SciencePG
Science Publishing Group

Research Article

Electoral Systems in Sudan: In Quest for an Appropriate Type

Abdu Mukhtar Musa[*] (iD)

Department of Political Science, Omdurman Islamic University, Khartoum, Sudan

Abstract

This article reviews the types of electoral systems applied in Sudan since independence – in both democratic and military rules. It goes beyond that to touch on the general features of electoral behavior as well. It employs historical and descriptive approaches to examine some facts pertaining to the reality of elections and hindrances to democracy in the Sudan: *First*, the democratic process has been obstructed several times by military coups and regimes. *Second,* children who grew up under al-Bashir's Militant Islamic Regime (MIR) were deprived form exercising democracy or know anything about voting. *Third,* the lack of continual political participation hindered the process of accumulating political awareness that could enrich the formation of political culture. *Fourth,* the tribal influence in the socio-political life in many parts of the country, had negatively affected the political behavior of the ordinary people as well as the politicians. This political reality shatters any hope for proper democracy to work in the country. This essay argues that for such pluralism and ethno-cultural multiplicity entails the adoption of consensual democracy. However, it believes that this consociationalism should be supported by the Proportional Representation type of elections –along with federalism and presidential system.

Keywords

Electoral Systems, Electoral Behavior, Tribalism, Military, Democracy, Political Parties

1. Introduction

In the Third World countries, apart from the impact of the social forces on political behavior and, hence, on electoral behavior, there are other forces of great impact too. These factors are, in turn, influenced by other drivers such as political awareness, mass communication and party affiliation."Studies of both adult electors and children have shown that partisan ties often extend back deep into childhood, with the family as the main agency of political socialization."

(Stokes,) Adult studies relying on a recall of early partisanship have repeatedly shown that large majorities of electors continue to hold the party allegiances of their parents. [3]

According to Mackenzie, elections constitute the basis of a legitimate claim to hold office. Elections "may be considered as one procedure for aggregating preferences of a particular kind … a form of procedure, recognized by the rules of an organization, whereby all or some of the members of organi-

zation choose a smaller number of persons or one person to hold office of authority in the organization." [5]. It implies dealing with persons "acting within systems of ethical norms and legal procedures". Stein Rokkan holds that elections are also "institutionalized procedures for the choosing of office holders by some or all of the recognized members of an organization." [14]

Some holds that democracy should include the principle that "all governments owe their just powers to the consent of the governed and that in numerous societies this consent may be expressed by representatives freely elected on a basis of universal adult suffrage." Therefore, electoral behavior here raises such questions as "what men think they are doing when they participate in elections?" [5]

Actually, scientists believe that "the study of electoral behavior may be viewed as concerned more narrowly with the formation and expression of individual preferences." [15, 16] Nonetheless, election does not necessarily entail voting; in certain societies, the proper procedure for election is by council, in others by acclamation, and in yet others by voting. [5]

2. Dynamics Underlying Electoral Behavior in the Sudan

The Sudan is a nation with over 40 million of population, with over 500 tribes, over 400 languages and dialects, more than 70 political parties, over 30 daily papers, more than 30 universities, with less stability and ridden by civil wars.

In spite of the spread of education (among over 55% of the population), Tribalism is still dominant as a social force that overwhelm political behavior and the decision to vote. Ethnicity is underlying electoral behavior and has had far reaching effect on the political life in general.
What makes reality more intricate is the fact that ethnicity influences the political behaviour of the elite as well as affecting the political culture at large.

This article rests on the assumption that democracy in the Sudan faces a cluster of problems and difficulties that all developing nations are facing. It explains how the short-lived democracy died in Sudan and the factors behind that – particularly those related to political behaviour, political participation and political culture. It examines how the poor political institutions have contributed to the crisis of democracy in Sudan. It advises how the would-be democracy, under the proposed (partial) proportional-representation system of election might help pave the way for a sound democracy in Sudan. The paper also reviews development of democracy in the Sudan, describes electoral systems adopted, and explains the dynamics underlying electoral behavior in the country.

According to my own observations, it seems that the Sudanese are among the most policy-oriented people as com-pared to their counterparts in the Third World. It is habitual that even the nomads and farmers carry transistor radio listening to news cast and follow up not only local, but also the world affairs. One can always find ordinary people in the streets or meeting at a social occasion discuss with heated debate either sports or political issues. The illiterate in Sudan in rural pastoral areas listen to radio and make brilliant analysis to the current events – local and international. This have developed some sort of political awareness.

