

South Sudan Constitutional Development: Go Slow To Go Fast

Kyle Thaller¹, Maxx Thalmann^{2*}, Mark Thaller³

^{1,2,3} Kyle's Campaigns for Change (KCC), United States

*Corresponding author: maxxthalmann@gmail.com

Abstract: Constitutional reform in post-conflict states often fails when it seeks immediate, idealized governance structures that ignore prevailing political and cultural realities that refuse to acknowledge the possibility of tolerated and/or purposeful imperfection enhances long term success. This study evaluates Incremental Constitutionalism, an incremental, feasibility-based model for South Sudan that prioritizes institutional resilience over rapid transformation. Using comparative analysis of historical constitutional evolutions and resource governance models, it identifies pathways for balancing short-term stability with long-term federalist ambitions. By centralizing control over finite resources such as oil and minerals while devolving authority over renewable assets like land and livestock, the framework fosters diversified economic growth and local investment opportunities. Preliminary assessments suggest this approach mitigates political risk, encourages sustainable development, and strengthens public trust in governance—outcomes rarely achieved under traditional reform strategies. This strategy is categorized as Go Slow to Go Fast.

Keywords: Constitution, Corruption, Economic Reform, Federalism, Novel Theory, South Sudan

1. INTRODUCTION

This presentation proposes a pragmatic approach to constitutional reform designed to foster long-term stability, economic growth, and federalism in South Sudan. Rather than pursuing a non-realistic idealized, sweeping overhaul of governance, this strategy advocates for an incremental, adaptive framework that acknowledges current political and cultural realities while laying the foundation for future prosperity all the while instilling the fundamental aspects of a federalism-based democracy.

Drawing on the evolution of the U.S. Constitution and military Special Forces doctrine, the principle of Go Slow to Go Fast serves as the central theme for incremental constitutionalism. Specifically, we propose that government leaders begin with what is politically and culturally feasible, and then strengthen institutions over time through targeted amendments and gradual decentralization. Neither the U.S. Government, NGOs, nor the United Nations have ever suggested such an approach and instead idealistically propose philosophical and ethical perfection from the onset. This past approach has, without exception failed.

A core component of this novel approach is the division of resource governance whereby the central government retains control of oil and mineral revenues—finite resources vital to immediate fiscal stability—while state governments are empowered to manage and collateralize land and livestock, South Sudan's "infinite resources." This strategy positions the States as catalysts for foreign investment in agriculture and cattle, two vastly underutilized sectors. Empowering the States to attract sustainable investment and manage resources independently promotes fiscal federalism, reduces the GDP's over-reliance upon oil, and builds the institutional groundwork for a more resilient and representative constitution.

The principles of Incremental Constitutionalism and associated socio-economic drivers were compiled and presented to the Minister of Federal Affairs, Republic of South Sudan on May 11, 2025. This same presentation was later provided to the Institute for Scientific and Engineering Research (ISER) for review and approval, and was subsequently presented at the International Conference on Conflict Resolution and

Peace Studies on August 1, 2025. The following sections include this reviewed/approved presentation without modification.



Figure 1. Presentation Introduction (Thaller et al., 2025)

