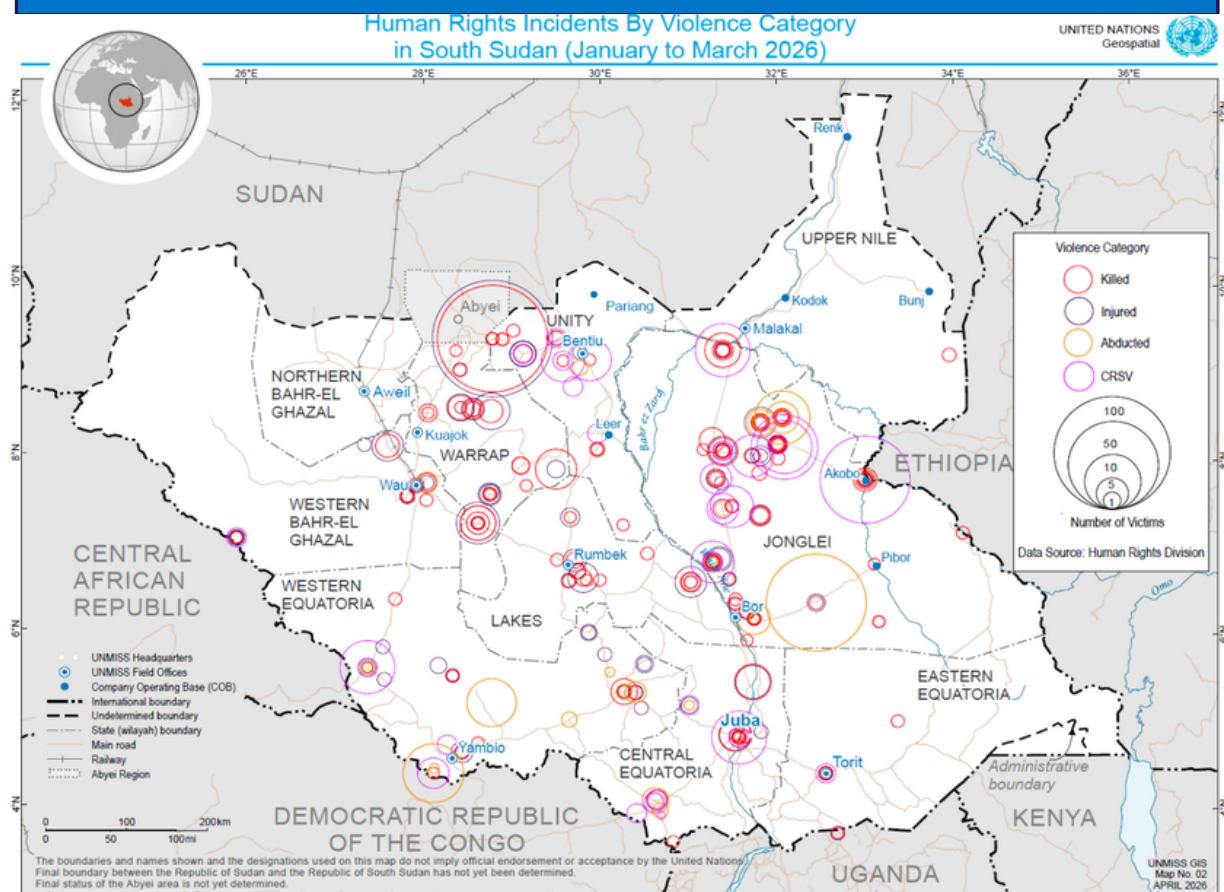


Introduction

This project examines how UNMISS field office closures in Aweil and Torit are understood from below. While UNMISS and public officials framed the closures in terms of funding cuts and a transition toward government responsibility, local and expert perspectives suggest that field offices also held practical, symbolic, and economic value. Through remote interviews and public-source analysis, this project compares Aweil and Torit to show how peacekeeping withdrawal is experienced through proximity, visibility, humanitarian coordination, local economy, and trust in government capacity.

