"We changed the laws":

electoral practice and malpractice in Sudan since 1953[1]

Justin Willis and Atta el Battahani

In 1983, a presidential referendum in Sudan returned the incumbent, Gaafar Nimeiri, to office further term in office.[2] Behind the press reports of an overwhelming turnout of voters and almost unanimous support was a rather different reality, as one former administrator recalled:

> In the same elections, there was the Minister of Education and he was in charge of the whole Northern Region, and I was one of the administrators working with him.. . . . He called me one day and said " Mohammed! there are some polling stations where the voting percentage is less than 90%. . We ...all the regional supervisors are competing ..that we have to reach 96 %... so every one of us wants his province to be over 96%! " I said " How can I do that, the election's finished?" . . . He told me that the laws are made by the Revolution Command Council, and they changed the law.. .[3]

Mohammed, in turn, had called in his subordinates, and explained to them that the law had been changed and they needed to collect more votes. They returned within hours, ballot boxes full; when he asked how it was that they had managed to collect votes so quickly from

[2] See the newspaper coverage in, for example, *As-Sahafa*, 17 Apr. 1983; and the 'results' in the same paper on 30 Apr. 1983.
[3] Interview, Mohammed Sharif Fadhul, Khartoum, 24 Feb. 2009.

polling stations which were more than a day's travel away, they replied – 'we also changed the laws!'

This anecdote of electoral failure immediately evokes some of the multiple spectres which hang over the elections planned for Sudan in 2010. Conceived as one of the most important milestones of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), these elections were intended to help ensure a lasting and peaceful settlement to the conflict in southern Sudan. This aim can be readily located in a pervasive international logic which sees the secret ballot as the key to political transformation, possessed of an almost magical force to end conflict and deliver just government, and it has been suggested that these elections were inserted into the process at the insistence of the international sponsors of the CPA.[4] Yet Mohammed's story recalls a recent history of state-ordered malpractice and official connivance, of elections which are no more than sham; in this more immediate context, how can elections be a success? Sudan has had many elections over the last six decades; none has produced a government which has been both widely accepted and stable. This paper explores the history of elections by secret ballot in Sudan since the 1950s, to try and identify how these have all – in different ways – been problematic, and to consider what this history may reveal about the likely outcomes of the planned election.

Studying elections

In Sudan, as elsewhere in Africa, elections with adult suffrage and a secret ballot were innovations of the last years of colonial rule. The sudden rise of the secret ballot to centrality in the political system was partly the result of the demands of nationalist politicians – who saw the secret ballot in itself as a mark of responsible nationhood, and a battering ram against the last redoubts of colonial rule. But these elections were also the

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[4] For critical comment on this notion, see L. Whitfield and A. R. Mustapha, 'Conclusion: the politics of African states in the era of democratisation', 225-226, in A.R. Mustapha and L. Whitfield (eds), *Turning Points in African Democracy* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY, James Currey, 2009), 202-227. The role of the international sponsors in insisting on elections in Sudan is suggested by J. Young, 'Sudan IGAD Peace Process: an Evaluation', (unpublished, 2007, available at URL: http://www.sudantribune.com/IMG/pdf/Igad_in_Sudan_Peace_Process.pdf), 30-31; but *cf* Young's earlier suggestion that international sponsors had little interest in elections and that it was the ruling National Congress Party who wanted them: J. Young, 'Sudan: a flawed peace process leading to a flawed peace', 106, *Review of African Political Economy* 103 (2005), 99-113.

last and most ambitious disciplinary project of the colonial state, a final exercise in listing, queuing and counting.[5]

The post-colonial chronology of Sudan's elections has been a little atypical, in African terms, as will be detailed below; but here as elsewhere there have been both multi-party and single-party elections, bombastic announcements of overwhelming turnouts in single-candidate polls and, sometimes, lively local competition for votes. And in Sudan, as elsewhere, the holding of elections by secret ballot has been partly the consequence of external pressure and of a reflexive mimesis: as the Chair of Sudan's Election Commission told the public in 1958 'the yes of the world are upon you'.[6]

Studies of elections across the continent have also explored the role of elections in constructing and maintaining networks of clientelism or purging members of the ruling group who have fallen from favour.[7] In arguing a deep history of electoral behaviour in Africa some have implied that all methods of elections are somehow similar, and that the secret ballot is no more than a means to deal with larger numbers.[8] But elections by secret ballot are different. As Tom Young has noted, the use of the secret ballot has not been solely a result of direct external pressure, or the pursuit of tactical political ends; it has been bundled up with the wider project of modernity and development to which most post-colonial African states have been rhetorically committed - however illusory that project may have proven.[9] Studies have repeatedly suggested the secret ballot has been seen – even by the most authoritarian regimes – as a source of legitimacy;[10] Young argues that the secret ballot had that potential power because it offers - for some, at least - an imaginary ideal, the performative enactment of the relationship between the modern, organizing

[5] F. Hayward, 'Introduction', 7, in F. Hayward (ed.), *Elections in Independent Africa* (Boulder, CO and London, Westview, 1987) , 1-23.

[6] Text of public address, 25 Feb. 1958, National Record Office, Khartoum (NRO), ELECOM (2) 1/3/20.

[7] M. Cowen and L. Laakso, 'Elections and election studies in Africa', in M. Cowen and L. Laakso (eds), *Multi-Party Elections in Africa* (Oxford, James Currey, 2002), 1-26; Whitfield and Mustapha, 'Conclusion', 220-21.

[8] Hayward, 'Introduction', 5-6; Cowen and Laakso, 'Elections and election studies', 3..

[9] T. Young, 'Elections and electoral politics in Africa', *Africa*, 63 (1993), 299-312. The same basic point was made by one of the first studies of elections in Africa: W.J.M. Mackenzie and K. Robinson, 'Introduction', 1, in W.J.M. Mackenzie and K. Robinson (eds), *Five Elections in Africa. A group of electoral studies* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960), 1-5.

[10] Hayward, 'Introduction', 14, 17; Cowen and Laakso, 'Elections and election studies', 24..

state and the disciplined individual rational citizen; the secret ballot is, in this sense, a grand venture in the modern state project which Timothy Mitchell has called 'enframing'. [11] Recent historical/ethnographic work on the secret ballot has similarly stressed the way that electoral performance has been seen as a tool to remake political subjectivities. People are listed, marshalled, identified; and then they are presented with a single moment of political choice, in which they are demonstratively separated from kin and neighbours, from sheikh and priest, landlord and employer.[12] It is an approach which has some resonance – though in very different language - with Staffan Lindberg's suggestion that the secret ballot helps to embed new forms of political practice.[13] In Sudan, as elsewhere, elections by secret ballot have been held because at least some Sudanese have seen them as part of this state project, a performance aimed not at an external audience but at the Sudanese populace themselves.