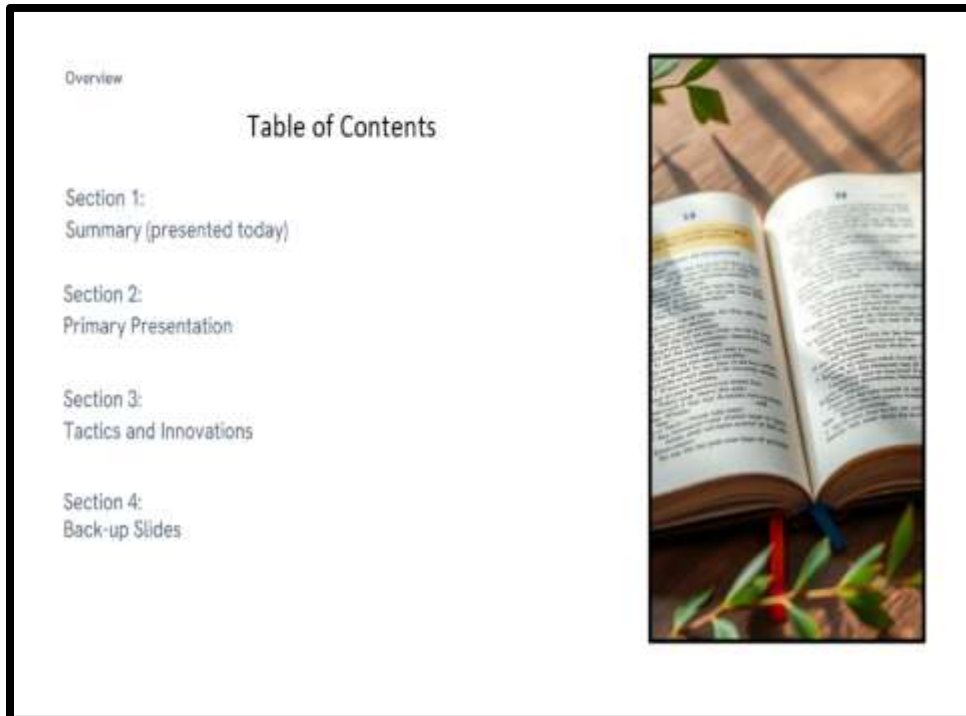


Figure 2. Presentation Table of Contents (Thaller et al., 2025)

2. FIVE KEY POINTS TO SUCCESS IN SOUTH SUDAN

The reform blueprint is anchored in five mutually reinforcing priorities. First, incremental constitutional change emphasizes gradual reform that secures elite consent and political feasibility. Second, agricultural and cattle development seeks to leverage South Sudan's underutilized economic assets to diversify revenue and create livelihoods. Third, state empowerment to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) involves decentralizing authority over land and livestock to foster local accountability and reduce investor risk. Fourth, centralized oil control ensures that the central government retains oversight of the country's primary revenue stream, maintaining stability while laying the groundwork for future decentralization. Finally, the Go Slow to Go Fast methodology embodies a long-term, sequenced approach to reform, privileging legitimacy and sustainability over rushed, fragile outcomes. Together, these five points form the conceptual core of the proposed constitutional and economic reform strategy.



Figure 3. Presentation Overview (Thaller et al., 2025)

3. INCREMENTAL CONSTITUTIONALISM (FIGURE 4)

A central insight is that sweeping, externally driven constitutional reforms are unlikely to succeed in South Sudan because they lack domestic legitimacy. Instead, the blueprint advocates Incremental Constitutionalism: implementing changes that are politically feasible today, even if imperfect, and leaving space for refinement over time.

This approach draws on lessons from comparative constitutional development. The U.S. Constitution, for example, evolved from the flawed Articles of Confederation, and has since undergone 27 amendments. The

iterative nature of constitutionalism demonstrates that long-term legitimacy is built through gradual adaptation rather than through immediate perfection.

The notion of accepting a degree of imperfection in pursuit of justice, civil rights, and other noble objectives is discussed in detail by Thaller (2017) in “Corruption, Culture, Context, & Killing: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Effects of Corruption upon Lethality and Feelings of Insecurity in Regions of Extreme Conflict”. Neither the United Nations, the U.S. Department of State, nor other NGOs have yet to publicly adopt an approach other than perfection. Although admirable, such approaches have never worked in the past and are unlikely to work in South Sudan, either.

The infographic is titled "Incremental Constitutionalism" and is divided into three main sections, each with a small icon and a brief description:

- Incremental, Adaptive Change:** Start with a simple, passable constitution, accepting imperfection. Use amendments and phased reforms to gradually strengthen governance and institutions. Initial constitution to provide a framework without contradicting a future, long term potential amendment or objective.
- Balancing Interests for Stability:** Maintain central control of oil and extraction resources (finite) to secure current leaders' support, while planning a gradual shift of revenue to states over time.
- Empowering States and Communities:** Provide States constitutional rights to manage land for infinite resources (excludes extraction resources) and to collateralize land for external investment and accountability.

