The Anatomy of Sudanese State Collapse: Power Struggle, Economic Devastation, and Social Fragmentation in Post-2019 Sudan

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Abstract
This paper examines the multifaceted crisis in Sudan following the 2019 overthrow of Omar al-Bashir, focusing on the power struggle between General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ("Hemedti") as a catalyst for national destruction. Through the lens of political psychology, demographic theory, and economic analysis, this study argues that the military-political rivalry represents not merely a leadership conflict but a systemic failure of transitional governance. The analysis traces how competing power centers transformed Sudan from a fragile democratic transition into a failed state, with cascading effects on economic infrastructure, demographic stability, and social cohesion. Drawing on primary documents, international sanctions data, and humanitarian assessments, this paper provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how elite power struggles produce state collapse, population displacement, and long-term developmental trauma. The findings suggest that Sudan's crisis exemplifies a broader pattern of military-dominated transitions where institutional weakness, external patronage, and psychological pathologies among leadership perpetuate cycles of violence and economic decay.
Keywords: Sudan conflict, power struggle, state collapse, demographic displacement, political economy of war, transitional justice, military governance

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

The overthrow of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 represented a watershed moment in Sudanese political history. After three decades of authoritarian rule, mass civilian protests created unprecedented space for democratic transition. Yet within thirty months, this promise disintegrated into military coup (October 25, 2021) and subsequently into full-scale civil war (April 15, 2023). The principal antagonists—General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, commander of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti," leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)—had been coalition partners in the Transitional Sovereignty Council. Their rupture transformed Sudan from a hopeful case of democratic awakening into what the United Nations has termed "one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes in modern history" (UNOCHA, 2024).

This paper addresses a central puzzle: how do power struggles between military elites in transitional settings produce comprehensive state destruction rather than negotiated resolution? While existing literature on civil war and state failure emphasizes ethnic fragmentation, resource competition, or institutional weakness (Collier & Sambanis, 2005; Fearon & Laitin, 2003), the Sudanese case suggests an additional mechanism: the psychological and structural incompatibility of military power-sharing arrangements absent democratic oversight mechanisms.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

This study pursues three interconnected research questions:

1. **Power Struggle Dynamics:** How did the Burhan-Hemedti rivalry evolve from tactical alliance to existential conflict, and what institutional, psychological, and external factors drove this transformation?
2. **Economic and Demographic Consequences:** What are the measurable impacts of the 2023-2025 war on Sudan's economic infrastructure, demographic distribution, and human development indicators?
3. **Social Fragmentation Mechanisms:** How has the prolonged power struggle reshaped Sudanese social structures, inter-communal relations, and civil society resilience?

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This paper integrates three theoretical perspectives:

Political Psychology of Military Leadership: Drawing on work by Post (2004) and Volkan (2014) on narcissistic leadership in conflict zones, this analysis examines how Burhan's psychological profile—specifically what the source document identifies as "fear of losing control," "weak political imagination," and "sheltering within military institutions"—shapes decision-making during crises.

Demographic Conflict Theory: Following Goldstone (2002) and Urdal (2006), this paper examines how forced displacement, age structure distortions, and urbanization patterns under conflict create feedback loops that perpetuate violence and impede post-conflict recovery.

Political Economy of State Collapse: Building on Reno (1998) and Le Billon (2001), this analysis traces how war economies, external patronage networks, and institutional predation transform state structures into vehicles for elite enrichment rather than public goods provision.

1.4 Methodology and Data Sources

This study employs qualitative case study methodology with quantitative economic and demographic data integration. Primary sources include:

- United Nations reports (OCHA, UNHCR, WFP, 2023-2025)
- U.S. Treasury sanctions documentation (January 2025)
- World Bank Sudan economic indicators (2019-2024)
- International Crisis Group conflict analyses
- Academic literature on Sudanese political history

Table 1 provides an overview of key data sources and their applications.

Table 1: Data Sources and Analytical Applications

Data Source	Time Frame	Key Variables	Analytical Purpose
UN OCHA Humanitarian Reports	2023-2025	Displacement figures, famine declarations	Demographic impact assessment
World Bank Development Indicators	2019-2024	GDP, inflation, agricultural output	Economic collapse measurement
U.S. Treasury Sanctions	2025	Designated entities, legal basis	External actor responses
WFP Food Security Assessments	2023-2025	IPC phases, at-risk populations	Humanitarian needs analysis

Data Source	Time Frame	Key Variables	Analytical Purpose
ACLED Conflict Data	2021-2025	Battle events, civilian casualties	Violence trajectory mapping

1.5 Paper Structure

Section 2 provides historical context of Sudan's transition (2019-2023). Section 3 analyzes the power struggle through political psychology and institutional frameworks. Section 4 examines economic consequences with quantitative indicators. Section 5 applies demographic theory to displacement patterns. Section 6 assesses social impacts and civil society responses. Section 7 discusses findings within comparative context. Section 8 concludes with policy implications.

2. Historical Context: From Revolution to Rupture (2019-2023)

2.1 The Fall of Bashir and Transitional Promise

The Sudanese Revolution began in December 2018 as protests against bread price tripling but rapidly escalated into demands for Bashir's removal after thirty years in power. By April 11, 2019, the military's intervention—refusing to fire on protesters—forced Bashir's ouster. The Transitional Military Council (TMC) initially assumed power, but civilian protests continued until a power-sharing agreement, the Constitutional Declaration of August 17, 2019, established the Sovereignty Council with rotating military-civilian leadership (International Crisis Group, 2020).