But commitment to this ideal varied, and this paper will argue that understanding the history of the secret ballot in Sudan entails some unpacking of the complex bundle of interests and processes that we call, summarily, 'the state'. Elections', as Mackenzie and Robinson understatedly put it, 'are administratively complex'. [14] In focussing in particular on the detail of this complexity – on what actually happened in the registration process, and in the polling booth – the paper will draw attention to the particular position and interests of administrative officials, as distinct from the politicians whose doings have been the usual focus of electoral studies. In Sudan, the self-conscious awareness of an administrative cadre that they were the embodiment of a modern, national state was immensely important; for them the disciplinary national project of the election was a central part of their duty. Yet their desire to realize the electoral ideal has always been thwarted: by the immense challenges of the operation in a country as large as Sudan, and by political conflicts which in themselves were partly the product of this group's narrow vision of the modernizing

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[11] T. Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley, CA, University of California, 1991), esp. 34-62.

[12] See for example, R, Bertrand, J.-L. Briquet and P. Pels, 'Introduction: towards a historical ethnography of voting', in R. Bertrand. J.-L. Briquet and P. Pels (eds), *Cultures of Voting: the hidden history of the secret ballot* (London, Hurst, 2007), 1-15; also P. Pels, 'Imaginer les elections: modernité, mediation et vote secret au Tanganyika à la fin de la période coloniale', *Politique Africaine,* 83 (2001), 135-50.

[13] S. Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections in Africa* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 19-20

[14] Mackenzie and Robinson, 'Introduction', 4.

nation.[15] In northern Sudan, the secret ballot has been undermined by the chronic political rivalry between Muslim sectarian leaders (who have often enlisted ethnic sentiments in their struggles);[16] in the south, the secret ballot has been tarnished by its association with an authoritarian and violent state.[17] But elections have also been undermined from within; administrators in Sudan have shared the sense of some politicians that while the secret ballot may be a powerful disciplinary tool, care must be taken lest its unpredictable results endanger the project of modernity itself, by handing power to an uneducated rural mass.[18] And so they have acquiesced in formal arrangements, and extra-legal behaviours, that have added to an impression of state partiality.

The gloomy tone of many studies of elections in Africa has been informed by a belief that cheating has reduced the process to "kangaroo" elections, sham events which satisfy international opinion but offer no real change;[19] Paul Collier's recent work has argued that the secret ballot in poor countries increases violence, because voters are driven by ethnic sentiment, and elites cheat.[20] Clearly, elections have not helped to transform the relationship between citizen and subject in Sudan, but this paper argues that cheating by 'politicianshas not been the only problem. In a very large country with poor communications, where much of the population is unused to the routinizing disciplinary processes of bureaucracy, it is not cheap or easy to perform all the multiple procedures of the secret ballot to a consistent standard. The Sudanese state has always been short of

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[15] For the narrowness of the particular modernizing project of post-colonial Sudan see, most recently, H. Sharkey, 'Arab identity and ideology in Sudan: the politics of language, ethnicity and race', *African Affairs*, 107 (2008), 21-43; also A.M. Lesch, *The Sudan: contested national identities* (Bloomington, IN and Oxford, Indiana University Press and James Currey, 1998); A. Idris, *Conflict and Politics of Identity in Sudan* (New York and Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 43-56.

[16] G. Warburg, *Islam, Sectarianism and Politics in Sudan since the Mahdiyya* (London, Hurst, 2003), 142-221.

[17] P. Bechtold, 'More turbulence in Sudan: a new politics this time?', 6-10, in J. Voll (ed.), *Sudan: state and society in crisis (*Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1991), 1-23*;* Atta el-Battahani, 'Multi-party elections and the predicament of northern hegemony in Sudan', 272, in Cowen and Laakso, *Multi-Party Elections in Africa,* 251-77

[18] See for example the views of Sadiq al-Mahdi, twice prime minister, cited in Warburg, *Islam, Sectarianism and Politics*, 224.

[19] S. Adejumobi, 'Elections in Africa: a fading shadow of democracy?', *International Political Science Review*, 21 (2000), 59-73.

[20] Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places* (New York and London, Harper, 2009), 20-40

skilled personnel, and of other resources and. where resources and time are short, performance can slip easily into pretence.   This paper will suggest that elections by secret ballot can in such circumstances become the exact inverse of their idealization – serving as demonstrations of the partial, corrupt and incompetent nature of power, demoralizing and discrediting officials and providing an opportunity for the assertion of the continued vitality of collective ties of religion and ethnicity.

Electoral studies have noted a tendency for international observers to be inordinately impressed by visible evidence of the performance of some processes of the secret ballot.[21] This paper will argue that in the case of Sudan's multi-party elections, problems have been partly masked by observers who, impressed by the absence of the flagrant cheating which characterized Nimeiri's referenda, were inclined to gloss over problems of procedure. This was true of both diplomats (who were, for example, cheerfully upbeat about the 1968 election despite the tiny turnout in southern Sudan and the murder of the leader of the largest southern party by the army during the campaign) and of academics, some of whom displayed a sort of condescending indulgence (praising the 'remarkable performance' of elections while noting almost in passing that problems of transport made it impossible for some officials to keep to timetables for registration and polling in rural Sudan).[22] The uncritical attitude of these observers reflected – and was no doubt partly driven by – the very strong sense that elections had come to be seen as a display of international respectability; a test which had to be passed for a new nation to be taken seriously.[23]

Learning to vote: the elections of the 1950s

The comparatively rapid adoption of the secret ballot in Sudan was driven by the complex political rivalries of its colonial rulers, Egypt and Britain. Each sought to win the support of the educated Sudanese elite with concessions, including the ballot; in consequence, Sudan

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[21] G. Geisler, 'Fair? What has fair got to do with it? Vagaries of election observers and democratic standards', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 31 (1993), 613-37

[22] British diplomats' enthusiasm for the 1968 election was expressed for example in Griffiths to Sindall, 4 May 1968, The National Archives, Kew (TNA) FCO 39/185. For sympathetic academic accounts, see H. Gosnell, 'The 1958 elections in the Sudan', *The Middle East Journal*, 12 (1958), pp. 409-17; Leo Silberman 'The rise and fall of democracy in the Sudan', *Parliamentary Affairs,* 12 (1958), 349-76;P. Bechtold, *Politics in the Sudan* (New York, Praeger, 1976), 146, 172.

