

Sudan: Conflict Snapshot

September 2023

BUILD UP A



Search for
Common Ground
Trust, Collaboration, Breakthroughs

Introduction

This round of the conflict snapshot series offers insight into both offline and online conflict trends in Sudan throughout September 2023. It encompasses instances of **violence** and their repercussions on various population groups, infrastructure, essential services, as well as offline and online **polarization** dynamics. The analysis draws from data gathered by embedded observers, reflecting the perspectives of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), host communities, and service providers in regions including Gadarif, Kassala, Blue Nile, West, and South Kordofan. Additionally, it analyzes public social media data from Facebook. The report also identifies emerging risks and opportunities, alongside providing actionable recommendations.

Key Trends – Conflict Dynamics

In September, **South Kordofan** saw a continuation of clashes between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-North) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), resulting in the death of two civilians in Kadugli. The SPLM-North also entered the village of Kiga, forcing residents to flee and still maintains control over the national road connecting Kadugli to Dilling.

In response to the situation, the Great Kadugli People's Initiative was launched. Led by Prince Hazem Yacoub¹, the initiative aims to promote peaceful coexistence, combat hate speech, and dispel rumors. It has extended invitations to RSF and SPLM to cease hostilities and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.

In **West Kordofan**, clashes between the SAF and local citizens in the Balila area resulted in the deaths of two civilians. Additionally, an altercation between armed citizens and formal armed forces in Al-Wahda Market in the city of Al-Fula resulted in the deaths of two SAF members.

In **Gadarif**, the conflict has caused increased crime rates, particularly theft and smuggling. It has also strained the state's healthcare infrastructure, overwhelming rural hospitals and leaving Al-Nuaimi Hospital as the main provider of services, despite limited supplies and equipment.

In **Blue Nile**, the division and polarization of the population continues to create two partisan groups with some supporting the RSF, while others lean towards the SAF. The conflict has brought about significant economic and political consequences, including loss of life, displacement, and the failure of the agricultural season.

Occasional clashes were reported in South and West Kordofan, while **Gadarif, Kassala, and Blue Nile** experienced fewer instances of violence.

Approximately 40% of the respondents mentioned occasional clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Another 28% reported rare clashes between SAF and RSF, while 24% of the respondents indicated that very frequent clashes between SAF and RSF occurred during the reporting period. Qualitative data also suggests frequent clashes between SAF and SPLM.

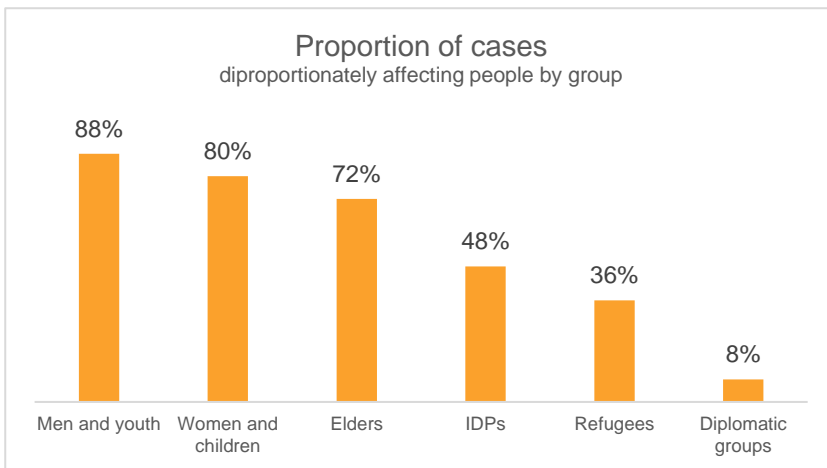
The **intensity of incidents** varied across different states as reported by monitors: In West Kordofan, 64% noted frequent "Battles in the field" involving SAF and RSF. In South Kordofan, 40% witnessed occasional and frequent "Explosions/Remote Violence" and shelling incidents between SAF and SPLM-N. At checkpoints and roads, 44% reported occasional "Violence against Civilians," mainly attributed to RSF, resulting in property looting. Gadarif, Kassala, West, and South Kordofan experienced 60% mentioning "Property Destruction" from SAF-RSF clashes, disrupting healthcare systems. Additionally, 4% highlighted the "Establishment of New Permanent Bases" by RSF, often referred to as "Daglo's Kingdom"² in Sudan, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of these issues.