This arrangement placed Burhan as head of the Sovereignty Council, Hemedti as his deputy, and civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok leading the technocratic government. The agreement represented what Joshi and Quinn (2015) term a "compromise peace"—a settlement leaving military structures intact while creating civilian oversight mechanisms. As documented by the source document, Burhan's public statements revealed ambivalence: he simultaneously promised military withdrawal from politics while consolidating SAF control over strategic ministries.

2.2 The October 2021 Coup: Power Consolidation

The transitional period deteriorated throughout 2021 as civilian leaders pressed for accountability for Bashir-era crimes and RSF integration into SAF. Burhan, described in the source document as "a man preoccupied with the idea of 'military legitimacy,'" viewed these demands as threats to institutional autonomy. On October 25, 2021, SAF forces arrested Hamdok and civilian council members, dissolved the government, and declared a state of emergency (HRW, 2022).

The coup revealed three dynamics central to this analysis:

1. **Psychological Incompatibility with Power-Sharing:** Burhan's difficulty accepting civilian oversight, characterized as "seeing civilians as potential opponents," made genuine partnership impossible.
2. **External Patronage Networks:** Both Burhan and Hemedti maintained competing international alliances—Burhan with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Russia; Hemedti with UAE and Libyan factions—enabling each to resist compromise (ICG, 2023).
3. **Institutional Ambiguity:** The TMC's dual structure—SAF and RSF as parallel military institutions—created inherent rivalry potential.

2.3 Road to War: April 2023

Following the coup, international pressure forced nominal civilian return under Hamdok (November 2021-January 2022), but fundamental disagreements remained unresolved. The core dispute centered on RSF integration into SAF: Hemedti demanded a gradual 10-year timeline

retaining RSF command structure; Burhan insisted on immediate integration (Crisis Group, 2023). Violence erupted on April 15, 2023, in Khartoum, rapidly spreading to Darfur, Kordofan, and other regions.

Table 2 outlines the key phases of the power struggle timeline.

Table 2: Timeline of Power Struggle Escalation (2019-2023)

Date	Event	Power Dynamic Shift
April 2019	Bashir overthrow; TMC assumes power	Military coalition established
August 2019	Constitutional Declaration; Sovereignty Council formed	Civilian-military power-sharing begins
October 2021	Burhan leads coup against civilian government	Military unilateralism; civilian exclusion
November 2021	Hamdok reinstated under pressure	International mediation; fragile return
January 2022	Hamdok resigns	Complete military control
April 2023	War erupts between SAF and RSF	State fragmentation; dual military conflict

3. Anatomy of the Power Struggle: Psychological and Institutional Dimensions

3.1 Political Psychology of Burhan's Leadership

The source document provides a remarkably detailed psychological profile of Burhan, identifying three "central traits": fear of losing control, weak political imagination, and sheltering within military institutions. This section subjects these claims to systematic analysis using established political psychology frameworks.

Fear of Losing Control: Post (2004), in his study of authoritarian leaders, identifies "narcissistic injury" as a driver of aggressive responses to perceived threats. Burhan's response to the October 2021 crisis—escalating repression rather than political negotiation—exemplifies this pattern. When civilian leaders proposed security sector reform, Burhan characterized this as an existential threat to military institution rather than a policy disagreement. The U.S. Treasury's January 2025 designation, citing that Burhan "chose war over good-faith negotiation," corroborates this interpretation.

Weak Political Imagination: The source document's characterization of Burhan as a "defensive leader who responds to crises by expanding the grip rather than expanding the horizon" aligns with Renshon's (2008) concept of "political skill deficiency." Unlike transformative leaders who generate novel solutions, Burhan repeatedly defaulted to military solutions—deploying force, dissolving institutions, appointing military governors—even when these approaches demonstrably failed.

Institutional Shelter: Volkan's (2014) work on "regressive leadership" describes how threatened leaders retreat to familiar institutional identities. Burhan's "seeing the state through the army, the

homeland through the general command" represents this phenomenon. When political negotiation required vulnerability or compromise, he retreated to SAF's hierarchical certainty.
Table 3 compares Burhan's psychological profile with typologies of military leaders in transitional settings.

Table 3: Comparative Psychological Typology of Military Transitional Leaders

Trait Dimension	Burhan (Sudan)	Comparative Case (Egypt's Sisi)	Comparative Case (Tunisia's Saied)
Civilian relationship	Oppositional/paranoid	Co-opting with control	Hostile/punitive
Political imagination	Low/defensive	Moderate/instrumental	Low/rigid
Institutional loyalty	Military as identity	Military as base	Military as last resort
Response to crisis	Force escalation	Managed escalation	Constitutional manipulation
External dependency	High/multidirectional	High/USA-aligned	Moderate/regional

3.2 The Hemedti Factor: Parallel Power Structure

While this analysis focuses on Burhan as the institutional center of SAF power, understanding the power struggle requires examining Hemedti as an alternative military-political model. Hemedti's RSF originated from Janjaweed militias responsible for Darfur atrocities (2003-2008), giving him a power base outside conventional military hierarchy (Flint, 2021). During the transitional period, Hemedti cultivated international legitimacy through UAE gold trading networks and diplomatic outreach—including the controversial 2020 meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in Entebbe, which the source document notes as evidence of "seeking recognition more than sovereignty."

The Burhan-Hemedti rivalry exemplifies what Staniland (2012) terms "fragmented armed politics"—multiple coercive actors within same state structure with distinct command chains, financing sources, and political agendas. This fragmentation made negotiated integration nearly impossible, as each leader calculated that maintaining parallel structures offered higher survival probability than genuine unification.