[23] Bechtold, *Politics in the Sudan*, 141; Bechtold also gives an extract from a newspaper report, authored by Basil Davidson, which evidences this sympathetic and uncritical attitude.

became independent of both powers in 1956, after a 'self-government election' at the end of 1953.[24] The election, held very largely by secret ballot (against the wishes of some British officials) manifested several characteristics which were to be enduring. Principal among these was the sense that the secret ballot was a mark of political maturity, and that election by secret ballot was an existential test of nationhood; if Sudanese administrators could run such an election, and Sudanese people vote in it, then Sudan had proved its readiness for independence. As one politician put it 'when the eyes of the whole world are focussed towards our country, it is our duty to prove that we can govern ourselves'.[25] The 'committees' of administrators and other public servants who ran the election were explicitly driven by this sense of national duty, proudly reporting how 'calm' and 'orderly' the polls were; symptomatically, in some constituencies the end of the ballot saw self-congratulatory celebrations, not for the winning candidates but for electoral officials.[26] It was this shared experience of the election which helped give Sudan's parliament the confidence to declare independence two years later – even though the majority of its members had been elected on the basis of a nominal commitment to union with Egypt.

The second characteristic was a sense among officials that the overall electoral performance was more important than whether or not particular people, or groups, could actually exercise their right to vote. Exasperated by the constant complaints of British officials that rural Sudanese – and especially southern Sudanese – might be unable to participate properly in elections by secret ballot, the chair of the international Mixed Electoral Commission which was supervising the process wrote that 'the Commission recognizes that in the conditions prevailing in the south, there is a risk that elections held under any procedure might not be an unqualified success . . . it will not improve matters, however, if

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[24] Justin Willis, '"A model of its kind": the Sudan self-government election of 1953', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35 (2007), 485-502.

[25] *Al Rai al 'Amm*, 24 Nov. 1953; Siddiq al Mahdi to Sukumar Sen, Electoral Commission, 5 Oct. 1953, National Record Office, Khartoum (NRO), Elecom (1) 10/2/4. That the secret ballot showed political maturity was a point made explicitly by Sudanese politicians: see for example El Amin bin Feki, President, National Unionist Party (NUP) Dilling to Electoral Commission, 8 June 1953, Elecom (1) 2/2/9.

[26] Election Committee Tonj to Electoral Commission, 18 Nov. 1953, NRO Elecom (1) 2/7/25. For descriptions of 'calm' polls, see for example Chief Election Officer Khartoum to Electoral Commission, 9 Aug. 1953, NRO Elecom (1) 2/2/9; Secretary, Electoral Commission to all Chief Election Officers, 22 June 1953, NRO Elecom (1) 2/4/13. For descriptions of polling see telegram, Returning officer Singa to Electoral Commission, 23 Nov. 1953 and telegram Returning Officer Suki to Electoral Commission, 18 Nov. 1953, NRO Elecom (1) 2/7/26.

responsible officials go on repeating time after time that elections cannot be held properly.'[27] The message was clear – elections must be held, even if some people would be excluded from them. For the same reason, the Commission turned a blind eye to the many complaints received from all sides about electoral malpractice – notably the use of bribes and official intimidation - because they feared that rigorous investigation or punishment might lead one party or another to denounce the whole process.[28] Just making sure that the election happened became the most important goal of the Commission.[29]

This willingness to accept the exclusion of large numbers of potential voters was the corollary of a kind of political elitism which was built into the 1953 elections, and was itself reflective of the 'bifurcation' of the colonial state.[30] Ninety-two seats in parliament were elected by 'territorial constituencies', with adult male suffrage; these had an average population of around 100,000 each. There were an additional five seats for the 'graduates' constituency', which offered additional representation to those who had completed secondary education; in total, just over 2,400 graduates registered to vote in this constituency. This additional representation drew on imperial precedent – university seats in the UK had only recently been abolished – but it also reflected the acute sense among educated Sudanese that they were a small minority, with special rights and duties: 'Educated people are guided more by their ideas than the various sects . . . [the graduate vote] sets up a genuinely intellectual support – and the most honourable of all – for the coming Parliament'.[31] The fear among the educated that the universal franchise might hand power to sectarian or tribal leaders who could command the votes of large numbers of uneducated followers, was to be a constant factor in the politics of independent Sudan; and

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[27] Sukumar Sen to Beaton, 18 Oct. 1953, NRO Elecom (1) 10/2/4.

[28] Willis, '"A model of its kind"'. For some examples of allegations, see Secretary General, Umma Party to Electoral Commission, 15 Oct and 11 November 1953 Elecom (1) 11/7/37; Hassan Abdel Gader, Secretary NUP El Obeid branch to Electoral Commission, 4 Oct 1953, Elecom (1) 2/4/12; Bell, Acting Civil Secretary to Inspector-General, Egyptian Irrigation Department, 22 Aug. 1953, Elecom (1) 10/2/4. The whole of file Elecom (1) 10/3/10 is devoted to one particular instance of intimidation of a potential candidate by a British DC.

[29] A point made explicitly by the Chair of the Electoral Commission: Sukumar Sen to Beaton, 5 Oct. 1953, Elecom (1) 10/2/3.

[30] M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press,, 1996).

[31] Secretary, Maahad Graduates Club to Electoral Commission, 6 May 1953, Elecom (1) 2/7/54.

a series of systems were to be devised to give special weight to the votes of the 'modern'.[32] That the graduates saw themselves as a group with particular political rights and responsibilities was clear from the very high turnout for the graduates' constituency, of around 80%; by contrast, the territorial constituencies saw a much lower turnout.[33]

The sense that elections were a national duty was even more evident in the election of 1958. The Chairman of the Election Commission which supervised the process was the senior civil servant who had been secretary to the Mixed International Commission of 1953; he wrote to his subordinates that

> I on behalf of all the Commission wish you and all your officials the best in the great task that lies ahead . . . we are all confident that we shall in future look back with pride to the great achievements and service you have all rendered this country.[34]

His Commission bombarded its staff with telegrams and directives which exhorted them to register as many voters as possible and set out how every step of the election should be handled (with detailed lists of required items for polling stations) and told them that 'You must satisfy yourselves that the voters are keeping order and are forming themselves into a smart queue'.[35] There is no doubt that the Election Commission took its job seriously; so much is clear from the barely-suppressed outrage in its final report over the gerrymandered constituency boundaries which were imposed on it by the government.[36] But its directives were simply impossible to follow and so, ironically, had the effect of encouraging deviation from process.[37]

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[32] El-Battahani, 'Multi-party elections', 263.

[33] It is difficult to give a national turnout figure because of the use of indirect voting in some seats; but in Khartoum, for example, less than 50% of those registered actually turned out to vote in 1953: figures from Sudan Government, *Final Report of the 1953 Electoral Commission* (Khartoum: Sudan Government, 1954), appendices.

[34] Hassan Ali Abdallah to all Chief Election Officers, 24 Feb. 1958, NRO Elecom (2) 1/3/20.

