV, mainly in the Likuangole area. According to humanitarian sources, an estimated 20,000 civilians were displaced as a result of these attacks.

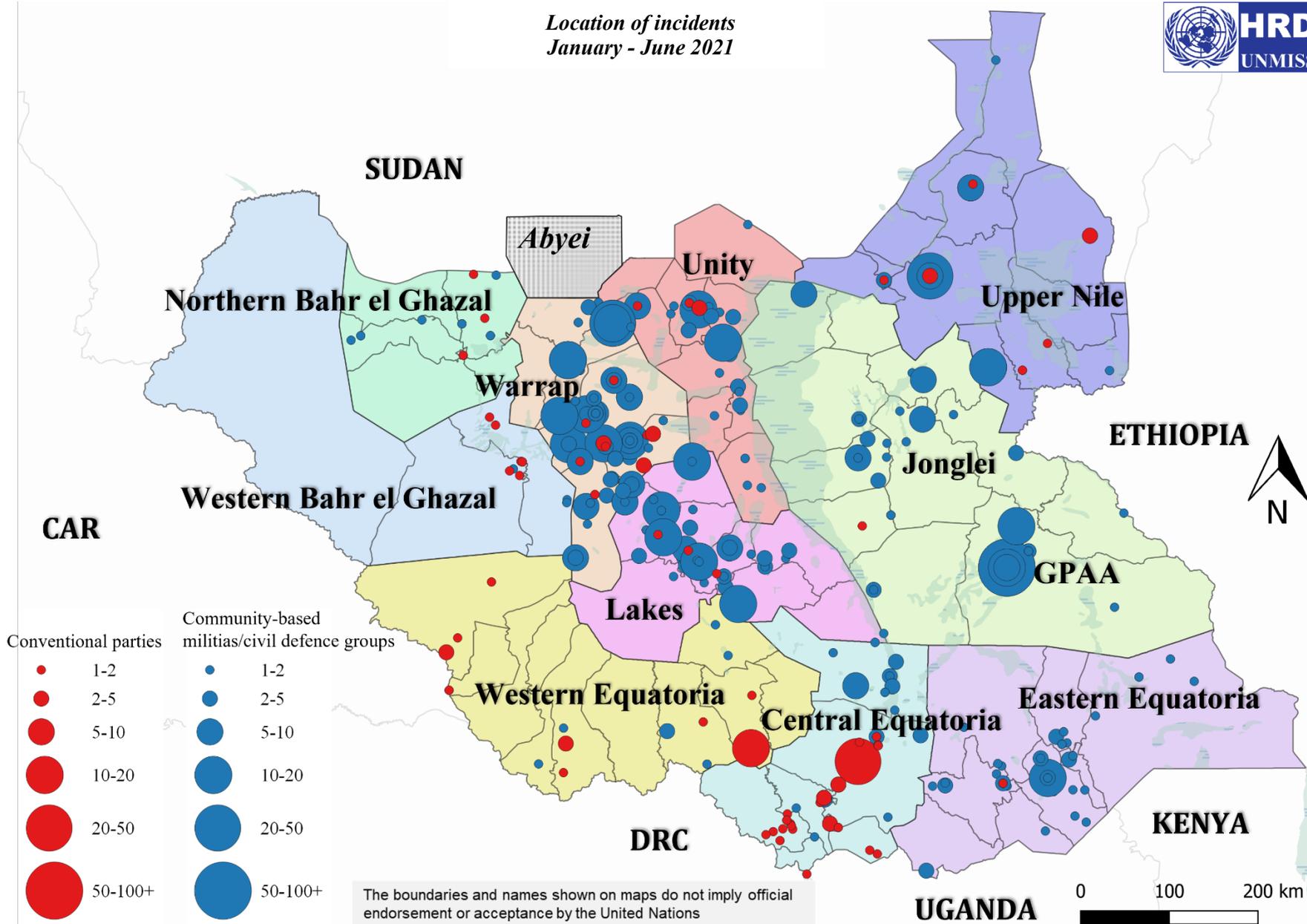
Sub-national violence in Warrap and Lakes accounted for 37 per cent of incidents and 38 per cent of victims (including 434 killed and 249 injured). However, it is important to note that this represents a decrease in the number of incidents (by 21 per cent) and victims (by 56 per cent) as compared with 2020. This decrease may be linked in part to the hardline approach of

officials in Lakes and Warrap in addressing violence and criminality in these states, which included the extra-judicial executions of at least 26 men and two boys by the end of June.

Incidents involving conventional parties to the conflict were triggered primarily by tensions between the South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF) and the National Salvation Front (NAS), largely concentrated in the Greater Yei and Lainya areas of Central Equatoria.

In Western Equatoria, primarily in Tambura county, attacks involving Maj. Gen James Nando-led SSDPF forces allied with militia elements from the Azande community on the one hand, and elements of the pro-Machar Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO/RM) and allied militia elements of the Balanda community on the other, resulted in the killing, injury and abduction of 67 civilians in June. These incidents also led to the large-scale destruction and looting of civilian property, including the burning of 80 houses and structures in Akpa and Nazareda, and the displacement of civilians.

Location of incidents  
January - June 2021



## GEOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Consistent with prior trends, violence affecting civilians during the first half of 2021 was concentrated in four main areas, which accounted for 63 per cent of all victims documented throughout South Sudan. Warrap was the most affected (24 per cent of victims), followed by Jonglei and the GPAA (23 per cent) and Lakes (16 per cent). These areas were primarily affected by sub-national violence involving civil defence groups and/or community-based militias. However, it is important to note that this violence was concentrated in specific *payams* (sub-divisions of counties), with 46 (out of 540) *payams* accounting for more than 89 per cent of victims.