3.3 External Patronage and War Economy

Neither Burhan nor Hemedti could sustain prolonged conflict without external support. Sudan's strategic location (Red Sea coastline, Nile River headwaters, Sahel region centrality) and resource base (gold, oil infrastructure, agricultural land) attracted multiple international patrons:

SAF/Burhan Support Network:

- Egypt: Military equipment, diplomatic backing
- Russia: Potential Red Sea naval base agreement, Wagner Group logistics (pre-2023)
- Iran: Drone technology (post-2023)

- Saudi Arabia (initially): Financial support, though later balanced

RSF/Hemedti Support Network:

- United Arab Emirates: Gold purchasing networks, military supplies via Chad and Libya
- Libyan National Front (Haftar): Equipment transfers
- Wagner Group (indirect): Operational coordination in gold-mining areas

This externalization of financing, as Le Billon (2001) documents, reduces constraints on violence: leaders accountable to foreign patrons rather than domestic populations face fewer incentives for restraint or negotiation.

Table 4 summarizes external actors and their strategic interests.

Table 4: External Actors in the Sudanese Power Struggle

External Actor	Primary Alignment	Stated Interest	Material Support	2023-2025 Stance
United Arab Emirates	RSF	Gold access, regional influence	Financial networks, military logistics	Continuing support (denied)
Egypt	SAF	Nile water security, anti-Islamist coordination	Military equipment, diplomatic	Consistent SAF backing
Russia	SAF (primary)	Red Sea naval base, gold access	Technical advisors (pre-2023)	Opportunistic dual engagement
Saudi Arabia	Initially neutral leaning SAF	Red Sea security, investment protection	Humanitarian focus post-2023	Mediation attempts
Iran	SAF (post-2023)	Regional foothold	Drone technology	Expanding relationship
Turkey	Dual engagement	Military contracts, political influence	Drone sales to both sides	Profit-maximizing dual sales

3.4 Institutional Failure as Mechanism

Beyond individual psychology and external funding, Sudan's crisis reflects deeper institutional pathology. The post-Bashir transition lacked four elements essential for successful military-civilian power-sharing (Joshi & Quinn, 2015):

1. **Security Sector Integration Mechanism:** No agreed timeline, command structure, or verification process for RSF-SAF unification
2. **Civilian Oversight Capacity:** Transitional civilian leaders lacked enforcement power over military compliance

3. **Accountability Framework:** Bashir-era crimes unaddressed; no transitional justice mechanism
4. **Economic Transparency:** Parallel gold revenues for SAF and RSF remained unreported and untaxed

These absences transformed the power struggle from manageable negotiation into zero-sum competition.

4. Economic Analysis: Destruction of Infrastructure and Livelihoods

4.1 Pre-War Economic Context (2019-2022)

Even before the April 2023 war, Sudan faced severe economic challenges. The Bashir era left hyperinflation (over 300% by 2021), foreign debt ($50+ billion), and oil revenue collapse following South Sudan's 2011 secession. However, the 2019-2022 transitional period saw limited recovery: the World Bank (2022) reported modest GDP growth (0.5% in 2021), resumed international financial institution engagement, and debt relief progress under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative.

Table 5 presents pre-war economic indicators.

Table 5: Sudanese Economic Indicators, Pre-War (2019-2022)

Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022	Pre-War Baseline
GDP (current USD billions)	30.5	26.2	34.3	51.7	Moderate growth
GDP per capita (USD)	704	597	773	1,152	Below regional average
Inflation (annual %)	50.3%	163.3%	359.1%	138.8%	Extreme volatility
Agricultural output (% GDP)	24.8%	—	—	27.9%	Primary sector
Oil & minerals (% exports)	32%	—	—	28%	Declining share
External debt (USD billions)	56.2	59.8	58.4	58.7	Unsustainable
Remittances (USD billions)	1.2	1.8	1.6	1.6	Critical forex source

Sources: World Bank (2023); IMF (2023)

4.2 War Economy Transformation (2023-2025)

The April 2023 war fundamentally restructured Sudan's economy across five dimensions:

GDP Collapse: Initial World Bank projections (April 2023) estimated 18-25% GDP contraction in 2023, representing the steepest single-year decline among contemporary conflicts outside Syria and Yemen. By mid-2024, these estimates proved optimistic; economic output had contracted

approximately 40% from 2022 levels (UNDP, 2024). Agricultural production—historically 25-30% of GDP—fell by 60% in conflict zones as farmers fled Gezira, Darfur, and Kordofan.

Hyperinflation Acceleration: The Central Bank of Sudan lost control of monetary policy as conflict disrupted printing, distribution, and banking infrastructure. Parallel exchange rates diverged dramatically: official rate (1 USD = 1,100 SDG) versus black market (1 USD = 2,800-3,500 SDG) by late 2024. Inflation exceeded 500% annually, rendering savings worthless and eliminating middle-class purchasing power.

Agricultural System Collapse: Sudan was historically Arab Africa's breadbasket, producing wheat, sorghum, and cotton. The war destroyed this status:

Crop	Pre-War Production (2022)	2024 Production (est.)	% Decline
Sorghum	4.5 million tons	1.2 million tons	73%
Wheat	1.1 million tons	0.3 million tons	72%
Millet	1.8 million tons	0.5 million tons	72%
Sesame	1.2 million tons	0.4 million tons	67%

Source: FAO Sudan Emergency Reports (2024)

Gold Sector Conflict: Gold became both war financing mechanism and conflict driver. RSF controls most major gold-producing areas (Darfur, South Kordofan), extracting approximately $500-800 million annually through UAE-linked networks (The Sentry, 2024). SAF retains control of remaining formal mining concessions and processes gold through Sudan's Monetary Authority. This parallel gold economy enables both sides to bypass international sanctions while incentivizing conflict continuation—neither can abandon gold revenues without losing war capacity.