[35] Secretary, Election Commission to all Chief Election Officers, 1 Nov. 1957, NRO Elecom (2) 1/3/18; Directive No. 13, 6 Jan. 1958, NRO Elecom (2) 1/4/26

[36] Government of Sudan, *Election Commission's Final Report* (Khartoum: Republic of Sudan, 1958), 9-10; also Bechtold, *Politics in the Sudan*, 195 and A. Abushouk, *Al Intikhabat al Barlamaniyya fi as Sudan* (Omdurman, Karim al Mirghani Centre, 2008), 82.

[37] Both Bechtold, *Politics in the Sudan*, 173 and Gosnell, 'The 1958 parliamentary elections', 409, lavished praise on the detailed nature of the directives.

At the root of this developing disconnection between an elaborate fantasy of precise directives and a reality of inconsistent or chaotic process lay a lack of resources. Although the Election Commission was able to call on the labour of several thousand local government officers and teachers, there were not enough educated staff to cover the whole of this vast country. Registering and polling teams had to move around, collecting names and votes over an extended period - but there was not enough transport.[38] Returning officers were told that they must hold 'rehearsals':

> Ensure that candidates, their agents or polling agents also attend rehearsals. Exhibit widely Election Films at these rehearsals. Rehearsals will be of no use unless they are held two or three times weekly. All Presiding and Polling Officers must compulsorily attend these rehearsals.[39]

 Three weeks before the elections, they were told that rehearsals should henceforth be daily.[40] But in rural constituencies scattered staff could not be brought together in advance – because they had other jobs, and there was no transport; and anyway there were few copies of the films, and even fewer mobile cinemas.[41] The film shows were a kind of double administrative fantasy: an acted display of order, which officials were directed to show even though it was impossible for them to do so. In a more plaintive moment, the Chair of the Election Commission wrote that 'It is sincerely hoped that the whole election will work as nicely as it was planned on paper.'[42]

It did not, and the disparity in electoral experience already suggested by the 1953 statistics became more acute as a result. Where the state was at its strongest, in the riverain north – where there were trained staff, and vehicles, and where education levels among the population were also higher – both registration and turnout were good, encouraging a profound self-congratulation among officials: 'we must thank the Election Commission for the honour it bestowed on us by enabling us to perform a notable piece of work for our

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[38] Chief Election Officer, Malakal to Election Commission, 2 Nov. 1957; Chief Election Officer, Malakal to Election Commission, 14 Nov. 1957; Election Commission to all Chief Election officers, 1 Dec. 1957; Chief Election Officer Kordofan to Election Commission, 16 Dec. 1957; all in NRO Elecom (2) 1/3/18
[39] Electoral Commission, Directive No. 12, 6 January 1958, NRO ELECOM (2) 1/4/26
[40] Directive No. 12, 6 Jan. 1958, NRO Elecom (2) 1/4/26; Election Commission to all Chief Election Officers, 29 Jan. 1958, NRO Elecom (2) 1/3/20.
[41] 'Final report on elections, Northern province', nd NRO Elecom (2) 1/1/10.
[42] Election Commission to all Chief Election officers, 15 Feb. 1958, NRO Elecom (2) 1/3/26.

country'.[43] But elsewhere, registration and turnout were much lower, and reports suggested that the electoral process, desperately short of resources, ground to a halt in the face of popular suspicion.[44] The electoral experience of potential voters in Upper Nile, where only one in fifty of the populace voted, was very different to that of those in greater Khartoum, where around one in ten people cast their ballot.[45] In some ways this is rather like the 'legal disfranchisement', described by Frederic Schaffer – but in this case propelled not by 'cleaning' up the election, but by a willingness to accept failures in the procedures required for such an election.[46]

The elections of the 1960s

Within months of the 1958 election, the military took power – encouraged to do so by a prime minister who feared to lose a parliamentary vote. The failure of the electoral process to win widespread support was perhaps evident enough in the way that the coup passed 'without a murmur of public protest'.[47] The next six years saw a steady slide into outright civil war in the south, accelerated by the increasingly authoritarian and narrow vision of progress pursued by the military government.[48] When popular unrest brought down the military government in the 'October revolution' of 1964, multi-party elections for a 'Constituent Assembly', which would provide the basis of government and would be responsible for approving a new constitution, soon followed. The overthrow of the military regime was really a movement of educated, urban northern Sudanese, a political moment in Khartoum, led by students and intellectuals rather than a popular revolution across the country. Elections were for this group – intimately linked as they were with Sudan's administrators and politicians - a reaffirmation of Sudan's status as a modern nation, a demonstration of the viability of the Sudanese state. While some argued for a delay in elections until a settlement could be reached in the south, the major northern political

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[43] Final report. Omdurman West constituency, 7 Apr. 1958, NRO Elecom (2) 1/1/4

[44] 'Report on election work in Lou Nuer South Akobo', 21 Mar. 1958, NRO Elecom (2) 1/1/4; there are more guarded hints of problems in the 'Final report on elections in Kordofan province', nd, NRO Elecom (2) 1/2/11.

[45] Figures from the appendices to the *Election Commission's Final Report*.

[46] F. C. Shaffer, 'Might cleaning up elections keep people away from the polls? Historical and comparative perspectives', *International Political Science Review* 23 (2002), 69-84.

[47] Silberman, 'Rise and fall of democracy'.

[48] D. H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* (Oxford, Bloomington, IN and Kampala, International African Institute, 2003), 30-31.

parties insisted on an early election.[49] There were bitter disputes over process, and partocuarly over the issue of votes for women and the graduates consitituency.[50] The result was a compromise, with universal adult suffrage and an increased number of graduates' seats; there followed a rushed poll, preceded by some vigorous gerrymandering by the major sectarian parties.[51] The election was entirely abandoned across most of southern Sudan in the face of a combination of widespread suspicion, violence in some areas, and a lack of the staff and transport. Despite the upbeat reports of some observers, there were also problems in the process in parts of northern Sudan. In 'nomad and semi-nomad' areas voter registration was based on lists supplied by the traditional leaders on whom local administration relied. Elsewhere, registration was supposed to be direct; in fact, many registration officials, who were under constant pressure to ensure a high level of registration, simply accepted lists of names supplied by parties (which, given the poor state of national organization of most parties, really meant the agents of local candidates).[52]

No voters' cards were issued; lists of names were typed up into alphabetical electoral registers. The names on these were numbered sequentially in the order that they were added to the register, but voters could find this out only by consulting the typed final register. While this was supposed to be displayed for public inspection, this was often done late, if at all, so that very few voters would have actually been able to look for their names or numbers before polling day.[53] Even in Khartoum, the official report on the elections noted that 'There was inadequate time for registration , which caused many mistakes which could have been avoided'.[54] Bechtold's rather carefully worded description suggests

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[49] *Al Ayyam,* 19 Jan. and 4 Apr. 1965.