This public consciousness pressed on the military rule – the Salvation Revolution - to embark on practical steps toward democratization particularly with the help of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which it signed in January 9, 2005, with the southern rebel movement. The CPA calls for democratic transformation – besides self-determination.

However, this conscious collective mind of the Sudanese people is always let down by the governing political elite. The political institutions are lagging far behind the peoples' drive for conscious political participation. A new generation appeared within the so-called 'traditional' political parties, namely the *Umma* Party (UP, of the *Mahdists*) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP, of the *Khatmiyya* religious sect). This young generation has been pressing on the old leaders to give way to the youth to assume leadership and modernize the parties to cope with the new changes and to make for broader participation beyond the limits set by the mentality of the parochial sectarian leaders. [6]

The outcome of this inter-generational conflict is the fragmentation in the (historical) parties that led the nationalist movement and brought independence. Some see that the intrigues of the Militant Islamic Regime (MIR) is to be held responsible for the schisms and dismembering that have divided and, hence, weakened the opposition parties in the country who had already suffered from being banned, isolated or deprived from political action by the military regimes for more than four decades – though not over consecutive period. These cleavages and discontinuity of political process in the political institutions have had a negative impact on the political participation. It impeded any drive for developing proper political culture because the 52-year long military governments controlled the mass media and all tools of political socialization – imposing only one doctrine or ideology mostly rejected by the great portion of the people.

Despite the fact that literacy in Sudan has been on the rise – from 36% in 1973 to 43% in 1983, to 55% in 1993, to over 60% at the present, ethnicity and tribalism still influences political behavior as well as electoral behavior. The top elite and the educated class at large practice what makes the political reality in the Sudan more paradoxical and intricate. To single out one example is that the issue of tribalism was brought into the Parliament under the MIR. The matter was brought into the parliament in 2012 when the minister of

energy, Dr. Awad al-jaz, (later on the minister of finance) was accused of practicing nepotism and monopolizing the jobs - in the ministry and its affiliates besides jobs at the oil fields and oil production companies – for his own dominant tribe in Sudan, the *Shaiqiyyah.* This tribe is one of the three *major* tribes in the Sudan (the other two are the *Danagla* and the *Ja'aliyyin*) which are accused of controlling power and wealth in the country since independence, marginalizing and excluding tens of tribes whose educated elites are qualified to public office. This has constituted a controversial issue and a major cause for vigorous and prolonged civil wars in the Sudan – notably in the South and the West (Darfur crisis). [8]

Another problem related to political participation in Sudan is related to propaganda and campaign. The mass media under the military regimes were state-owned and state-controlled. Any statement about – even relative degree - of freedom is true only at the theoretical level, as indicated in some press acts. In practice, there is no fair play for the coverage of the activities of any anti-government group or individual contesting for local or parliamentary elections under those regimes. Until now, under the ruling political party, the National Congress Party (NCP), the electronic media is fully owned and controlled by the government (i.e., the NCP). It is true that the press was allowed a relative degree of freedom after signing the "Comprehensive Peace Agreement" (CPA) in 2005 with the Southern Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM) as a partner party in the government. However, the Security of the major ruling party (NCP) continued to exercise a prior censorship against the private (locally known as independent) press.

Furthermore, a part from the opposition's doubts and fears about fraud, the opposition parties were practically left only with a limited room for canvassing and touring states for political rallies or conducting campaigns. This is together with the lack of finance as compared to the ruling party that had access to the state machinery to manipulate for its own interests. For these fears and distrust in the government to run elections with fairness and integrity, the opposition called for international body to monitor and supervise the 2010 elections. Actually, elections were organized and the ruling party won it amidst rigorous criticism of being unfair and corrupt.

A major feature of the electoral experience in Sudan is that it had come into being at a time of universal transformations and transition characterized by the deceleration of the classical model of democracy and the emergence of new shapes manifesting new realities. The overlapping of different phases of building of political institutions in various parts of the world affected the local experience in Sudan which had to choose one from amongst the numerous types of electoral systems that could compromise the conflicting – traditional versus transitional – forces within a newly emerging state. [2]

The traditional argument of scholars that "in linguistically and religiously divided societies majority elections could clearly threaten the continued existence of the political system," [12, 13] is *now* on a high gear in Sudan. Those minorities and disadvantaged ethnic groups in the south, east, and west (Kordofan and Darfur) of Sudan; who claim being excluded and marginalized; took arms against the central government and destabilized the country.