The data highlights that armed groups, specifically **SAF and RSF, are the primary actors in 80% of the reported clashes** particularly identified across West Kordofan, Gadarif, and Kassala. In South Kordofan and

¹ Prince Hazem Yacoub is a leader of the Kadugli tribe, ex-locality commissioner, and member of the peace transitional council.

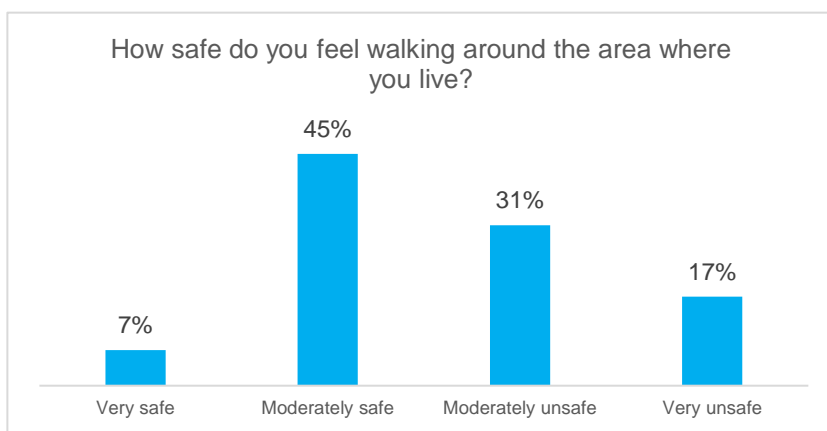
² This is referring to the perception that Mohamad Hamdan Dagalo, the head of the RSF, is establishing new bases as part of a master plan to build his own empire within Sudan.

Blue Nile, SAF and SPLM-North are identified as the most involved groups, while 8% is attributed to Political Parties - FFC, and 4% is associated with "Others," including individuals with lawbreaking tendencies and those with ambitions linked to foreign countries in Sudan.



Furthermore, the data highlights disparities in the impact of clashes on different demographic groups in various states.

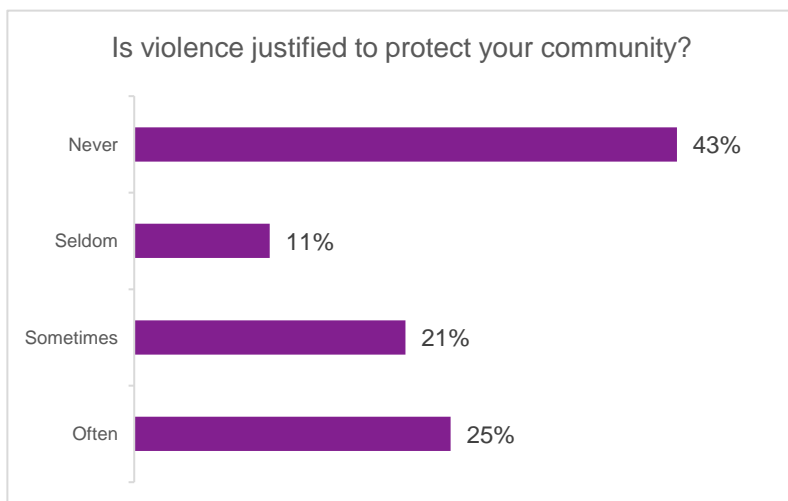
Citing the impact of the clashes, economic disruptions, including a notable decline in agricultural output, and the displacement of people (including IDPs and refugees) were reported by 74% of respondents, specifically in Gadarif, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan. 84% mentioned loss of lives or injuries, mainly due to healthcare system disruptions and disease outbreaks including Dengue fever and Cholera. In Gadarif, Kassala, and Blue Nile, 72% of respondents noted infrastructure destruction, and 64% mentioned social divisions and mistrust.



Regarding the Physical Violence, respondents' feelings of safety walking alone around their respective areas were in majority moderately safe or moderately unsafe, with 17% feeling very unsafe, mainly in the state of South Kordofan, and 7% feeling very safe in Gadarif state.

Collective Polarization

In September, respondents expressed varied sentiments with regards to feeling dehumanized on the basis of their identity. 36% disagreed with feeling dehumanized due to their identity, and 24% expressed a neutral to agree sentiment. Meanwhile, 12% strongly agreed that they are perceived as less human based on their identity, and 4% strongly disagreed with this notion.