Violence Affecting Civilians



Source: UNMISS Human Rights Division, Brief on Violence Affecting Civilians, January-March 2026. The map shows human rights incidents by violence category across South Sudan. Aweil and Torit are highlighted as case sites to show how local perceptions of UNMISS withdrawal can reveal protection concerns that national violence rankings may not fully capture.

Background

UNMISS was established in 2011 with a mandate that includes civilian protection, human rights monitoring, peace agreement support, and creating conditions for long-term stability. In 2025, UNMISS announced field office closures in Aweil and Torit as part of funding-driven restructuring. Public reports stated that Aweil would continue to receive support from Wau, while Torit would be supported from Juba through mobile teams and partners. These changes raise a central question: what is lost when peacekeeping presence becomes more distant?

Research Question

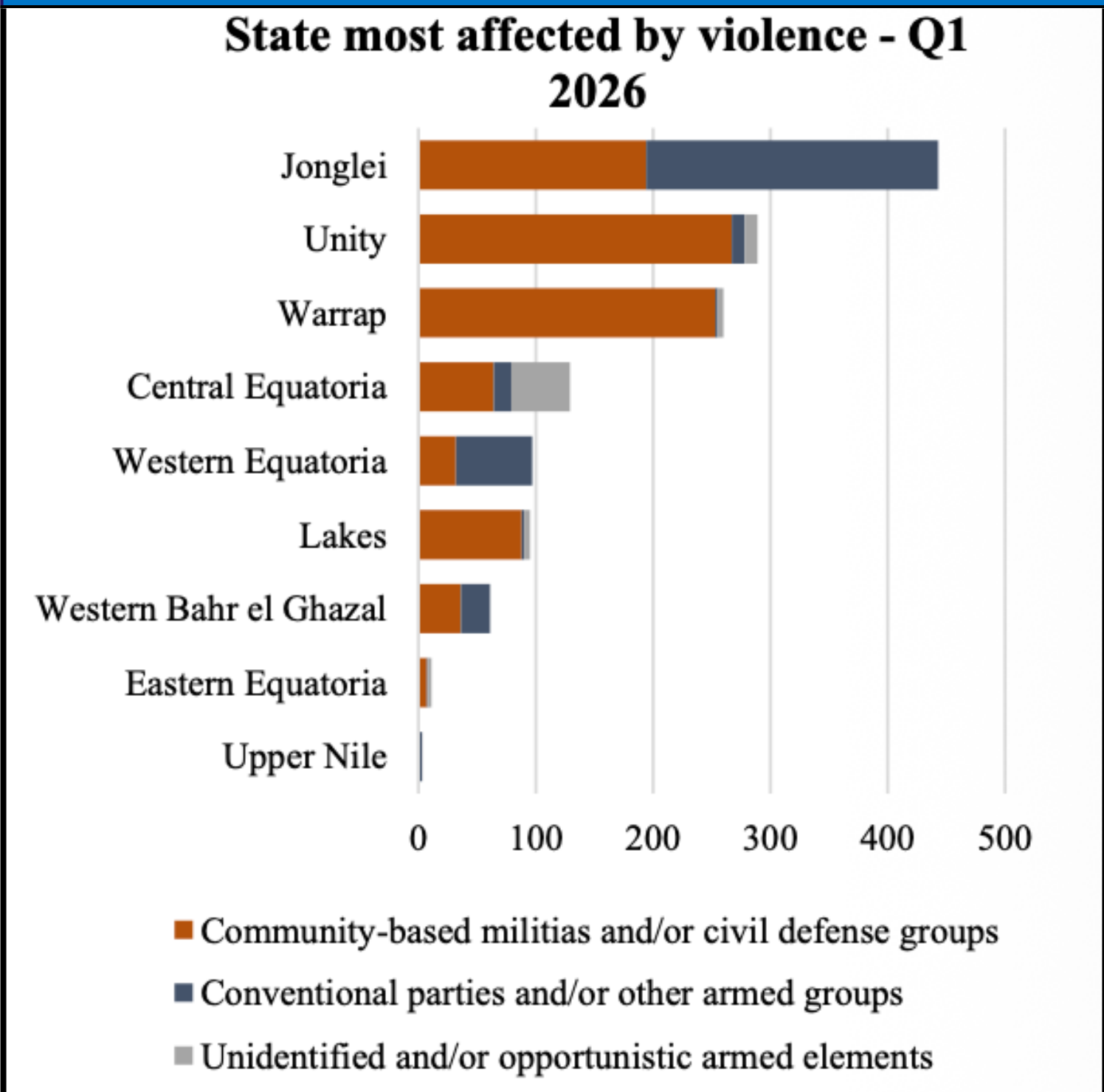
How do local communities perceive UNMISS field office closures in Aweil and Torit, and how do these perceptions complicate traditional measures of peacekeeping effectiveness?