Prior to independence Sudan witnessed two elections. The first one was the 1948 elections of the Legislative Assembly under the British rule. One of the two major political parties boycotted it – the DUP. [11] This first experience witnessed some restrictions introduced in demarcating the constituencies. One major criterion favoured the urban centres at the expense of the rural areas where the population of a constituency in the rural areas was fixed at 120000 against 43000 for the urban. This criterion included 50% for population, 30% for elementary education, and 20% for wealth as estimated by the direct taxes. The British Governor-General in the Sudan retained the right of appointing 28 members for the Assembly. [2]

This experience combined between the direct elections and voting by the provincial councils of the Southern Sudan (electoral college), besides appointment. This was similar to the British experience of 1832 – 1906, that is an attempt to compromise between the traditional and transitional (modernizing) elites. [2]

The boycott by the Unionist forces, as led by the DUP, left the scene for the leaders of the "Native Administration" (tribal system of traditional administration); and independent forces (who called for independence from Britain without any link with Egypt).

In spite of the drawbacks of these first elections, it served as a model for elections at the municipal and provincial councils of 1960. The Local Government Act of 1971 over-ruled it. The first general parliamentary elections in Sudan took place in November 1953 under the self-rule when the country was a still a British colony.

Of the post-independence era, Sudan witnessed 52 years of military rule and only 9 years of democracy, three times; with two years of transitions, (this is until 2919 when a popular uprising – started in December 2018 – forced Gen. Al-Bashir to step down on April 11, 2019. So, one can divide elections accordingly – those conducted under the military and those under democracy. Under the civil democratic rule, elections took place in 1958, 1965 and 1986.

3. Elections under Democracy

3.1. The 1958 Elections

A new election Act was issued where the so-called "grad-

uates' seats were cancelled.

Graduates' seats (or constituencies) are seats devoted to graduates of universities and high institutes. It was an attempt to represent the elite and allow the educated class to play role in the political life since the plural majority type of elections failed to give this classroom for parliamentary participation.

Constituencies were re-divided and increased in the areas influenced by the then two most popular political parties in the Sudan: the *Umma* Party and the DUP. The Sudanese of the West-African origin were enfranchised after being deprived this right in the previous elections of 1953. This reflects domination of the traditional elite (sectarian and tribal leaders). This administrative intervention by the two ruling parties in the technical arrangements of elections was seen as corruption. [11] By doing so the DUP, for instance, increased its constituencies (its closed areas) in the Northern province by 128%, and the *Umma* Party, in (Kassala) province, by 100%, to give a few examples.

3.2. Elections Under the Second Party System: The 1965 Elections

In the eve of this election, there emerged a trend for representing the so-called 'the new forces' specially teachers, workers and farmers. However, as the two major parties came back to power in the elected government of 1965, that followed the October Revolution of 1964, a new election act was endorsed and the graduates' seats (constituencies) were restored to be 15 instead of five in the 1953 elections. These elections were boycotted by the DUP and were not conducted in the South due to the war. A major achievement of this election was that women gained full suffrage in par with men. Now women have got the right to vote as well as to be elected. By contrast in 1953 only the educated women were allowed to vote in the graduates' seats.

3.3. The 1968 Elections

In this election, the graduates' seats were cancelled as it was in 1958's. The population for a constituency was set at 50000 – 70000. Twenty-seven parties contested. The major parties, particularly the DUP, failed to score an absolute majority, got only 40% of the votes. The *Umma* party, which split into two factions, got 21% and 18% for each. No one of the other parties (28) gained 1% of the votes. In the south the Liberal party, which got 40 seats (66.6% of the total seat allotted to the South) disappeared in the 1968 elections and was replaced by Sudan African National Union (SANU) which got 14 seats and the Southern Front Party got 10 seats, an indication that the Southerners' votes went to different tribal parties.