[50] Abushoul, *Al Intikhabat*, 130. For some flavour of the debates over this, see the reports in *Al Ayyam,* 6 and 8 Jan. 1965*.*

[51] Bechtold suggested that there were few complaints over boundaries in the 1965/7 election and that which followed in 1968 (*Politics in the Sudan*, 167); but Abushouk details a number of irregularities (*Al Intikhabat,* 150) and the chair of the 1968 Election Commission recalled direct gerrymandering: Interview, El Tayyib El Khalil, Khartoum, 2 Mar. 2009; also Adlan Hardallo, Khartoum,19 Jan. 2009; Siddig Yousif, Khartoum, 17 Jan. 2009.

[52] For the formal insistence on direct registration see Interview: El Tayyib El Khalil, Khartoum, 2 Mar. 2009; for acceptance of party lists, see Interview Abdel Rahman Gaili, Khartoum North, 25 Feb. 2009; Ibrahim Moniem Mansour, Khartoum, 24 Feb. 2009.

[53] For complaints regarding registers, see NUP Omdurman to Senior Election Officer, Khartoum, 25 Mar. 1965; Abbas Dafalla, Umma Party to Senior Election Officer, 22 Apr. 1965, NRO Elecom (3) 1/2/8.

[54] 'Final report on geographical constituencies, Khartoum', 1965, NRO Elecom (3) 1/2/9.

something of the consequent problems with registers which were, for the voters and for officials, the only proof of eligibility to vote:

> An additional difficulty lay in the state most registration lists were in, particularly in view of the problem of arranging the names correctly in alphabetical order. It can be estimated that roughly three-fourths or more of all Sudanese names begins with one of three letters

Bechtold slipped into a footnote the further observation that 'most literate Sudanese were not at all sure of the correct sequence of letters in the Arabic alphabet' .[55]

In response to these problems, the agents of candidates went beyond the provision of names for registration, and in some cases they helped voters find their names (or names like theirs) on the lists; they would then write the sequential number on a piece of paper which the voter could then use to try and persuade the polling station staff of his or her right to vote.[56] Where there was no such assistance, voters just had to hope that harassed polling staff would find their names, possibly over the objections of rival agents who might challenge their right to vote.[57] Would-be voters who had some education and a degree of cultural confidence in dealing with officials, and had some familiarity in bureaucratic procedures, would have been most likely to succeed in casting a vote. In rural areas, where it was unlikely that candidates would be able to arrange this kind of assistance to voters, people were very much reliant on their relationship with local men of influence, who served as 'identifiers' at each polling station, and whose role was to confirm – or challenge – the identity of those who sought to vote.

Taking lists of voters from candidates' agents, and turning a blind eye to the presence of agents around the polling station, were unacknowledged ways of 'changing the law'. So too was the acceptance of a developing culture of feeding, entertaining and transporting possible voters. In 1953, transporting voters had – after some uncertainty - been forbidden, and while there had been a good deal of gift-giving in an attempt to influence both voters

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[55] Bechtold, *Politics in the Sudan*, 149.

[56] Interview: Siddig Yousif, Khartoum, 17 Jan. 2009; also Maaz al Hassan, Wad Medani, 9 Jan. 2009.

[57] Interviews: Abdel Rahman Gaili, Khartoum North, 25 Feb. 2009;

and candidates, this had been limited to some extent by the possibility of legal action.[58] But by the 1960s, both the provision of transport to bring voters to the polling station, and the feeding of voters while they were waiting to vote, had become widespread.[59] Given the distance that some rural voters had to travel to reach polling stations, and the possibility that once there they would be required to queue for hours as officials struggled with the registers, this kind of provision made it much more likely that voters would turn out; but it was, of course, entirely dependent on the resources and organizing capacity of the candidates in any particular constituency. The consequence was a considerable disparity in turnout in different parts of northern Sudan, which was in some areas very low.[60]

In southern Sudan, by-elections were eventually held in 1967. This was not because levels of violence had diminished - if anything, they had worsened, though the final report of the Election Commission blandly remarked that 'voting began calmly in the south'.[61] It was more simply that Sadiq al Mahdi, whose Umma party had come out of the 1965 vote with the largest number of seats but no clear control of parliament, thought that he could win seats in the south - where the only people likely to register and vote were officials, police and soldiers - cheaply and easily.[62]   Umma did win more of the southern seats than did any other party, in many cases with very small turnouts.[63] While the official report of the election glossed over problems, newspaper accounts from southern Sudan suggest that practice was very far indeed from the letter of the law:

> The opening of the polls has been shrouded with secrecy. Apart from announcements that
> the polls would open today, no clarification has been made whether or not polling opens in
> all the 34 constituencies all over the south or by stages, province by province, or

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[58] The Khartoum police announced that transporting voters would be treated as an offence in 1953: *al Rai al 'Amm*, 24 Nov. 1953

[59] B. S. Sharma, 'The 1965 elections in the Sudan', *The Political Quarterly*, 37 (1966), 441-52; Interviews; Adlan Hardallo, Khartoum, 19 Jan. 2009; Abd el Rahman Gaili, Khartoum North, 25 Feb. 2009; Al Fadil Adam Abdallah, Fatiha Ithnain, Omdurman, 26 Feb. 2009; Juba Local Government group interview, 4 Feb. 2009; Ibrhaim Moniem Mansour, Khartoum, 24 Feb. 2009.

[60] Sharma, 'The 1965 elections', 452.

[61] Final Report of the Election Commission, 1965, NRO Elecom (3) 1/3/14.

[62] Hartland-Swann, FO to British Embassy, Khartoum, 11 Feb. 1967, TNA FCO 31/195.

[63] Umma won 15 of the 36 southern seats which were contested in 1967: Hart to Sindall, 13 July 1967, TNA FCO 39/183; Bechtold, *Politics in the Sudan*, 250.

constituency by constituency. No usual announcements of polling stations in each constituency have been made, nor of how long polling would take in each constituency. . . .

. . . many supposed voters on the list have never known that their names are on the list for voting, and this is bound to keep the percentage of the polling very low.[64]

A few months later voters in both north and south went to the polls again, as rival sectarian parties struggled to achieve a parliamentary majority; registration and turnout were generally higher than in 1965/7, but were again extremely low in the south where 'in many constituencies, the army and the police were virtually the only people on the electoral rolls'.[65] Even in Khartoum, officials complained of shortages of transport and a lack of trained staff. [66]

Turnout by province in parliamentary election, stated as percentage of estimated population (and as absolute number)[67].

	1958	1965/7	1968	1986
Khartoum	15 (82,598)	16 (120,135)	25 (193,938)	35 (634,631)
Kordofan	10 (188,093)	12 (240,718)	15 (306,763)	19 (559,344)
Northern	10 (97,543)	10 (99,342)	18 (183,281)	39 (392,986)
Kassala	9 (91,842)	7 (97,842)	11 (164,899)	22 (490,607)
Blue Nile	14 (315,597)	17 (454,351)	22 (615,542)	32 (1,246,874)
Darfur	7	8	14	15

[64] *The Vigilant,* 8 Mar. 1967.

