



**Good Governance Africa (GGA) - Horn of Africa and
Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) of Addis Ababa
University**

**South Sudan – Elections, Governance Uncertainty, and Challenges to
the Peace Process | 17 September 2026 | 02:00 pm -05:00 pm | Venue:
IPSS Conference Hall/ Hybrid Zoom Platform**

Concept Note

1. Background and Rationale

Good Governance Africa (GGA) is an independent, non-partisan research and advocacy institution dedicated to advancing democratic governance, institutional integrity, and accountable leadership across the continent. The GGA Horn of Africa Regional Office (GGA-HoRA) provides evidence-based analysis of governance challenges in one of Africa's most complex regions. Its core focus areas include conflict transformation, political transitions, state reform and state-building, youth empowerment, and climate change. Its partner, the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) of Addis Ababa University is the premiere institute for research, policy dialogues, and professional development on peace and security in Africa. IPSS' Africa Peace and Security Programme (APSP) is a joint programme of the African Union (AU) and the Institute, mandated by the African Union Executive Council. Under this program, IPSS promotes the values of a democratic and peaceful society through various policy dialogue platforms and its evidence-based research outputs. GGA-HoRA and IPSS have partnered to host a policy dialogue on the 2026 elections in South Sudan which fall within the wave of elections in several Horn of Africa countries this same year.

This joint initiative is informed by the belief that the African Union's normative frameworks, particularly the prohibition of unconstitutional changes of government and commitments to good governance, remain central reference points for measuring political progress. Yet, in the Horn of Africa, the role of elections in deepening democratic governance and improving state–society relations has been inconsistent. Despite their shortcomings, elections remain vital mechanisms through which citizens can express preferences, provide feedback to governing elites, and engage in peaceful political contestation.

Against this backdrop, the 2026 elections in South Sudan represent a critical moment. Beyond their immediate political implications, these elections provide an entry point for examining governance trajectories and the prospects for strengthening democratic resilience amid complex structural and security challenges.



2. Purpose of the Policy Dialogue

South Sudan, the youngest nation in Africa, has never held national elections since gaining independence in 2011, and the electoral process has been repeatedly postponed. The most recent extension has pushed the vote from December 2024 to December 2026. These repeated delays are linked to insecurity, incomplete reforms, and political disputes. However, many challenges remain to prepare the country for the election.

In spite of this, South Sudan intends to hold its first-ever general elections in December 2026. However, progress on the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS) has been slow, and political tensions, including the detention and trial of First Vice President Riek Machar, continue to undermine the unity government. The rupture of the Petrodar pipeline in 2024 has dramatically reduced state revenue, weakening government capacity to administer nationwide elections or deliver essential services.

Given these constraints, the feasibility of peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections remains uncertain, raising questions about alternative sequencing, political dialogue, and the roles of regional and international partners. The policy dialogue therefore aims to convene scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and civil society actors to critically assess the evolving electoral landscape in South Sudan.

Discussion Questions

1. What minimum political, security, and administrative conditions must be in place for credible elections in South Sudan?
2. How can national dialogue initiatives and civil society actors support or complement election preparation under the current political climate?
3. What electoral or governance benchmarks should guide IGAD, the AU, and the UN in determining the type of support to provide?
4. How can the risks of election-related violence, displacement, or elite fragmentation be mitigated ahead of the 2026 polls?
5. What alternative political options such as phased elections, extended transition, or a national dialogue might protect the peace process if conditions for full elections are not met?

3. Policy Dialogue Format

The three-hour hybrid event will follow a standardized, interactive format designed to balance expert analysis with audience engagement:



- Moderated Panel Discussion: A moderator will guide a discussion among panelists, drawing out comparative insights and contextual analysis based on the session's key questions.
- Interactive Q&A Session: Participants will engage with panelists through a moderated Q&A chat, enabling practical and policy-focused dialogue.
- Closing Remarks: The moderator will summarize key takeaways and outline next steps.

4. Target Audience

- Regional policymakers and governance practitioners
- Civil society organizations and democracy networks
- African Union and IGAD officials
- Academic researchers and think tanks
- Development partners and bilateral donors
- Youth and community leaders
- Media and public affairs professionals

5. Expected Deliverables

- Outcomes Report including key takeaway
- Photos and media content for GGA and IPSS websites and social media

6. Venue and Date

The policy dialogue will be hosted at IPSS Conference Hall in a hybrid format on 17 September 2026 from 09:30 am -12:30 pm.