The performance of the Constituent Assembly (Parliament) was very weak for the poor attendance of MPs; besides the differences between the two coalition parties on many issues. These differences weakened the parliament. This weakness is also, partly, attributable to the unsuitable electoral system that brings to the legislative organs unqualified and incapable members. Moreover, the political system is actually composed of a great number of weak and small ethnic or tribe-oriented parties. These parties tried to articulate their partisan, or actually ethnic, interests through the parliament.

The transitional elite have become aware that this parliamentary system, which is based on ethnic parties, could not enable them to achieve their aspirations in taking part effectively in public policy making. Because of the dispute among the major parties in the parliament, the Assembly was dissolved in 1968. A new government was formed but was toppled by a military coup in May 1969.

3.4. The 1986 Elections (the 3rd Party System)

After the demise of the one-party military rule in 1985, liberal democracy came back to the political life of Sudan. The 1986 elections were characterized by: [2] 1- the rise of regionalism, tribalism and ethnicity in Sudan politics. Even in the capital a great deal of the electorate voted on ethnic bases. 2- Graduates' seats were increased to 50 where great number of Sudanese abroad (the expatriates) participated, especially in the Gulf states and West Europe. 3- Some accused one of the parties of manipulating the graduates' constituencies particularly of the Sudanese working abroad, and that party won the majority of those seats. 4- Demographic changes due to civil war and displacement changed the electoral map where the capital was no longer a closed district for a definite party as in the past. 5- the emergence of the Islamic National Front, INF, (formerly the Muslim brothers). 6- Observers criticized the prevailing system of elections, 'First Past The Post' (FPTP) which excludes many parties leaving a great number of minorities and ethnic groups unrepresented.

The 1986 elections were won by the three major parties: the Umma, got 100 seats; the DUP, got 63 and the INF got 28 (mainly from the graduates' constituencies). The two first parties formed a coalition government leaving the INF in the opposition. Differences and lack of homogeneity weakened the government. This was paralleled by the growing military might of the rebel movement in the South. The movement conquered many areas in the South and started taking some towns in the North. The Islamic Movement alleged that the deteriorating security situation vis-à-vis the rebellions growing military strength, was one of the reasons that induced to assume power through a military coup and called itself the 'National Salvation Revolution' (NSR). The new Islamic military junta formed a 15-member Transitional Military Council (TMC) led by brigadier Omer Hassan Ahmed Al Bashir who (was) still in power.

Table 1. *Elections of the 3rd democracy in Sudan: 1986.*

The Party	Seats scored	Notes
The Umma Party	100	Mahdist sect
The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	63	Khatmiyya *Sufist* sect
The National Islamic Front	28	Muslim Brothers
The Sudanese National Party*	08	Nuba Ethnic group
SAPCO** Party	07	Southern/regionalist
The Sudanese Alliance for S. Sudan	07	-
Independent candidates	06	Non-doctrinal
The Sudanese Communist Party	02	Ideologue
The People's Federal Party	01	Non-doctrinal
The Sudanese African Congress	01	Regionalist
The Beja Congress	01	Ethnic
Rural Solidarity Forces	00	Regionalist group
The Arab B'ath Socialist Party	00	Doctrinal
The People's Progressive party	00	Non-doctrinal
Total	224	

*This party draws its membership purely from the Nuba ethnic group in South Kordofan state. [8]
**SAPCO: The Sudanese African Party Congress.

In spite of the fact that the Sudanese advocate democratic system of government, many blame the political parties for the intervention of the army in politics because of the weakness of these civil governments and their failure to achieve development, stability and national unity. However, defenders of democratic civil rule hold that the democratically elected governments were not allowed ample time to carry out their programmes. But critics believe that those democracies who ruled three times had not even shown any programme for change or development. They continually engaged in partisan differences that resulted in chaos.

Generally, the democratically elected governments in Sudan (three periods) were characterized by poor performance and schisms. Each parliamentary term witnessed several Governments, some cabinets survived only for one year:

1) During the government of the 1953 elections: four governments (cabinets) were formed.
2) In the government of the 1965 elections: three governments were formed.
3) In the government of the 1986 elections, five governments were formed within three years (by al -Sadiq al-Mahdi) which was toppled by the military coup of general al-Bashir, in June 30, 1989.