[65] 'Discussion with Sayed Hilary Logali, Aug. 1968, TNA FCO 39/185; see also J. Howell, 'Politics in the southern Sudan', *African Affairs*, 72 (1973), 163-78.

[66] 'Final report on elections, Khartoum Province', 1968, NRO Elecom (4) 1/18/114.

[67] Sources: *Election Commission's Final report, 1958,* Appendix D; Abushouk, *Al Intikhabat,* 148; Bechtold, *Politics in the Sudan*, Table 7.2, 7.5; statistical appendices to the *Final Report of the Election Commission, 1986.*

	(94,599)	(113,841)	(213,240)	(611,915)
Bahr el Ghazal	7 (77,193)	8 (104,270)	8 (106,865)	1 (8,267)
Upper Nile	6 (53,992)	3 (33,541)	5 (58,994)	2 (33,818)
Equatoria	9 (85,908)	<1 (5,633)	2 (22,383)	6 (95,786)
Total	10 (1,087,355)	10 (1,269,653)	14 (1,865,905)	20 (4,074,228)

Single-party elections

In terms of building popular support for elected government, the multi-party elections of the 1960s were as unsuccessful as those of the 1950s. When Gaafar Nimeiri led a coup in May 1969, the government was again removed without public protest.[68] Nimeiri and the self-consciously radical intellectuals who supported him were dismissive of 'liberal democracy'; 'the good climate for reactionarism and stoogism', as one of their key documents put it.[69] But the secret ballot – though not political parties – was to play a prominent part in the construction of a different kind of democracy. Nimeiri's regime idealized 'objective planning and modern science'; the disciplinary performances of the secret ballot lent themselves well to the vision of state-directed national progress, as Nimeiri himself explained in one of his lengthy radio speeches:

> The rush of our people to the registration centres for the Presidential Referendum regardless of the results, represents an appreciated enlightenment which was received with pride and gratitude.
> The millions of people all over the country who were keen to perform their right in saying "Yes" or "No" were actually expressing the finest accomplishments of these

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[68] Bechtold, *Politics in the Sudan*, 257.

[69] Sudan Socialist Union: Charter for National Action, 2 Jan. 1972. Copy of English version in TNA FCO 39/1150.

people and their victories. They were representing national unity and confirming the commitment towards the one country

'The millions who were practising their right were actually announcing their new belief in the unity of leadership against the variety of commitments, the unity of the land against the defeated sectarianism, regionalism and racism.[70]

Nimeiri held three referenda on the position of the president, intended as public performances of allegiance.[71] This was the context for the ballot-box stuffing described at the beginning of this paper, and for other farcical performances of the 'secret ballot', such as the use of a system of two ballot boxes, one for 'yes' votes and one for 'no' votes, positioned so that officials could clearly see which box the voter used.[72]

The Nimeiri period also saw a series of elections to a parliament, or 'Popular Assembly'.[73] These gave special political weight to people with certain kinds of education or employment, who would 'represent the bodies of the May revolution' in what were called 'sectoral' seats.[74] The list of sectoral seats became increasingly elaborate: alongside farmers and veterinarians there were seats for book-keepers, university graduates of agricultural professions and administrators.[75] Few people voted for this 'sectoral' representation, and those who did were mostly in urban areas. In 1980, one candidate was elected to represent the 'economists and financial officers' with a total of 732 votes nationally; 586 of these were cast in Khartoum.[76]

Nimeiri's elections were supervised by 'Technical Election Committees' which sent out streams of directives requiring officials to swear oaths and offering bombastic instructions: 'take part in many practice polls', urged one.[77] But electoral procedure became ever more

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[70] Text of Nimeiri's 'Face the Nation Address', 29 Apr. 1977. English translation by Sudan News Agency. TNA FCO 93/1184.

[71] *As Sahafa*, 10 Apr. 1983.

[72] Interviews: Al Hadi Abdul Samad, Khartoum, 18 Jan. 2009; Abdel Rahman Gaili, Khartoum North, 25 Feb. 2009; Mohammed Ahmed Salim, Khartoum, 1 Mar. 2009.

[73] Mansour Khalid, *The Government They Deserve: the role of the elite in Sudan's political evolution* (London, Kegan Paul, 1990), 258-59.

[74] 'Final report on Elections to the First People's Council', NRO Elecom (5) 11/1/3; see also Interview: Mahgoub Mohammed Salih, Khartoum, 17 Jan. 2009; Mukhtar al Assam, Khartoum, 18 Jan. 2009

[75] See for example Notice, 20 May 1980, NRO Elecom (5) 14/3/22.

[76] 'Results of economists and financial officers' seat for the 4th People's Council', NRO Elecom (5) 4/3/26

[77] Directive No. 4, 10 Feb. 1983, NRO Elecom (5) 14/1/4; for oaths, see Directive No 1, 26 Feb. 1974 NRO Elecom (5) 14/1/5; Directive No. 1, NRO Elecom (5) 14/1/8.

remote from the ordered imaginary of these instructions. The pressures on the officials were to provide lengthy lists of names to show how popular elections were, and to make sure that on election day many of those names were ticked off on lists. In some places, officials neatly short-circuited the process, and there was no registration; people turned up to vote and their names were written down as they voted. Elsewhere local officials carefully wrote up lists of names of tax-payers by hand in books; then separated these out into alphabetical order and used these as registers.[78] In the final years of the regime, as shortages became ever more common, officials started to use ration lists to compose voting registers.[79] In some territorial constituencies – which were very large – there were dozens of candidates, all standing with the approval of the SSU. Candidates relied entirely on tribal loyalty or personal popularity, and the elections became an almost parodic performance of the rituals of the secret ballot. Ballot papers with 25 symbols for separate candidates were produced, but even this was not enough in some constituencies, and officials were instructed to fasten two of these papers together, though they were not told how voters should show whether they wanted the candidate represented by the tree on the first paper, or the one represented by the tree on the second paper.[80]

Nimeiri lost power in 1985, unseated by popular unrest; as in 1964, politicians and administrators then turned to parliamentary elections by secret ballot as an assertion of Sudan's continued viability as a state, and in the face of a rapidly escalating renewed war in the south.[81] They were encouraged to do so partly by a desire for international respectability, but also because the major sectarian parties of northern Sudan believed that an election would allow them to mobilise a rural vote which would strengthen their hand against some of the more radical elements who had been involved in the uprising.[82] There was much debate over the system to be used, which ended with an agreement that there would be 273 members of parliament elected by universal adult suffrage from geographical constituencies and 28 elected by special graduates' constituencies, in which the electorate would be composed of people who had two or more years of post-secondary education -

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[78] Some of these books are preserved in the Government of Southern Sudan Archives, in Juba.