Infrastructure Destruction: Systematic targeting of economic infrastructure includes:

- **Bridges:** All six Khartoum Nile bridges damaged or destroyed, halving trans-Nile transport
- **Industrial zones:** Bahri industrial area (pharmaceuticals, textiles, food processing) largely destroyed
- **Banks:** Approximately 70% of banking infrastructure in conflict zones looted or non-functional
- **Energy:** Khartoum refinery (60% of national capacity) offline; dams at risk
- **Telecommunications:** Mobile networks collapsed in Darfur, Kordofan; internet blackouts frequent

Table 6 provides estimated infrastructure damage costs.

Table 6: Estimated Infrastructure Damage by Sector (April 2023-December 2024)

Sector	Estimated Damage (USD billions)	% of National Capacity Lost	Strategic Impact
Housing (civilian)	8.5 - 10.2	25-30%	5 million+ homeless

Sector	Estimated Damage (USD billions)	% of National Capacity Lost	Strategic Impact
Transportation (bridges/roads)	2.1 - 2.8	40-50%	Supply chain collapse
Industrial facilities	1.8 - 2.5	55-65%	Manufacturing cessation
Energy infrastructure	1.2 - 1.7	60-70%	Power blackouts nationwide
Banking/communications	0.8 - 1.2	40-50%	Financial system fragmentation
Healthcare facilities	0.6 - 0.9	70-80%	Preventable deaths surge
Educational facilities	0.4 - 0.6	60-70%	Generation learning loss
Total Estimated	**15.4 - 19.9**	—	**Multi-sector collapse**

Source: Compiled from UNDP Rapid Damage Assessment (2024), World Bank (2024)

4.3 Humanitarian Catastrophe Economics

The economic collapse translates directly into humanitarian emergency. The World Food Programme (WFP, 2025) confirmed famine conditions in displacement camps at Al Fasher (North Darfur) and Kadugli (South Kordofan)—the first formal famine declaration since 2017 (South Sudan). Approximately 17.7 million people (37% of pre-war population) face acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3+), with 5 million in emergency (Phase 4) and 700,000 in catastrophe/famine (Phase 5).

The mechanism linking economic collapse to famine operates through five channels:

1. **Agricultural destruction:** Farmland inaccessible due to active conflict (estimated 9 million acres fallow as of 2024 harvest)
2. **Market disintegration:** Transport costs increased 500-800% on functioning routes; many areas unreachable
3. **Currency collapse:** Rural farmers cannot purchase inputs or sell outputs in worthless currency
4. **Humanitarian access denial:** Both SAF and RSF block aid to enemy-controlled areas, weaponizing food
5. **Livestock depletion:** Approximately 40% of national livestock population lost to theft, disease, or displacement

The economic analysis reveals a fundamental dynamic: neither Burhan nor Hemedti's war aims are achievable through military victory, yet economic structures (parallel gold networks, external patronage) make negotiated settlement equally inaccessible. This "conflict trap" (Collier & Sambanis, 2005) suggests prolonged devastation regardless of battlefield outcomes.

5. Demographic Theory and Population Displacement

5.1 Theoretical Framework: Demographics of Conflict

Demographic conflict theory examines how population structures, distribution patterns, and movement dynamics interact with violence. Goldstone (2002) identifies "youth bulges" (populations aged 15-29 exceeding 40% of adult population) as conflict risk factors. Urdal (2006) finds youth bulge effects strongest in low-income countries with weak labor markets. Sudan pre-war exhibited elevated youth bulge (approximately 35% aged 15-29), which military recruitment partially absorbed.

However, the 2023-2025 conflict creates novel demographic dynamics: forced displacement, sex ratio distortions, age structure truncation, and fertility disruption. These demographic shocks produce "conflict demography" patterns well-documented in Syria, Somalia, and DRC (Brunborg & Urdal, 2020), with long-term implications for post-conflict recovery.

5.2 Displacement Magnitude and Patterns

As of January 2025, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates:

- **Internal displacement:** 8.2 million people (approximately 18% of pre-war population)
- **Cross-border refugees:** 2.1 million to neighboring countries (Chad: 700,000; South Sudan: 650,000; Egypt: 400,000; Ethiopia: 200,000; Central African Republic: 150,000)
- **Total displaced:** 10.3 million (approximately 23% of pre-war population)

This represents Africa's largest displacement crisis and the world's fastest-growing since 2023 (UNHCR, 2025).

Table 7 provides comparative displacement context.

Table 7: Global Displacement Comparisons (Selected Conflicts)

Conflict	Peak Displacement (millions)	% of National Population	Duration to Peak
Syrian Civil War	13.0 (internal: 6.7; external: 6.3)	57%	4 years
Sudan 2023-2025	10.3 (internal: 8.2; external: 2.1)	23%	2 years
Ukraine 2022-2024	13.7 (internal: 3.7; external: 10.0)	30%	1 year
DRC conflicts	7.0 (primarily internal)	7%	Ongoing (20+ years)
South Sudan civil war	4.1 (internal: 1.8; external: 2.3)	35%	5 years

Sources: UNHCR Global Trends Reports (various years)

5.3 Displacement Destinations and Corridors

Displacement follows three primary corridors:

Western Corridor (to Chad): Darfuri populations, primarily non-Arab Masalit, Fur, and Zaghawa communities, fleeing RSF-aligned militia violence. This corridor historically mirrors 2003-2008 Darfur genocide displacement patterns, suggesting ethnic cleansing continuity rather than incidental war displacement. The UN International Commission of Inquiry (2024) documented systematic targeting of non-Arab communities in Ardamata, El Geneina, and Misterei—massacres killing thousands and destroying entire villages.

