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Monday 16th - Friday 20th November, 2026

THEME:

South Sudan's Electoral Transition: Implications for Democratic Governance, Economic Sovereignty and Regional Stability in Eastern Africa

South Sudan's decision to postpone its first national elections to 11 February 2027 underscores the fragility of its political transition and its implications for peace and stability in Eastern Africa. The delay exposes weaknesses in democratic institutions, incomplete implementation of the 2018 Revitalised Peace Agreement, and unresolved political divisions that threaten electoral credibility. It also highlights emerging cybersecurity vulnerabilities surrounding voter data, electoral systems and digital misinformation. Meanwhile, the estimated US$223 million electoral financing gap reflects broader fiscal constraints arising from heavy dependence on oil revenues and vulnerable export infrastructure. Prolonged political uncertainty further raises concerns about transparency in petroleum governance, external influence and economic sovereignty. IGAD, the African Union and development partners should intensify diplomatic engagement, support inclusive dialogue, strengthen electoral institutions and cybersecurity, coordinate sustainable electoral financing, and promote transparent petroleum governance to secure a credible transition.

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Monday 16th November 2026

South Sudan's Electoral Uncertainty and Its Implications for Peace and Stability in Eastern Africa

South Sudan's decision to move its first national elections since independence to 11 February 2027 is another setback for a political transition already weakened by incomplete implementation of the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict. The National Elections Commission asserted that the revised timetable would allow more time for preparations. The new date replaces the 22 December 2026 polling date. However, the delay comes amid escalating armed confrontations, political divisions, and the continued detention and trial of opposition leader Riek Machar. These developments raise concerns about whether the process can command broad political confidence and take place in a secure environment. The September dissolution of the transitional government and legislatures, followed by the appointment of a caretaker administration, has added uncertainty to the power-sharing arrangements established under the peace agreement.

The consequences extend beyond South Sudan. The 2026 humanitarian response plan estimates that 10 million people require assistance. In addition, around 1.4 million refugees and returnees have crossed into the country from Sudan since the conflict there began in April 2023. Continued violence could deepen displacement, increase pressure on host communities and humanitarian agencies, and strain already limited public resources. It could also disrupt cross-border trade and complicate regional efforts to manage insecurity and population movements.

This uncertainty also complicates planning for humanitarian agencies and regional governments. For Eastern Africa, the concern is not simply whether elections take place on the revised date. It is whether the political conditions for a peaceful transition are restored before polling. IGAD and the African Union should intensify engagement with the parties, support inclusive dialogue, and press for implementation of outstanding peace provisions. Their efforts should also connect electoral preparations with civilian protection, humanitarian access, and cross-border coordination. A credible transition requires political agreement and improved security, not only a new electoral calendar.



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South Sudan's Electoral Transition: A Test of Democratic Governance in Eastern Africa

South Sudan's delayed electoral transition exposes weaknesses in the institutions expected to manage the country's first national vote since independence. The elections depend on a functioning legal framework, an adequately resourced National Elections Commission, voter registration, civic education, political participation and security arrangements that allow citizens to take part without intimidation. Repeated extensions have left these tasks unfinished. Political divisions have also raised questions about the inclusivity of the process. Institutional uncertainty has deepened following the September 2026 dissolution of the transitional government and national and state legislatures, and the appointment of a caretaker administration. These changes have implications for oversight, checks and balances, and the power-sharing framework established by the 2018 Revitalised Peace Agreement.

Without functioning representative institutions and broad political consensus, electoral preparations risk becoming an administrative exercise rather than a process that strengthens democratic accountability. The economic consequences of weak governance are also substantial. The Global Peace Index 2026 estimates that the economic impact of violence in South Sudan reached 19.97% of GDP in 2025. This reflects resources lost to insecurity, displacement, and conflict that could otherwise support public services and development. The figure illustrates why institutional weakness and political instability cannot be treated as separate from economic recovery.

For Eastern Africa, South Sudan's transition will test the ability of regional institutions to support constitutional governance and peace agreement implementation. IGAD and the African Union should establish jointly monitored benchmarks for electoral readiness, encourage transparent reporting by the National Elections Commission and support an inclusive political dialogue. Assistance should be tied to measurable progress on legal, institutional, and security preparations. This would help ensure that the revised timetable is accompanied by stronger institutions and public accountability.