The data also reveals diverse opinions regarding the justification of violence in specific situations. 25% of respondents from various states believe that violence to **protect their community** is often justified, another 21% believe that it is sometimes justified, while 11% consider violence to be seldom justified. However, 43% firmly believe that using violence to protect their community is never justified. Similarly, there is a spectrum of views regarding violence to **defend**

sources of livelihood, with some respondents seeing it as frequently justifiable and others deeming it seldom or never justified.

In the **online discussions** September saw a similar incidence of hate speech as in August: 13K posts, generating approximately 287K comments. On average, hate speech posts receive slightly more engagement compared to the overall dataset and have higher averages in total interactions.

In contrast to the data from August, 42% of hate speech posts now originate from accounts supporting the [Search for Common Ground](#) | Sudan

SAF, while only 2% come from accounts backing the RSF. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that META has been deactivating multiple RSF-affiliated accounts. A significant amount of hate speech also comes from unofficial sources, such as informal groups where users post miscellaneous content, or pages that frequently repost content to push a specific viewpoint.

These posts contain discussions about military forces, with the RSF and SAF frequently mentioned. Many of the posts address the role, actions, and misconduct of military forces during conflict. Accounts supportive of military factions receive high interactions, 46% of which are love emotions indicating that users are highly engaged with security and military issues. Discussions are mainly focused on incidents in Khartoum, with references to the Sudanese people's struggle and calls for freedom and change.

The number of posts labeled as incitement slightly decreased in September, with a total of 1.67k posts and 26k comments. Posts inciting violence tend to have lower engagement metrics across all categories compared to the overall averages. This suggests that while these posts are present, they may not resonate as strongly with the broader audience or be as widely endorsed within this community. The lower number of shares and comments potentially indicates that users are less likely to interact with content that incites violence, possibly due to differing sentiments, fear of repercussions, or platform moderation policies. However, the presence of these posts and the fact that they receive engagement at all highlight the necessity for continued monitoring and intervention efforts to curb violent rhetoric and its potential escalation.

The posts frequently refer to military forces such as 'القوات المسلحة', 'الدعم السريع', 'الجيش', and 'قوات الدعم', (military forces, the army, the rapid support, the rapid forces) as well as the Janjaweed. There are calls for action, both for and against these forces, with strong reactions to posts about military victories or mobilizations. Nationalistic discourse is also prevalent, with calls for action and liberation. The language used is often direct and aggressive, with phrases like "traitors and renegades" that may provoke hostile emotions and reactions, highlighting the power of language in inciting violence.

The page with the highest number of posts (188) inciting violence is "لا للحرب في السودان" (No to war in Sudan), though it has lower average interactions (28.31) compared to others. This group is public and has a large number of members who post frequently, which may be the reason for more voices inciting violence, despite its name. Notably, many of the top posters are 'pro-SAF'.

In the online discussions, we saw a **sharp increase in posts expressing solidarity** going from 682 posts in August to 3210 posts in September, with approximately 59.4K comments. Many of these posts express anti-war sentiment, with frequent uses of phrases like 'لا للحرب' (no to war), 'الحرب العيثية' (the senseless war). **Posts highlighting the human impact of conflict, calls for peace, or support for the marginalized resonate strongly, indicating widespread empathy or shared grievances.** Posts critically discussing leaders, policies, or aggressive acts suggest **solidarity in opposition**, possibly uniting diverse audiences against common 'adversaries.'

The top solidarity posts on the platform include a political figure discussing unity and shared goals, a report on clashes in Port Sudan, a discussion on how former residents of the capital see their homes, and two posts highlighting voices from the margin. These posts suggest ongoing efforts to foster dialogue, unity, and joint action. Unlike the other narratives, posts expressing solidarity are dominated (90%) by accounts that neither support SAF nor the RSF and that are not news outlets.

The page "لا للحرب في السودان" (No to War in Sudan) again stands out with the highest number of solidarity posts. Pages like "كلنا لجان المقاومة السودانية" (All of us are the Sudanese Resistance Committees) reflect community-based movements, indicating grassroots efforts in the solidarity narrative. "Sudanews - أخبار السودان" and similar outlets highlight the role of news and media platforms in circulating solidarity content, showcasing the influence of journalistic entities in shaping public sentiment. "dalia elthahir" shows exceptionally high average interactions, indicating a strong public resonance, likely due to personal narratives or influential commentary.