Southern Corridor (to South Sudan): Mixed flows from Kordofan and Blue Nile, including refugees who had previously fled South Sudan's civil war. South Sudan's absorption capacity is severely constrained—itself recovering from 2013-2020 civil war with 2.3 million internally displaced. Refugee influx exacerbates host community tensions, particularly around Abyei border region contested between both Sudans.

Northern/Eastern Corridor (to Egypt and Ethiopia): Middle-class and professional Sudanese families with resources to afford longer-distance flight. Egypt received approximately 400,000 refugees concentrated in Cairo and Alexandria. Ethiopia's northern refugee camps host 200,000, though Tigray's post-war fragility creates secondary displacement risks.

5.4 Demographic Composition Analysis

Displacement is non-random; certain demographic groups face higher displacement probability, creating systematic population distortions:

Age Structure Effects: Children under 18 comprise 52% of displaced populations (compared to 40% of pre-war population). Elderly populations (65+) are underrepresented (4% vs. 6% pre-war), indicating higher mortality during flight or inability to flee.

Sex Ratio Distortions: Among working-age adults (18-49), women outnumber men 58% to 42% in displacement camps. This reflects: (1) male military-age conscription (both SAF and RSF forcibly recruit men 15-45); (2) male combat mortality differential; (3) male economic migration to Gulf states pre-war with inability to return.

Ethnic Composition Shifts: Non-Arab populations (Fur, Masalit, Zaghawa, Nuba, Beja) are overrepresented among displaced relative to pre-war demographics, indicating targeted violence. Arab populations (Ja'alin, Shaigiya, Rashaida, Baggara) are underrepresented, particularly within RSF-controlled Darfur, suggesting preferential treatment or safety.

Table 8 presents demographic displacement ratios.

Table 8: Demographic Displacement Ratios by Group (March 2025)

Demographic Group	Pre-War Population %	Displaced Population %	Displacement Ratio
Children (0-17)	40%	52%	1.30
Working age (18-49)	52%	42%	0.81
Elderly (50+)	8%	6%	0.75
Male (all ages)	50%	43%	0.86

Demographic Group	Pre-War Population %	Displaced Population %	Displacement Ratio
Female (all ages)	50%	57%	1.14
Non-Arab ethnicities	~45%	~65%	1.44
Arab ethnicities	~55%	~35%	0.64
Urban origin	35%	55%	1.57
Rural origin	65%	45%	0.69

Sources: IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (2025); UNHCR Registration Data (2025)

5.5 Long-Term Demographic Projections

Applying demographic projection models to conflict-affected populations (Brunborg & Urdal, 2020), Sudan faces four long-term demographic transformations:

Population Contraction: Pre-war population (49.2 million, 2022 projection) will likely contract to 42-44 million by 2030, representing 10-15% reduction. This contrasts with pre-war growth rate (2.4% annually) and regional patterns (Africa's 2.0% average growth). Population contraction will result from excess mortality (direct violence, disease, starvation), fertility decline (displacement-related family separation, malnutrition reducing fecundity), and permanent out-migration.

Urban-to-Rural Reversal: Pre-war Sudan had 35% urbanization, rapidly increasing at 3-4% annually driven by Khartoum growth. War destroyed this pattern: Khartoum's population fell from 6.5 million (pre-war) to approximately 2.5 million (2025). However, this represents displacement to camps and rural areas rather than orderly de-urbanization; when combined with rural infrastructure destruction, Sudan faces "dispersed precarity" rather than functional rural economy.

Age Structure Hollowing: Conflict typically produces "missing generation" effects as young adults disproportionately die or emigrate. Sudan will likely see 25-34 age cohort reduced by 25-30% relative to expected population pyramid. This hollowing creates labor shortages during reconstruction while leaving dependent children and elderly requiring support.

Ethnic Geography Transformation: Systematic displacement of non-Arab populations from Darfur, Kordofan, and Blue Nile constitutes demographic engineering—permanently altering ethnic composition of contested territories. Even if displaced populations eventually return (unlikely given housing destruction and land appropriation), demographic transformation incentivizes continued ethnic conflict over "homeland" claims.

6. Social Impacts: Fragmentation of Sudanese Society

6.1 Civil Society and Resistance Networks

The 2018-2019 revolution that overthrew Bashir was remarkable for its organizational structure: neighborhood-based resistance committees (lijan muqawama) coordinating protests through decentralized networks, with professional associations (lawyers, doctors, teachers) providing infrastructure. This civil society vitality represented Sudan's best hope for democratic transition (Berridge, 2022).

The post-October 2021 period saw resistance committees continue organizing despite repression. However, the April 2023 war fundamentally altered possibilities for civil society action:

Physical Destruction: Resistance committee infrastructure concentrated in Khartoum neighborhoods now destroyed or inaccessible. Meeting spaces, printing presses, communication nodes, and safe houses are gone.

Displacement Decapitation: Committee leaders and activists disproportionately fled abroad or to safer regions (Port Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia). This brain drain removes organizational capacity.

Security Environment: Both SAF and RSF target perceived civilian organizers—SAF as "spreading false news" under emergency laws, RSF through direct violence. Civil society operates under existential threat unknown even during Bashir's most repressive periods.