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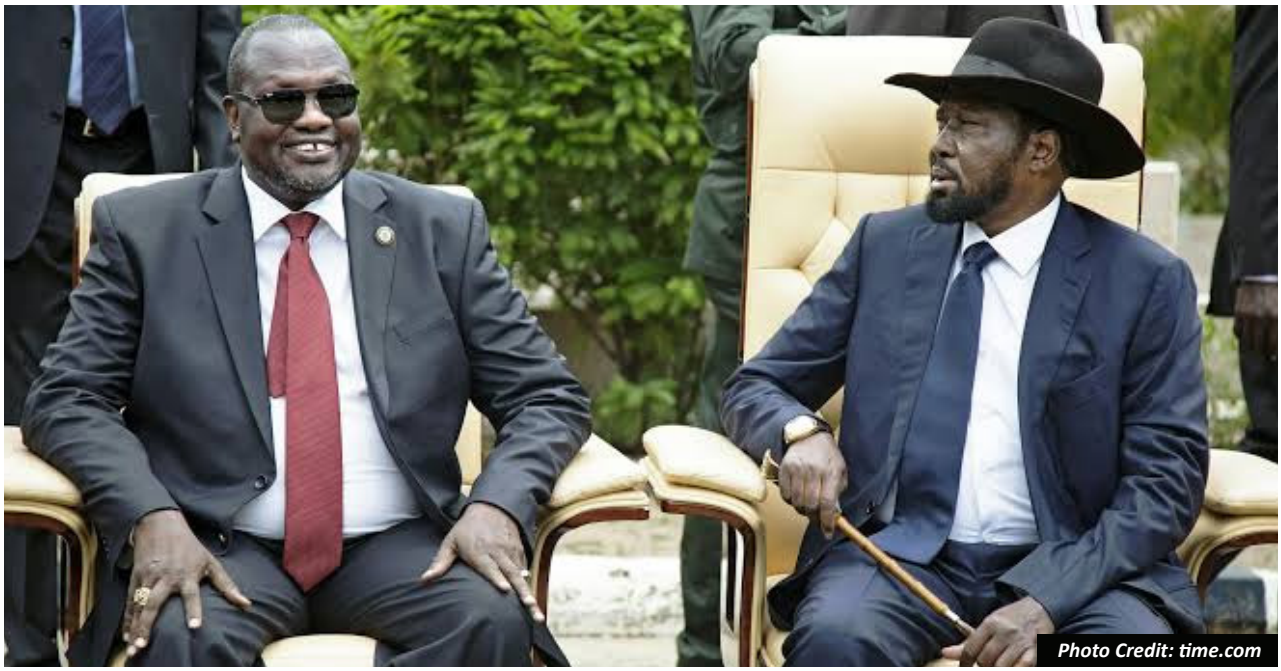
Strengthening Electoral Cybersecurity to Safeguard South Sudan's Electoral Integrity

South Sudan's February 2027 elections will depend not only on physical security but also on the integrity of the information and digital systems used to administer the vote. The National Elections Commission opined that voter registration will be conducted manually, in person, and on paper. The information collected will then be entered into the Commission's computer systems, while original registration books will be retained as permanent records. This arrangement reduces reliance on digital registration at the point of data collection, but it does not remove cybersecurity risks.

Electronic voter information could be exposed to unauthorised access, alteration, theft or disruption. Electoral databases, results-management platforms and digital records used to track ballot-paper production and distribution therefore require protection. Weak access controls or backups could compromise essential records. The Commission has also had to correct false online claims that voter registration had begun and that regional registration figures were available. Such misinformation can confuse voters, encourage fraud, and undermine confidence. The postponement gives electoral authorities time to strengthen safeguards. Cybersecurity must be built into the electoral cycle. Procedures are needed to handle data, verify announcements, secure equipment and identify vulnerabilities. Independent security assessments can identify weaknesses before they are exploited.

South Sudan should conduct regular system audits, restrict access to sensitive data, use encryption and maintain secure, tested backups. It should establish an incident-response team and public channels to correct false information. Physical safeguards are equally important. Ballot-paper production, storage, and distribution records should be traceable and independently verifiable. IGAD, the African Union and neighbouring countries can support technical training, cyber threat intelligence-sharing, and coordinated responses to cross-border incidents. Protecting electoral information is central to the credibility of the vote and public trust in its outcome.