4. Elections Under Military Regimes

4.1. The First Military Rule (1958 – 1964)

Elections were conducted for the provincial councils and the Central Council (i.e., the parliament) in 1962 based on the 1948 electoral experience. Little to be said here about elections because it was an absolute military dictatorship unlike the two other military regimes (of Numeri and al-Bashir) which were totalitarians tried to legitimize their existence in power by appealing to the people through elections for a one, dominant, political party (the Sudan Socialist Union and the National Congress, respectively).

4.2. Elections Under the 'May Regime' (1969 – 1985)

The military rule which assumed power in May 25th, 1969 adopted the one-party system (the Sudan Socialist Union, SSU) – borrowing Nasser's experience of the 'the Arab Socialist Union' in Egypt. "The May regime banned political

parties and drafted an act for political seclusion," [10] and, hence, no one could be elected on party basis a part from the (SSU). However, the act of political seclusion was not practically used because members of the banned political parties refrained from participating in a system that was not democratic and did not recognize political parties. The Political parties formed an opposition front abroad (in Libya) called the "National Front". They militarized their elements under this front and tried to overthrow Numeri's regime by leading a coup attempt in 1976, but failed. In the following year Numeri signed with leaders of the National Front, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi and al-Turabi, a reconciliation agreement known as "the national reconciliation" in July 7th, 1977.

Five elections were conducted under this military regime: in 1972, 1974, 1976, 1980 and 1983 for regional councils and a central parliament known as the 'People's Assembly'. Elections under this one-party system were characterized by:

1) a permanent commission for elections and referendum was established for the first time in the Sudan where they were previously run by only ad hoc committees.

2) This regime adopted a mixed system of: direct elections, indirect elections, appointment and membership by ex officio. The direct elections were based on geographical constituencies, the indirect base one the electoral colleges which represent the leading committees of trade unions and popular organizations.

3) The minimum age for voting was decreased from 21 to 18 years, and for candidacy from 30 to 21 years.

4) The President of the Republic was vested with the right of appointing 10% of the MPs.

5) Moreover, there are other notable features of elections under the May regime to be pointed out such as: [10]

6) The principle of the secret ballot, which led to the use of symbols in all constituencies with the exception of intellectuals and national capitalists, where most of the voters know how to read and write.

7) The absence of a requirement that a deposit be paid by candidates – which was the case in previous elections up to 1968. This fee as removed in the 1972 elections held under the military.

8) The insistence that a person contesting any of the popular and functional (or occupational) organization constituencies should be a member of the popular or functional organization in whose constituency he was standing. This was not the case in 1968 elections.

9) The principle of universal suffrage in the territorial constituencies and what looks like college elections in other constituencies.

10) Some constituencies are allotted to the so-called the 'Alliance of the Working Forces of the People' and local government administrative units. In order to consolidate the alliance, which had supported Numeri's coming to power, a single party – the SSU was created

in 1970, while at the same time, the organization representing the component social groups of the alliance were strengthened; reformed or created; and youths' and women's organizations set up. These bodies, and those representing workers, intellectuals and national capitalists, became subordinate wings of the SSU. The non-territorial constituencies were intended to provide them with direct representation in the Assembly and the system was extended to the South in an effort to integrate Southerner into the Northern system of post-coup politics. [10] With regard to qualifications criteria the elections rules under Numeri's regime stipulates.

For the voters that a person is qualified for registration on the electoral roll for any constituency, if he (she) is:

a. Sudanese;

b. eighteen years of age on the date of closing the registration on the electoral roll;

c. of sound mind;

d. Enjoying political rights;

e. Has been resident in the constituency for a period not less than three months before the closing of the electoral roll, if this condition shall not apply to persons returning to their homes (to the south) from neighboring countries, where they had taken refuge during the period of unrest in the Southern region. The additional condition in the non-territorial constituencies was that a person was qualified to register and vote, if he (she) is a member of a recognized organization, e.g. agricultural union, youth union, etc.

Most of those conditions for low registration and turnout in the south (indications for partial participation in the political process) were also present in Darfur (equal in space to France). The south may differ a little bit with regard to higher percentage of illiteracy as compared to Darfur (which has 20% of Sudan's population). The North is better off as compared to the instable south. It has higher literacy, better roads and means of transport, communication, and information, relatively better developed, so that the average of registration is above 50%.

In 1976, however, Numeri signed reconciliation agreement with the opposition parties (as it was explained before). The opposition elements joined the third People's Assembly as well as the SSU. Now the government of the May regime lacked homogeneity, became week and corrupt. The matter was worsened by the economic crisis; a popular Uprising in April 1985 eventually toppled it.