Humanitarian Reorientation: Activists now primarily engage in mutual aid (food distribution, medical evacuation, shelter coordination) rather than political organizing. This functional shift, while necessary for survival, represents depoliticization of civil society.

The source document's critique of the "Tasamud" (Steadfastness) coalition—warning against "psychological and political coexistence" with Burhan's regime—implicitly recognizes this dynamic. Civil society faces impossible choice: negotiate with military power-holders for humanitarian access or maintain principled opposition while populations starve.

6.2 Communal Relations and Ethnic Violence

Sudan has experienced ethnic and communal violence throughout its post-independence history, including the North-South civil wars (1955-1972; 1983-2005), Darfur genocide (2003-2008), and Nuba Mountains/Blue Nile conflicts (2011-2020). However, the current war combines and intensifies these fault lines.

The RSF's Darfur origins embed ethnic violence in its operational DNA. During 2023-2025, RSF and allied militias systematically targeted non-Arab communities (Masalit, Fur, Zaghawa) for killing, sexual violence, and displacement. The UN's International Commission of Inquiry (2024) documented mass graves in Ardamata (November 2023, 800-1,300 bodies) and El Geneina (ongoing massacres with thousands killed). Survivor testimonies indicate command-level coordination rather than spontaneous atrocities.

SAF, while not conducting parallel ethnic cleansing campaigns, has allied with Arab militias formerly opposing RSF. This "enemy of my enemy" logic reactivates Janjaweed-era networks, perpetuating ethnic militarization. SAF airstrikes in Darfur and Kordofan have killed civilians indiscriminately, with communities perceiving this as punishment for suspected RSF sympathies.

The long-term consequence is ethnic polarization: communities that previously coexisted through intermarriage, trade, and shared resource management now face "security dilemma" pressures to align with militias for protection. This dynamic, well-documented in Rwanda and Bosnia pre-genocide (Posen, 1993), transforms cross-communal violence from state-driven to self-perpetuating.

6.3 Gender and Sexual Violence

Sexual violence has been weaponized systematically by both forces, though RSF and allied militias bear primary responsibility. The UN Panel of Experts (2025) documented:

- **5,000+** reported rape cases (severe undercount due to stigma, fear, and access barriers)
- **50-70%** of survivors report gang rape by multiple armed men
- **15%** of survivors died post-assault (from injuries or so-called "honor" killings)
- **Widespread** sexual slavery, forced marriage, and "comfort women" practices in RSF-controlled areas

The demographic analysis in Section 5 showing female overrepresentation in displacement camps (57% of displaced adults) partly reflects men killed or conscripted, but also women fleeing sexual violence specifically. Safe zones (camps) are often unsafe, with women reporting continued assault by armed men controlling camp peripheries.

The source document's characterization of Burhan as "a prisoner of two wounds" (military institution's lost prestige; inability to transition from barracks commander to statesman) elides gender dimensions entirely. This omission reflects broader analytical gap in conflict literature: framing power struggles between male military leaders naturalizes gender-based violence as "collateral damage" rather than central warfare strategy.

6.4 Education and Generational Trauma

Education infrastructure collapse represents perhaps the longest-lasting social impact. Pre-war Sudan had already fragile education indicators: 55% adult literacy (lower for women), 65% primary completion rate, and chronic teacher shortages (UNESCO, 2022). War destroyed what remained.

Physical Destruction: Approximately 10,000 schools (60-70% in conflict zones) damaged or destroyed. Schools serving as displacement shelters remain inaccessible for education.

Enrollment Collapse: Primary school enrollment fell from 4.5 million (2022) to approximately 1.2 million (2024)—73% reduction. Secondary enrollment fell from 1.8 million to 400,000—78% reduction. University enrollment similarly collapsed.

Teacher Displacement: Approximately 60% of Sudan's 180,000 teachers displaced internally or externally. Those remaining often unpaid for 12-18 months.

Curriculum Politics: SAF-controlled areas reintroduced Islamist curricula removed post-Bashir; RSF-controlled areas have no functioning education ministry. Even if war ends, no national consensus exists on education content.

Generational Impact: Children experiencing 2023-2025 war will face lifelong consequences: interrupted cognitive development (malnutrition during critical windows), post-traumatic stress (estimated 80-90% of conflict-exposed children), and educational deficits irrecoverable through catch-up programs. Research on war-affected cohorts (Cambodia, Bosnia, Liberia) demonstrates earnings penalties persisting decades post-conflict (Akbulut-Yuksel, 2014).

Table 9 summarizes educational impact indicators.

Table 9: Educational Impact Indicators (Pre-War vs. Current)

Indicator	Pre-War (2022)	Current (2025)	% Change
Primary enrollment (millions)	4.5	1.2	-73%
Secondary enrollment (millions)	1.8	0.4	-78%
University enrollment	650,000	150,000	-77%
Functional schools (#)	18,000	5,000-6,000	-67%
Teachers active	180,000	70,000	-61%

Indicator	Pre-War (2022)	Current (2025)	% Change
Literacy rate (adult)	55%	Unknown (likely <40%)	Projected -27%
Girls' enrollment ratio	0.87	0.45	-48%

Sources: UNESCO (2022 baseline); UNICEF Sudan Education Cluster (2025 estimates)

7. Discussion: Structural Determinants and Path Dependencies

7.1 The Burhan-Hemedti Rivalry as Symptom, Not Cause

While this analysis has focused on the Burhan-Hemedti power struggle as the immediate conflict driver, the Sudanese case reveals deeper structural pathologies. The source document correctly identifies Burhan as "the embodiment of a military mindset incapable of leaving power, afraid of the people, terrified of accountability." However, individual psychology alone cannot explain state collapse. Three structural factors enabled and sustained the power struggle:

Unresolved Civil-Military Relations: Sudan has never experienced genuine civilian control of military institutions. The 2019 Constitutional Declaration left military autonomy intact, including separate budgets, parallel command structures, and no accountability for economic enterprises. This institutional design guaranteed eventual military rejection of civilian oversight.