At the bottom, a box states: "Primary Basis for Incremental Constitutionalism: Thaller, 2017; Spring-2020 U.S. Senate Pages, 2020; Thaller, 2023". To the right of the text is a photograph of a man in a dark suit celebrating with his arms raised, holding a South Sudanese flag, surrounded by a crowd of people also holding flags.

Figure 4. Incremental Constitutionalism (Thaller et al., 2025)

4. GO SLOW TO GO FAST: A PROVEN METHOD OF SUCCESS (FIGURE 5)

The Go Slow to Go Fast methodology applies incrementalism to the South Sudanese context. The phrase captures the paradox that by deliberately moving cautiously in the short term, reformers can accelerate institutional consolidation over the long term.

This principle has proven effective both in politics and in military strategy. In U.S. history, the protracted process of drafting, amending, and institutionalizing the Constitution ultimately produced a stable governing framework. In military doctrine, this principle provides a foundation to operations where initial caution and purposeful delay enables and/or enhances long-term success. Applied to South Sudan, the lesson is that constitutional reform must prioritize stability and legitimacy before deeper transformations can occur. Similarly, such reform is required to tacitly endorse compromise by acknowledging a degree of non-perfection. Taking small steps towards long term success requires patience and an acceptance that the long-term goals are worth waiting for.

Summary

Go Slow to Go Fast: A Proven Method of Success

- Go Slow to Go Fast essentially means that one should not rush to make everything “perfect” all in one go; Hence, our proposed *Incremental Constitutionalism* approach.
- A great example of this proven method of success in government is the U.S. Constitution
 - Initial drafts of Articles of Confederation gave almost all power to the states and left the central government extremely weak and ineffective.
 - Initial government lasted for 11 years until calls were made for a new constitution
 - The U.S. Constitution has had 27 amendments over 200 years
- Although it was a slow process, the final product of the U.S. Constitution represents the foundation of the most powerful country in the world.
- Most importantly, this NEVER would have been accomplished if we had tried to make it perfect all at once.
- “Go Slow to Go Fast” can be utilized by South Sudan to harness its political, economic, and military potential.

Figure 5. Go Slow to Go Fast Historical Context (Thaller et. al., 2025)

5. AGRICULTURE AND CATTLE (FIGURE 6)

Agriculture and cattle are South Sudan’s most underutilized assets. Cattle, in particular, serve not only as wealth but also as the primary source of intercommunal conflict. The majority of the people of South Sudan subsist as farmer or as pastoral (e.g., cattle) activities. However, unlike the remainder of the world, cattle are retained forever and serve as a form of currency as well as source of subsistence. As a result, the cattle’s need for grazing often requires far-ranging movement that damages farmers’ efforts. Each family’s need to watch over the cattle also impedes upon children attending school. In short, South Sudan’s greatest resource is also the source of its problems.

Formalizing cattle through the creation of a **cattle bank** could redefine livestock as collateral, freeing land for cultivation while creating new industries such as leather processing and meat exports. Large collectives would be formed every few thousand square miles and serve as holding areas for thousands of prime cattle. The owners of the cattle would be able to “withdraw” some cattle, as needed for ceremonial purposes. However, the hundreds of thousands of cattle collectively owned by these people would be slaughtered and monetized. The Cattle Bank model is not unlike standard banking whereby only a fraction of the bank members’ deposits is actually held in the bank; the remainder is invested.

Economic modelling suggests that these industries could potentially quadruple national revenue and create millions of jobs. Moreover, by reducing disputes over land and water, cattle banking would help resolve one of the most persistent drivers of interethnic violence. Assigning constitutional authority over agriculture

and cattle to the states would further ensure localized control, fostering accountability and reducing bureaucratic barriers for investment.



Figure 6. Agriculture and Cattle (Thaller et al., 2025)

6. STATES TO CATALYSE FOREIGN INVESTMENT (FIGURE 7)

Decentralized management of agriculture and cattle would empower states to attract foreign direct investment. By granting states authority to collateralize land and livestock resources, investors could negotiate directly with subnational governments, thereby reducing regulatory risk and increasing transparency.