Methodology

This project uses a qualitative comparative case study of Aweil and Torit. It draws on remote interviews, focused on each case, alongside public-source analysis of UNMISS reports, local media, humanitarian reporting, and peacekeeping transition literature.

Because of time and recruitment limits, the interviews are not treated as representative of all civilian views. Instead, they provide contextual evidence on how UNMISS field office closures were understood locally in the affected communities. The analysis focuses on recurring themes such as proximity, visibility, reassurance, deterrence, humanitarian coordination, local economy, government capacity, and the gap between official institutional transition language and local experience of civilians.

Violence Metrics and Their Limits



Source: UNMISS Human Rights Division, Brief on Violence Affecting Civilians, January-March 2026. This graph shows state-level violence data, but it also reveals the limits of institutional measurement. Northern Bahr el Ghazal does not appear, and Eastern Equatoria appears relatively low, which shows how national violence rankings can make places like Aweil and Torit seem less urgent. This project contrasts those metrics with local perspectives on proximity, reassurance, visibility, trust, and response capacity.

Research Findings

Finding 1: UNMISS field offices helped people connect with support, information, protection systems, and local coordination.

Finding 2: Support from Wau or Juba is not the same as having a local office. Distance made communication, response, and meetings harder.

Finding 3: Aweil did not become highly violent after the change, but people still felt the reduced UNMISS presence. Returnees, economic problems, night theft, pressure on resources, and less visibility still mattered.

Finding 4: In Torit, the closure created more concern because it happened around the same time as road insecurity, nearby fighting, displacement, and humanitarian access problems.

Finding 5: Peacekeeping success should not only be measured by official plans or numbers. It should also include how local people feel about safety, trust, response, the economy, and government capacity.

Case Sites and Support Hubs



Note: Aweil and Torit are the case sites, while Wau and Juba represent the support hubs expected to cover them after UNMISS field office closures.

Table 1. Case Comparison

Theme	Aweil	Torit
Closure framing	Understood institutionally as reconfiguration, with support expected from Wau	Framed as closure or downsizing, with support expected from Juba
Main local concern	Reduced proximity, returnee pressure, local economy, resource strain, weaker engagement	Protection gap, road insecurity, displacement, timing before elections, weaker visibility
Security context	Relatively peaceful but not free from pressure	More visibly fragile due to fighting, displacement, and humanitarian access risks
Meaning of UNMISS presence	Partnership, coordination, patrols, projects, local economy, reassurance	Visibility, deterrence, humanitarian coordination, protection, local confidence
Government role	Government seen as primary protector, with UNMISS complementing state capacity	Government role recognized, but readiness and resources questioned

Contribution

This project contributes to debates on peacekeeping transitions by showing that field office closures should not be evaluated only through institutional or budgetary logic. A civilian-centered approach reveals that peacekeeping presence matters through visibility, trust, proximity, reassurance, local coordination, and everyday perceptions of safety. Therefore, peacekeeping success should be measured not only by when missions leave, but by how communities experience what remains after they leave.

Limitations

This project is based on a small number of remote interviews and public-source analysis. It does not claim to represent all civilian views in Aweil or Torit. Instead, it identifies final project findings from the available evidence and highlights areas where further community-based research would be valuable.

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