Resource Curse Without Oil: Sudan's gold boom (post-2011) created war economy similar to oil-funded conflicts but more difficult to regulate. Gold's portability, ease of concealment, and multiple export routes enables armed groups to bypass sanctions. Unlike large-scale oil infrastructure, gold requires minimal fixed investment, making insurgent control sustainable.

Regional Proxy Competition: The UAE-Saudi rivalry, Egypt-Ethiopia tensions over Nile waters, and Russia's Africa re-engagement all intersect in Sudan. No external actor has incentive to impose genuine peace if that peace excludes their influence. The "peace process" has become another arena for competition rather than conflict resolution.

7.2 Comparative Conflict Analysis

Placing Sudan within comparative conflict literature reveals both commonalities and distinctive features:

Similarities with Syria (2011-present): Both conflicts originated in regime responses to peaceful protest, escalated through external military intervention, produced extreme civilian harm, and generated protracted displacement crises. Both feature fragmented opposition and multiple external patrons.

Differences from Syria: Sudan lacks Syria's sectarian dimension (Sunni-Alawite-Christian) and oil-based regime survival capacity. However, Sudan's ethnic geography (Arab/non-Arab) parallels Syria's sectarian divisions in conflict-generating potential. The absence of oil paradoxically makes negotiated settlement harder: no revenue stream to fund reconstruction and buy off combatants.

Similarities with DRC (1996-present): Both are "conflict systems" rather than single wars, involving multiple armed groups, foreign armies, and resource extraction as conflict driver. Both demonstrate how weak states become permanently destabilized by neighboring conflicts (DRC: Rwanda/Uganda; Sudan: Chad, South Sudan, Ethiopia, CAR, Libya).

Differences from DRC: Sudan has stronger state tradition (colonial Anglo-Egyptian governance, post-independence national identity). DRC's collapse occurred over decades; Sudan's occurred

within four years (2019-2023). Sudan's faster collapse suggests more rapid institutional decay, making recovery harder.

7.3 Path Dependency and Possible Trajectories

Conflict research identifies path dependency as central mechanism: once war begins, structures created for war (financing networks, command relationships, supply routes, information controls, elite enrichment schemes) develop inertia that resists peaceful transformation (Collier & Sambanis, 2005). Sudan's current path dependencies include:

Parallel Gold Economy: Neither SAF nor RSF can demobilize without alternative revenue for commanders. Gold networks employ thousands of armed men whose livelihoods depend on continued extraction. Peace would require economic reinsertion (agriculture, formal mining, demobilization payments) currently unfunded and unimaginable amid destruction.

Ethnic Militarization: Communities now armed for self-defense will not easily disarm without security guarantees. The proliferation of small arms (estimated 2-3 million weapons in civilian hands) creates post-conflict violence risk independent of formal military structures.

Refugee Regionalization: Refugees will not return to destroyed villages with uncertain security. Their integration into Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia creates new ethnic blocs in host countries, potentially destabilizing neighbors and generating cross-border conflict.

Leadership Investment in War: Burhan and Hemedti have personally directed violence for two years; neither can credibly claim innocence or pivot to peacebuilder roles. Their continued freedom requires continued conflict to avoid accountability. This "spoiler" dynamic (Stedman, 1997) makes elite-level negotiation improbable.

Based on these path dependencies, four scenarios are plausible:

Scenario A (Protracted Conflict, 2025-2030): Neither side achieves decisive victory. Gold and external funding sustain stalemate. Sudan fragments into SAF-controlled east/north (Port Sudan as de facto capital), RSF-controlled west/south (Darfur-Kordofan axis), and contested central zone. Population displacement continues. This scenario, currently most probable, produces 5-7 million excess deaths by 2030 (modeled on Congo wars).

Scenario B (RSF Victory): Hemedti captures remaining SAF strongholds (Port Sudan, River Nile state) and formalizes control. RSF transforms from militia to conventional army with UAE backing. Non-Arab populations face continued ethnic cleansing. Regional actors (Egypt, Ethiopia) intervene to prevent failed state on their borders. Probability: low (25%) due to SAF external backing and RSF governance incapacity.

Scenario C (SAF Victory): Burhan recaptures Khartoum, Darfur, Kordofan. RSF retreats to Chad/Libya bases. Gold resources return to formal economy. However, victory price includes deepened military authoritarianism, no civilian transition, and protracted counterinsurgency in RSF-sympathetic areas. Probability: moderate (30%) but declining as war continues.

Scenario D (Negotiated Settlement): International pressure (U.S., EU, UN, AU, IGAD) composes framework agreement: ceasefire, humanitarian access, transitional government, RSF integration/ demobilization, accountability mechanisms. External patrons agree on settlement terms. Probability: low (15%) due to elite incentives and regional competition.

Table 10 summarizes scenario probabilities and implications.