4.3. Elections Under the Government of National Salvation (1989- 2019)

The National Salvation Revolution (NSR), which came to power in June 30, 1989 by overthrowing a democratically elected civil government, was led by the military officers

who belong to the INF – an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers Movement, which was established by the late Hassan al-Banna (assassinated in 1949). The leaders of the military coup declared that they assumed power because the civil government failed to maintain law and order, solve the southern problem and achieve national unity. They also held that the previous elected government was corrupt and failed to achieve socio-economic development. These were the same reasons that were given by the previous military government of Numeri when it assumed power through a coup d'état in 1969.

Soon after coming to power, the NSR set up 'peoples' committees' in villages and towns all over the country to mobilize the people to support government programmes and provide services to the citizens. However, they failed to play their proper role and have often been criticized for exercising excessive powers rather than providing adequate services. The Peoples' Committees system was aimed to fill in the political vacuum until the establishment of the National Secretariat of Congresses that was endorsed by the National Conference on the (newly introduced) Political System in 1991. This new political system is known as the 'congresses system', to operate within a federal system, aimed to hand power to the people. It was made up of: Constituent Congress at the base (villages and local areas). These constituent congresses nominate representatives to the 'District Congresses', which – in turn – choose their representatives up to the 'province congresses', which also name their representatives to the 'state congresses' which nominate their representatives to the National Congress. The latter was to form the 'National Council' (the parliament). The general idea is that this political system is to operate as the only political organization. According to the MIR, the NCP is a one-party system aimed to replace the multi-party system on the ground that those political parties have failed in governance.

The new totalitarian regime - which banned political parties, the constitution, and the press and formed a 'Revolutionary Command Council' - turned into a one-party system (the National Congress). Due to the rise of a strong civil society, changes in the international atmosphere (a US-led uni-polar new world order), the NSR started to shift toward a liberal trend. By 1998, it issued a new constitution allowing freedom of press and political parties to conduct their activities. By late 1990s, all political parties started to come back from abroad and from "underground" (like the SCP and the Ba'ath) to resume their political activities openly. However, in practice, this proved to be a verbal rhetoric for media show. Actually, the few partied that tried to mobilize their bases and appeal for political participation, were disappointed by oppressive measures – such as denying them the right organizing rallies or conferences. Some partisan figures were detained for criticizing the lack of

freedoms. The 'independent' (private/non-state) papers were confiscated from time to time by forging false charges such as "threatening the national security". Actually cracking down on press and freedom is one feature of the MIR. "Sudan under al-Bashir is a Long history of turmoil, conflicts." [4]

The period of the NSR (1989 - 2019) witnessed two general parliamentary elections in 1996, 2000, and 2 presidential elections in 2010 and 2015. Now the reference for elections is the 1998 constitution, a new Elections Act and the Elections Regulations of 1999. The 1998 constitution was amended in 2005 to incorporate the 'Comprehensive Peace Agreement' (CPA) signed with the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). A new election act has been drafted and submitted to the parliament. The new election act was to regulate the elections scheduled for July 2009. Some advocated the postponement due to many factors such as

1) The war in Darfur;
2) Settling the dispute on borders demarcation between the North and the South;
3) The issue of Abiey which was submitted to the International Court of Justice for arbitration – to decided whether this oil-rich area with southerners and northerners coexisted fore more than 100 years is part of the north or south;
4) The controversy over the population census of 2008.

The results of the census were to be declared since late 2008 but the SPLM – the partner in the government – rejected the statistics of the census pertinent to the Southern region on the ground that the figures are far below the actual number of the people of the south (southerners). The leaders of the SPLM hold that there are more than 3 million southerners in the north who were displaced by the war, in addition to hundreds of thousands southern refugees in the neighboring countries. This dispute suspended the declaration of the census that is a basic pre-requisite for new elections to take place under the 1998 constitution and the CPA. The amended constitution, known as 'transitional constitution' recognized the great religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the Sudan, adopts liberal democracy, federal system and a presidential republic.