Basic Services and access

Accessibility

In Blue Nile, South Kordofan, and West Kordofan, residents predominantly report that clashes between SAF and RSF have led to the inaccessibility of certain locations. In Kassala and Gadarif States however, residents either respond with "No" or express uncertainty about the accessibility of certain areas due to the ongoing clashes.

In Blue Nile State, the SPLM Al-Hilu controlled neighborhoods in Kurmuk and the Gassan locality, which are reported as inaccessible. Similarly, specific eastern neighborhoods in Kadugli such as Talo, as well as all SPLM-occupied villages in South Kordofan, are deemed inaccessible. The Al Wahda Market in West Kordofan has also been blocked due to clashes. The SPLM still maintains control over the national road connecting Kadugli to Dilling, affecting access to primary necessity goods and people movements.

Basic services

56% of respondents have reported the inaccessibility of essential services like electricity, water, healthcare, and communication networks during the ongoing conflict. The data highlights that in the absence of government services during clashes and incidents, various actors and informal networks play a crucial role in humanitarian efforts, providing basic services to affected communities. Local community organizations (64%) and NGOs (84%) offer resources such as food, medicine, shelter, and support for IDPs, while relatives (64%) and community leaders (32%) provide material and financial assistance to those in need.

In Gadarif and Kassala, local community organizations deliver essential services, and NGOs provide vital supplies and assistance with IDP registration. In West Kordofan and Blue Nile, relatives support their families, while in South Kordofan community leaders offer meals and material support. Volunteers monitor services in accommodation centers, and religious groups contribute material support and offer prayers for peace.

Risks and Opportunities

In Blue Nile, there are several potential risks including displacement, and abandonment of areas due to lapses in security and services. There's also an escalation in decamping, which might suggest that conflict zones are expanding to more influential areas. Additional risks include the agricultural season failing, epidemics emerging, and infrastructure being destroyed.

In Gadarif, there are significant concerns that tribal divisions may lead to the disintegration of the social fabric. Moreover, there is a looming possibility of civil war, economic downturn, healthcare collapse, and disease outbreak. With government oversight lacking, the region might also witness further breakdown of the social structure, such as widespread property destruction, a rise in crime, displacement, and a surge in smuggling and child labor.

In Kassala, there's apprehension about the conflict spreading from other states, the potential division of Sudan, and rising concerns over terrorism and explosive incidents.

In South Kordofan, citizens face the dangers of injuries, displacement, and loss of property, while **in West Kordofan**, potential risks center around anticipated tensions between citizens and armed forces, which could escalate into disputes and confrontations. This could lead to further casualties, flight, and massive citizen displacements, which may be further prompted by disruptions in markets and essential services.

Across all states in the dataset, **several opportunities** emerged: supporting locally led initiatives to halt the ongoing conflict and provide assistance to civilians, including by supporting the establishment and functioning of women's networks given women's heightened vulnerability in wartime. There is also an opportunity for community-level supporting civilian advocacy in the Jeddah initiative for a Sudan peace agreement, applying international pressure on conflicting parties, and international force intervention for civilian protection. Finally, the increase in solidarity posts on social media presents an opportunity to further enhance peace narratives online.

Recommendations

- **International Advocacy for Human Rights and Aid Delivery:** Leverage the Jeddah initiative aimed at reaching a Sudan peace agreement to raise community voices for human rights, especially the rights to food, housing, medical care, and movement, and for the establishment of safe routes for the provision of essential relief. Work with international bodies to ensure that aid reaches those who need it most, despite logistical challenges.
- **Establish and Support Women's Peace Networks:** Given the heightened vulnerability of women in wartime, prioritize the establishment of women-led peace networks and support their actions. These networks can serve as platforms for women to discuss their unique challenges and come up with tailored solutions to local conflict dynamics, while also creating an opportunity to amplify their voices in ongoing peace processes and their subsequent implementation.
- **Counter Online Disinformation:** Support initiatives that incorporate fact-checking platforms, amplify peace narratives and initiatives online, provide digital literacy workshops, and/or use AI algorithms to detect manipulated recordings – with the aim to mitigate the spread of misinformation and amplify peace and solidarity narratives.

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