For instance, 19 per cent of all victims of killing, injury, abduction and CRSV were documented in five (out of 72) *payams* in Jonglei and the GPAA.

During the same period, chronic armed violence between Dinka sub-clans in Lakes and Warrap, concentrated in 13 *payams*, amounted to 38 per cent of all victims (706 individuals).

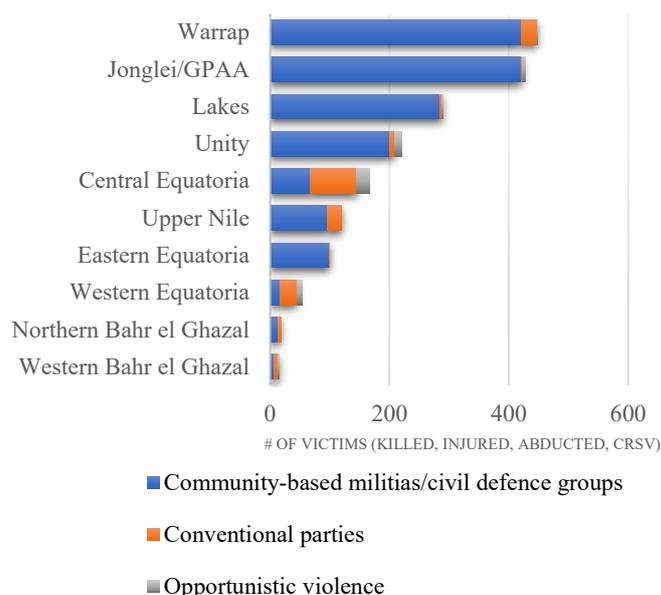
## VICTIMS

Men continued to account for the majority of victims (76 per cent or 1,406 individuals), followed by women (13 per cent or 254 individuals) and children (11 per cent or 199 individuals).

According to HRD's findings, the overwhelming majority of men were killed or injured (95 per cent), primarily in the context of sub-national violence. The remaining 5 per cent were victims of abduction, including for the purposes of forced labour and/or forced military recruitment.

Women were primarily subjected to killing (35 per cent), injury (17 per cent), and abduction (29 per cent). Conflict-related sexual violence accounted for 19 per cent of adult female victims (47). Thirty-eight per cent of these CRSV cases were attributed to conventional parties to the conflict, largely in the Yei and Lainya areas of Central Equatoria, while 58 per cent occurred in the context of sub-national violence, particularly in Jonglei and the GPAA (29 per cent) and Warrap (13 per cent). This

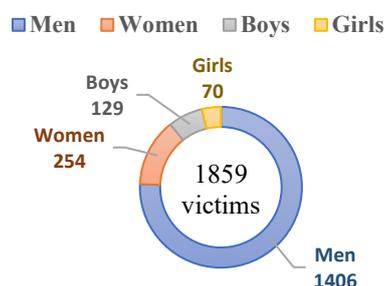
*States most affected by violence*



By contrast, the majority of victims attributed to conventional parties (amounting to 7 per cent of all victims) were documented in seven *payams* of Central Equatoria and six *payams* of Western Equatoria.

included at least 10 women who were subjected to CRSV during the surge in violence in Jonglei and the GPAA in May. However, it is important to note that UNMISS has reason to be concerned that women and girls were subjected to sexual violence in cases of abduction as well.

*Victims, by age and sex*



Children were primarily abducted (59 per cent), in nearly all cases in the context of sub-national violence, while 22 per cent were killed and 13 per cent injured. Twelve girls were confirmed as having been subjected to CRSV.

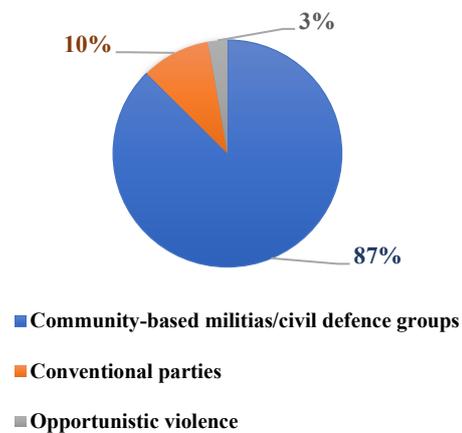
## PERPETRATORS

Among the three main categories of alleged perpetrators involved in armed violence in South Sudan, community-based militias and/or civil defence remained the single largest category responsible for harm to civilians, accounting for 87 per cent of total victims (1,626 of 1,859). However, violence involving these groups decreased by 48 per cent (3,119 to 1,626) compared to the same period in 2020, largely due to an overall reduction of violence and associated casualties in Jonglei and the GPAA.

HRD investigations have consistently found that some of these groups have a high degree of organization and are capable of carrying out military-style tactics. These groups are often used as proxies by elites driven by political interest and bolstered by the support of national and local actors to provide security for their interests on cattle investment. In Jonglei and the GPAA, traditional and spiritual leaders have also played a part in fueling violence by mobilizing armed youths for attack against neighboring communities.

As in prior reporting periods, conventional parties to the conflict were the second category of perpetrators causing harm to civilians. Government forces and organized armed groups were responsible for 10 per cent of victims (182 of 1,859) documented in the first

*Victims, by category of perpetrator*



half of 2021 as compared with 16 per cent (630 of 3,846) during the same period in 2020.

HRD also documented a relatively small number of incidents by unidentified but related armed elements, which do not fall specifically within one of the two categories described above, but which bear a link to the conflict based on the suspected perpetrators, location, modus operandi, and other factors. These actors were primarily engaged in opportunistic violence, and were responsible for three per cent of all victims (51 of 1,859) recorded between January and June 2021.