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Financing South Sudan's Electoral Transition: A Regional Economic and Security Concern

South Sudan's preparations for the February 2027 elections face a major financing challenge with implications for the wider region. The National Elections Commission estimates that approximately US$250 million is required to conduct the vote, but only US$27 million had been provided, leaving a reported shortfall of US$223 million. This gap threatens the capacity to complete essential tasks, including voter registration, civic education, deployment of personnel, procurement of materials, transport and election security. The postponement creates additional time, but it does not resolve the underlying funding problem.

The shortfall reflects the country's narrow revenue base. Oil accounts for nearly 80% of projected government revenue, leaving public finances highly exposed to changes in production, prices and export conditions. South Sudan also relies on pipelines crossing conflict-affected Sudan to move crude oil to international markets. Disruptions to this infrastructure can reduce export earnings and limit the funds available for public services and electoral preparations. External instability can therefore become a domestic financing constraint. An underfunded process risks uneven preparations and greater dependence on external assistance. It may also place pressure on other public spending at a time when humanitarian needs remain acute. For neighbouring countries, fiscal instability in South Sudan can affect trade, investment, transport links and the resources available to manage cross-border security and displacement.

Juba should publish a transparent election budget and regular expenditure reports, protect essential electoral allocations and strengthen non-oil revenue collection. Options such as improved digital tax administration, better customs collection and carefully governed voluntary contributions from businesses and the diaspora could complement public funding. Any dedicated electoral fund should be ring-fenced, independently audited and subject to public reporting. The African Union, IGAD and development partners should coordinate technical support for revenue mobilisation and financial oversight. Reliable financing is essential, but it must be transparent and sustainable.



Photo Credit: camillelepage.org

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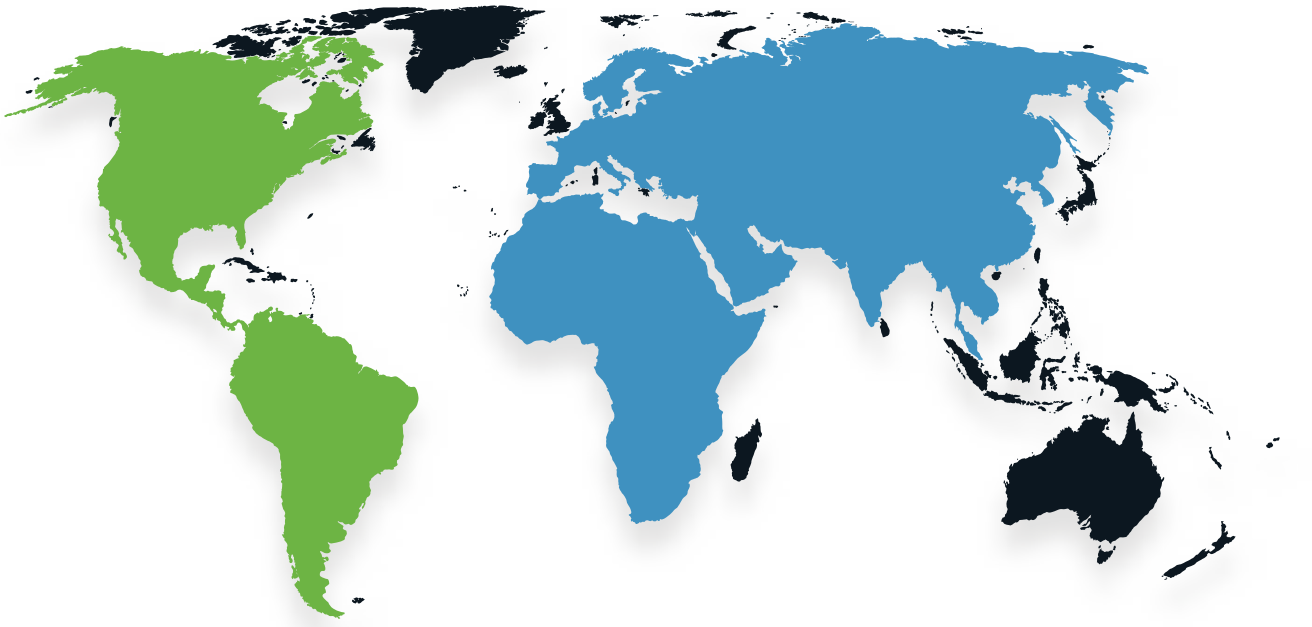

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