[79] Interview: Mohammed Ahmed Salim, 1 Mar. 2009.

[80] Directive No. 12, 16 Apr. 1974, NRO Elecom (5) 14/1/5.

[81] Johnson, *Root Causes*, 59-81.

[82] Interview: Adlan Hardallo, Khartoum, 19 Jan. 2009.

who, in the words of one official, had greater political 'comprehension'.[83] Once again, a three-man Election Commission was appointed (including one man who had served in the 1968 Commission) and once again it busied itself with the issuing of directives.

The major rebel movement, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), boycotted the general election, arguing that a peace deal which addressed their demands for political transformation must be negotiated first. The interim administration in Khartoum pressed on with the election, determined to have the show of a national poll in defiance of the reality of widespread violence in the south, and the collapse of government control over significant areas. There was, in the event, no voting at all in thirty-seven of the sixty-eight southern constituencies; as in the 1960s, even in those southern constituencies where there was a vote, registration and turn-out were very poor. By contrast, registration and turn-out in greater Khartoum and in Northern Province – along the line of the Nile – were very high indeed. Even here, and despite the vigorous ideological differences between some of the competing parties - Communists, Ba'athists and the National Islamic Front (NIF) - campaigning might rely on ties of family or locality, as one successful candidate for the NIF, an Islamist party, explained:

> I went to all centres, places you can find people, where you can have access: clubs, football clubs, especially, and the social clubs. Otherwise, the mosque. Every week, to visit the mosque, to say prayers and to speak after with them, informally. So I find a lot of blood relationship, area allegiances where I come from in the north, and ideologically people were really unsure. . . .. It is family connections which you can bank on. . . .[84]

HIgh registration and turnout in some areas rested on practises which contravened the formal directives of the Commission: accepting lists of voters, ignoring treating, transporting and oathing of voters, allowing agents to help prospective voters assert their right to vote at the polling station. Around Khartoum, the growing numbers of 'internally displaced people'

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[83] Abushouk, *Al-Intikhabat*, 199-201; J. Chiriyankandanth, '1986 elections in the Sudan: tradition, ideology, ethnicity – and class?', *Review of African Political Economy*, 14 (1987), 96-102; Mohammed Ahmed Salim, quoted in *as Sahafa*, 15 Apr. 1986; Mukhtar al Assam and Jaafar Karrar, 'The meaning of the results in the Graduates' Constituencies in the 1986 elections', DSRC Seminar Paper, University of Khartoum, 1986

[84] Interview: Ahmed Abdel Rahman, Khartoum, 19 Jan. 2009. See also Mohammed Ahmed Salim, Khartoum, 1 Mar. 2009 and Abushouk, *Al Intikhabat*, 223.

(IDPs) driven to the capital from western or southern Sudan by famine and war, provided a new body of voters, who could be manipulated by officials or government recognized chiefs:

> There were threats also, in the IDP centres. Because normally, the IDPs, some were being removed from place to place, so whoever talks much, or has this Islamic support, will be the one who will be elected. Because they were making use of the chiefs, the chiefs appointed in the IDP camps. Those people were being controlled by these chiefs. To go and vote, mobilising them to go.[85]

Such practices also facilitated the considerable multiple voting and impersonation which is suggested by some very high – or simply impossible – turnout figures.[86] Once again, there was gerrymandering of constituencies, and parties jockeyed to take advantage of the additional votes given to the educated. The NIF did this most successfully, ingeniously exploiting the regulations on expatriate graduate voters to ensure that it won the great majority of graduates' seats.[87]

In the parts of northern Sudan beyond the riverain heartland, turnouts and registration were lower – though still much better than in the south - and the failures of procedure which partly lay behind this were heavily criticized by some Sudanese observers at the time.[88] Again, registration and turnout in rural Sudan relied on the involvement of intermediaries, usually local figures who claimed some kind of authority based on tribe or religion.[89] And when the military seized power again, in 1989, once more there was no popular movement in defence of the elected government.

Elections and National Salvation

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[85] Interview: Juba Local Government Board, 4 Feb. 2009.

[86] Constituencies with more than 100% turnout were nos. 44 (Omdurman Wad Nubawi); 46 (Omdurman Musalama/Maurada); 111 (Singa); 141 (South Fasher); 189 (East Kassala). Constituencies with a turnout of 90% or more were nos. 21 (Khartoum 1); 27 (Khartoum 7); 37 (East Nile 1); 39 (East Nile 3); 59 (South Berber). 43 other constituencies recorded apparent turnouts of more than 80% of registered voters. One interviewee explicitly linked the anomalous voting figures of 1986 with the presence of IDPs: Mahgoub Mohammed Salih, Khartoum, 17 Jan. 2009.

[87] Interview: Mukhtar al Assam, Khartoum, 18 Jan. 2009.

[88] One prominent critique being Sharif al Hindi. Interview: Shendi Group, 28 Feb. 2009.

[89] Interview: Halima Hamid Musa, Omdurman, 1 Mar. 2009.

The group of soldiers and Islamist ideologues who seized power in June 1989 offered a new rationale for a succession of exercises involving the secret ballot: presidential and parliamentary votes in 1996 and 2000, and a referendum on a new constitution in 1998. These were presented as both a departure from an imposed foreign form of democracy and as an intentional break with tradition (*taqlid*). Instead, they would be a tool for renewal (*tajdid*) - these terms being taken from wider debates over the role of Islam which stressed its role as a route to renewal. Elections would, at the same time, be an opportunity for the populace to express their allegiance, *ba'ia*, to a leader whose acceptance of that allegiance implied that authority ultimately lay in the hands of God.[90] Yet despite the emphasis on collective consensus, the secret ballot played a prominent role in each of these events. It was announced through the press and through speeches at mosques, that voting was a public and a religious duty; and the organizers of elections took some pride in framing a new electoral law and regulations and in performing some of the rituals of the ballot – choosing symbols, sealing and unsealing boxes, and so on.[91] The international press were invited, and the northern Sudanese press covered the votes at considerable length, solemnly offering figures on turnout and reporting alleged minor problems of procedure.[92]

The elections were, however, widely criticized. In 1996 the many individuals who stood against the incumbent , Omer el Beshir, in the presidential race were unknowns, the press were tightly-controlled, and state resources were freely used in support of the incumbent's campaign. Registration, it was openly acknowledged, was conducted on the basis of putting together various existing lists of names.[93] There were allegations that ballot boxes were stuffed by anxious officials, there were special voters' lists for members of the uniformed forces and it was rumoured that millions of spoiled ballots were destroyed in order not to

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[90] The clearest discussion of these ideas took place in a conference on 'The Islamic perspective on elections', reported in *Al Sudan al Hadith,* 6 Mar. 1996; see especially the section 'The democracy of Westminster is not appropriate to Sudan'. Also Abd al Rahim Omar Mahii al Din, *Al-Turabi wa al-inqadh: sirā' al-huwwiya wa al-hawan* (Khartoum, 2005), 67 ff.