This arrangement would promote **localized growth**, as states develop tailored strategies for leveraging their agricultural potential. It also supports the emergence of **fiscal federalism**, with state-level economies contributing more equitably to national GDP. Over time, this model would balance the fiscal relationship between Juba and the states, strengthening both accountability and resilience.



Figure 7. States to Catalyze Foreign Investment (Thaller et al., 2025)

7. OIL AND EXTRACTION INDUSTRIES CONTROLLED BY THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT (FIGURE 8)

Oil remains the backbone of South Sudan's economy. Under the proposed model, the central government should retain control over oil revenues in the short term, ensuring elite buy-in and reducing fears of secession. However, over a time horizon of 10–15 years, revenues should be gradually shared with the states as they develop the administrative and fiscal capacity to manage their own resources.

This approach requires the adoption of a Go Slow to Go Fast mentality as well as an associated tolerance for a moderate degree of corruption. The pursuit of peace and stability concurrent with a perfect constitution with 100% justice for 100% of the people is a noble objective. However, the endorsement of such activities by the United States and other foreign actors has been the primary reason for ongoing war, death, corruption, and despair in South Sudan. Allowing the oil industries to be controlled by the central government while focusing on agriculture and cattle within the state governments is a crucial step towards peace, even though it relinquishes the bulk of the current revenue to people and entities that many might otherwise choose to exclude.

This sequencing allows for a phased transition: as oil reserves decline, agriculture and cattle revenues will provide a sustainable alternative foundation for national growth. In time, South Sudan could fulfill John Garang's vision of becoming the breadbasket of Africa and the Middle East.



Figure 8. Oil and Extraction Industries Controlled by Central Government (Thaller et al., 2025)

8. CONCLUSION

The principles of Incremental Constitutionalism and Go Slow to Go Fast demonstrate that gradual, adaptive constitutional reform and an associated tolerance for a moderate degree of cultural tolerance despite such tolerance being otherwise branded as corruption can prevent the repeated failures of sweeping overhauls, reduce the risk of renewed conflict, and create space for consensus-building. Short-term federal

control over oil and mineral revenues provides immediate fiscal stability, while long-term state authority over land and livestock enables agricultural investment, economic diversification, and local empowerment.

By integrating pilot programs, rebranding reforms, and patronage-based incentives, this approach facilitates gradual adoption of difficult changes. Citizen scorecards, local monitoring, and transparency mechanisms ensure accountability, strengthen trust, and amplify community voices in governance. Equitable revenue sharing between federal and state governments underpins stability, fosters investment, and drives sustainable growth. Together, these measures create the institutional groundwork for a resilient constitution and enduring peace.

Building on this framework, the following steps are recommended:

- **Pilot Implementation:** Launch targeted pilot programs to test incremental reforms at the state level before nationwide adoption.
- **Institutionalization of Oversight:** Develop citizen scorecards, monitoring committees, and transparency platforms to formalize community engagement.
- **Phased Resource Governance Reform:** Maintain federal control over finite oil and mineral revenues in the short term while expanding state-level authority over renewable resources.
- **Capacity Building for States:** Provide technical assistance to enable states to attract and manage agricultural and livestock investment.
- **Roadmap to Peace:** Use the blueprint to convene a Constitutional Convention, draft a representative constitution, and lay the foundation for credible elections and lasting peace.

This pragmatic, phased approach aligns political realities with long-term national aspirations, offering South Sudan a viable path toward stability, prosperity, and democratic governance. The authors provided comments on the draft Constitution Blueprint to the Minister of Federal Affairs (MoFedA) privately on May 10, 2025 (Thaller, 2025). This advice and the corresponding document are proprietary to the Republic of South Sudan and are not shared as part of this publication. However, most notably and to the authors' surprise and immense pride the South Sudan Ministry of Federal Affairs published the final document, "South Sudan Federal Blueprint" on July 30, 2025 and formally acknowledging our assistance.

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