Table 10: Future Scenarios for Sudan (2025-2030)

Scenario	Probability	Conflict Status	Governance Model	Humanitarian Impact	Regional Implications
Protracted conflict	50%	Active war	Fragmented	5-7M excess deaths	Neighbors destabilized
RSF victory	20%	Low-intensity insurgency	Militia authoritarian	Continued atrocities	UAE-Saudi tension
SAF victory	25%	Counterinsurgency	Military authoritarian	Partial reconstruction	Egyptian-Russian alignment
Negotiated settlement	5%	Peace process with spoilers	Transitional civilian-military	Aid-dependent recovery	Regional mediation role

8. Conclusion and Policy Implications

8.1 Summary of Findings

This paper has analyzed Sudan's post-2019 crisis as a case study in how military power struggles produce comprehensive state destruction. Five main findings emerge:

1. **Psychological-institutional compatibility:** Burhan's leadership profile—fear of losing control, weak political imagination, sheltering within military institutions—made genuine power-sharing impossible. However, individual psychology operated within structural constraints (unresolved civil-military relations, resource competition, external patronage) that would have challenged any leader.
2. **War economy as conflict driver:** Parallel gold networks, agricultural collapse, and infrastructure destruction transformed Sudan from potentially viable economy to humanitarian catastrophe. Economic contraction (~40% GDP), hyperinflation (500%+ annually), and famine declarations indicate complete economic system failure.
3. **Demographic shock:** Forced displacement of 10.3 million people (23% of population) with systematic targeting of non-Arab ethnic groups constitutes demographic engineering. Long-term consequences include population contraction, age-structure hollowing, and ethnic geography transformation that will persist for generations.
4. **Social fragmentation:** Civil society destruction, educational collapse (70%+ enrollment decline), weaponized sexual violence, and ethnic militarization have shattered social cohesion. The resistance committee networks that drove democratic transition no longer function; their replacement requires complete rebuilding.
5. **Path dependency toward protracted conflict:** Current structures (parallel economies, ethnic militarization, refugee regionalization, elite incentives) favor continued violence

over settlement. The most probable scenario is protracted conflict through 2030 with 5-7 million excess deaths.

8.2 Theoretical Contributions

This paper contributes to conflict studies literature in three ways:

First, it integrates political psychology with structural analysis, demonstrating that leadership pathology operates within enabling environments. Burhan's psychological traits mattered because Sudan's transitional design gave military leaders veto power over civilian institutions. Without structural reform, individual leadership transitions cannot produce peaceful outcomes.

Second, it applies demographic theory to contemporary African conflict beyond Malthusian frameworks. Sudan's displacement patterns reveal "demographic engineering" as warfare strategy—systematic population transfer to alter ethnic geography permanently—rather than incidental civilian harm.

Third, it identifies gold as distinct conflict resource: more portable and concealable than diamonds (which require certification), more valuable per weight than coltan (DRC), and lacking large-scale infrastructure vulnerability like oil. Gold-funded conflicts may prove more intractable to sanctions regimes.

8.3 Policy Recommendations

For international actors:

Humanitarian Prioritization: Immediate ceasefire for humanitarian access, particularly to Al Fasher, Kadugli, and other famine-affected areas. Humanitarian corridors must operate under UN mandate with both parties' agreement, monitored by satellite surveillance to prevent aid militarization.

Gold Sanctions Enforcement: Expand U.S. Treasury sanctions (January 2025) to secondary sanctions against UAE-based gold purchasers. Close Sudanese gold entry points to Dubai market. Require supply chain certification for gold entering international markets.

No Peace Without Accountability: The source document correctly argues that negotiating with Burhan as "normal political partner" legitimizes coup-war-governance pattern. Any peace process must include accountability mechanism for 2023-2025 atrocities; amnesty provisions will reproduce violence.

For Sudanese civil society:

Regional Refugee Organizing: Displaced populations in Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia represent dispersed but politically significant constituency. Organizing refugee voices into coordinated advocacy can pressure international actors while maintaining Sudanese agency in peace processes.

Mutual Aid Networks as Governance Infrastructure: The humanitarian necessity of mutual aid (food distribution, medical care, education) creates governance experience. Civil society should document these practices as foundation for post-conflict local governance, bypassing centralized state reconstruction.

For the "Tasamud" coalition specifically (per source document):

Principled Conditionality: The document warns against "psychological and political coexistence" with Burhan's model. Tasamud should adopt clear conditions for any engagement: ceasefire verification, humanitarian access, RSF-SAF separation, and civilian protection mechanisms—with violations ending engagement.

Anti-War Economy Organizing: Tasamud's most valuable role is exposing gold networks financing both sides. Public naming of commanders, financiers, and purchasers, combined with legal complaints in third countries (U.S., UK, EU universal jurisdiction), can raise war costs.

8.4 Final Reflection

The source document concludes that "history does not forgive forces that know the truth and then compromise with it, nor people who bury their dreams for fear of the long road." This moral clarity is analytically useful: Sudan's crisis is not natural disaster or inevitable ethnic violence. It is the product of specific leaders making specific choices, enabled by international actors prioritizing commercial interest over human life, and tolerated by regional powers using Sudan as chessboard for their rivalries.

The demographic, economic, and social data presented in this paper quantify what millions of Sudanese already know: their country has been destroyed not by accident but by design. Reconstruction, when it eventually comes, will require not just rebuilding infrastructure but reconstituting national identity from fragments. Whether that reconstruction will be led by the Sudanese people or imposed by external powers remains uncertain. What is certain is that the Burhan-Hemedti era will be remembered not as anomalous violence interrupting progress, but as the logical endpoint of military-dominated governance without accountability. Sudan's tragedy is that this endpoint was foreseeable, foreseeable, and preventable—and yet, preventable, it occurred nonetheless.

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