[91] Interview, Abdel Moneim en Nahas, Riyadh, Khartoum, 20 Jan. 2009; *Al Sudan al Hadith,* 14 and 26 Feb. and 4 Mar. 1996; *As Sahafa*, 15 and 18 Dec. 2000.

[92] *Al Sudan al Hadith*, 2, 13 and 16th Mar. and 26 Apr. 1996.

[93] A al-Karsani et al. *Al-Intikhabat fi as Sudan* (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press: 1999), 50-53

tarnish the lustre of Beshir's victory.[94] There were apparently some new departures in malpractice: not only were government vehicles used to bring voters to polling stations, but in some cases ballot boxes were reported to have been taken to public gatherings – to weddings, or funerals – and people were given ballot papers to put in the boxes.[95] These elections brought together, in striking fashion, two approaches to 'changing the law': the straightforward cheating which had developed in the Nimeiri period and the combination of a fantasy of procedure with a reality of multiple local expedients to push up participation rates.

The coming election

The elections originally planned for 2009, and now postponed to 2010, will be more complex than any previously attempted in Sudan. This is partly a consequence of the notional commitment to decentralization, espoused by a succession of regimes in Khartoum, and which has been the ironic counterpart to persistent state authoritarianism. Multiple levels of elected government have been created, and must be voted for: the national president; the president of the autonomous Government of Southern Sudan; the governor of each of the 26 'devolved' states into which Sudan is divided; the national parliament; the parliament of each state; and the parliament for southern Sudan. The elections for national, southern and state parliaments will be further complicated by the voting system. In each of these bodies, 60% of members will be elected by territorial constituencies, on a first-past-the post basis. There are no 'graduates' seats', but the notion of special representation has emerged in a new form. 25% of seats in each parliament are reserved for women members, who will be elected on an adult franchise using a proportional representation system at the level of each state. A further 15% are reserved for 'party list' members, elected on a similar basis. While the allocation of seats to women might be seen as a commendable commitment to empowering women, it is likely that the allowance of both women's and party seats will benefit the ruling National Congress Party

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[94] See the retrospective comments in *As Sahafa*, 9 Dec. 2000. Interview: Shendi Group, 28 Feb. 2009; el Battahani, 'Multi-party elections'; Lesch, *Sudan: Contested National Identities*, 124-5.

[95] *As Sahafa,* 13 and 19 Dec. 2000; for the ballot boxes at funerals, see Interview: Muhammed Sharif Fadul,,Khartoum, 24 Feb. 2009. For generalized accusations of malpractice in these elections, see for example Interview: Ibrahim Moniem Mansour, Khartoum, 24 Feb. 2009; Mohammed Ahmed Salim, Khartoum, 1 Mar. 2009.

(NCP), since campaigning at a state level will require resources and organizational capacity beyond the capacity of any individual, and probably also beyond the abilities of the old sectarian parties, which have been weakened by factionalism and their long exclusion from power.

These arrangements will also make voting a very complicated process. In northern Sudan, each voter will cast eight ballots (one presidential, one gubernatorial, three for the national parliament and three for the state parliament). In southern Sudan, there will be twelve ballots – those above, plus one for the southern president and three for the southern parliament. If each voter casts all these ballots at the same time, it is likely that the process of polling will be very lengthy; if the votes are held on different days, the demands on staff and transport will be multiplied.[96]

The election is already threatened by the failure of the NCP to create the freedom of association and movement needed for an election, and especially by displacement and violence in Darfur.[97] It is threatened also by the fallout from the botched census of 2008, which was intended to provide data for constituency demarcation and seat allocation. Through a combination of logistical unpreparedness and political maladroitness on the part of the SPLM, this resulted in what would seem to be a substantial undercounting of the southern populace. The Government of Southern Sudan formally rejected the census, and the allocation of constituencies which has just been made on the basis of this; what the consequences of this will be for the election is not yet clear.[98] And while there is evident enthusiasm in at least some parts of Sudan for the idea of a process that will allow people to choose their leaders, it seems that popular understanding of the particular processes of the secret ballot is considerably more limited.[99]

The process of registration, which is just being completed at the time of writing (December 2009) offers some suggestion of what may come. Information from northern Sudan has

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[96] Recent trial polls at the University of Khartoum suggested that it would take 24 minutes for one individual voter to cast the eight ballots required in the north, and 29 minutes for the twelve ballots required in the south.

[97] Adam O'Brien, 'Sudan's election paradox', June 2009, URL: www.enoughproject.org

[98] 'South Sudan government rejects census results', *Sudan Tribune*, 5 July 2009

[99] T. Cook, with D. Vexler, *Imagining Elections: A Look at What Citizens Know and Expect of Sudan's 2010 Vote* (Washington: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2009), 6-7.

been patchy; in the south, reports suggested a slow start and multiple logistical problems.[100] These were followed by repeated government pronouncements on the importance of the process (a message reinforced by lorry loads of soldiers who toured urban areas threatening to arrest any who had failed to register); surprisingly high registration statistics have now been announced, though observers report continued logistical problems.[101] How rigorous the registration process has really been remains unclear.

  Since 1953, elections in Sudan have repeatedly fallen short of the ideal of the election as a moment of shared national participation, which teaches responsible citizenship and demonstrates the impartiality and organizing ability of the state. Both multi-party and authoritarian elections have confirmed the differential nature of citizenship in a state where a fantasy of bureaucratic regularity lies over a reality of multiple networks of kinship, cultural familiarity, tribe and religious affiliation, and where officials have struggled to cover up the gap between the imaginary state of ordered efficiency and the reality of constant, expedient, deviation from process. When the election comes it is depressingly likely that, quite apart from attempts at direct cheating, and problems with intimidation, censorship, restrictions on movement and misuse of government resources, it will see multiple failures in procedure, driven by shortages of transport and personnel and material. The experience of many voters will once again be one of confusion, uncertainty, reliance on intermediaries – or, more simply, of exclusion.

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[100] See for example statement released by the Carter Center on 2 Nov. 2009: 'Carter Center concerned about voter registration process and obstacles to observer accreditation'; also 'Sudan's Upper Nile state grants employees time off for voter registration', Sudan Tribune website, 10 Nov. 2009; 'Voter registration delayed in Jonglei's Pigi', Sudan Tribune website, 11 Nov. 2009; .

[101] 'Carter Centre praises peaceful voter registration despite concerns', Sudan Tribune website, 1 Dec. 2009; 'South Sudan leads voter registration', *Sudan Tribune*, 9 Dec. 2009.