Chapter 4 of the transitional constitution defined four levels to run the state machinery:

1) The national (central or federal) level,
2) The level of the Southern region (autonomous rule),
3) The state level, and lastly the local level. [1]

Another feature of the new constitution at the federal legislative level is that a bi-cameral system of parliament has been introduced: one is called the National Assembly which is formed by election by the people and the other is the 'States' Assembly'. The States' Assembly is formed by states' representative – two for each (of the 26 states) to be elected by the states' people's assemblies. Those states

members of the States' Assembly are 'delegates' of the states not representatives. The former cannot be dismissed (or stripped of membership of) from the assembly, but the latter can be dismissed by the electorate. Another feature of the new constitution is that if an elected MP changed his allegiance from one party to another (defected), the parliament has the right to drop his membership in the parliament. [11]

Under the NSR (i.e., the MIR), two presidential elections took place, in 2010 and 2015 (as mentioned before). All were held under a military dictatorship – with no party competition as real democracy suggest. The aim of the 1996 was to legitimize the military leadership. It was not elections in pure democratic terms but rather general referendum like those forged by all third world states to give an autocratic ruler a 99% majority. In the second one (2000) as the NSR decided to alleviate the authoritarian grip, other candidates were allowed to run for the presidency on personal, not partisan, basis. Consequently, some contested but al-Bashir scored a landslide by 86%.

The general feature of elections under the NSR's one-party military regime are: [2]

a) They were conducted according to the 'First Past The Post' system of election in the territorial constituencies while used the Proportional Representation system in occupational constituencies (workers, farmers, nomads, and businessmen).

b) The NSR was the first government in the Sudan to make a permanent record for the electorate that is annually revised instead of making new registration at every election.

c) It has adopted the mechanism of public plebiscite on major national issues.

d) Adopted simple majority for the parliamentary elections whereas the absolute majority for the presidential.

e) It set up a standing authority for elections instead of the temporary one that works only during elections.

f) One of the negative aspects of elections under the NSR is the existence of the so-called 'compromising councils' whose task is to bargain and negotiate between the candidates to convince some candidates to withdraw so that a certain candidate can win as unopposed.

g) Another negative electoral practice is that a person should not be a candidate only if others recommend him (she). Regulations also stipulate that a candidate have to get one hundred persons signed for him to step for candidacy.

h) The Elections Authority is assigned to publicize candidates by organizing or supervising media campaigns.

Generally, both the totalitarian systems – the NSR of al-Bashir and the May of Numeri – share one concept of elections, that the forces who are entitled to participate are their supporters. Elections in both military regimes were indirect, special types of elections, appointment, and depended mainly on mobilizing their supporters rather than expressing public policy. In addition, this neglects the interests of other sectors in society – such as ethnic minorities, cultural and socio-economic groups. [10] Therefore, these groups tended to articulate their interests through new parties, ethnic groups or otherwise refrained from participating in the political system. According to the 1998 elections Act, for instance, quarter of the state's assembly are to be indirectly elected – one third of them for women, one-third for teachers and one-third for occupational groups.

5. General Assessment

In the case of Sudan, some suggest that effective participation does not only entail efficient large-scale, or large voting turnouts or very efficient election machinery but rather by training election staff, advanced communication networks, good set of electoral rules and procedures, comprehensive voting methods, and effective information for the general public about elections and electoral procedures. These matters do not necessarily make for effective channels for allowing the ordinary citizens to choose his government freely. In fact, some of the most efficient electoral system and largest voting participation may be found in authoritarian political system where elections amount to little more than a periodic ritual. [10]

It is true that Sudanese enjoy a relative degree of political culture, have desire of change, and incline to political participation; however, elite tend to manipulate this trend and delude the people to achieve their own interests. Candidates give high or unrealistic pledges to the voters but in reality only very little are achieved. During canvassing and voting times, whether under totalitarian or democratic regimes, people are taken by vehicles to attend a political rally of a candidate or to polling stations. The focus is greater on women who, in a patriarchal society like Sudan, vote as their fathers or elders order them to.

One argue that the future of democracy and stability in Sudan relies heavily on maintaining such requirements as: "visionary leadership, post-revolutionary institutions building, rebuilding political parties on sound basis to tackle their structural and functional deficiencies …, building coherent and conscious civil society organizations to function in a free democratic climate to contribute effectively to democratization and nation building." [9]

Therefore, to establish sustainable democracy in Sudan, it is not only the type of election matters, but other destabilizing factors are to be addressed. Actually, the problem of instability and civil wars in Sudan is "an outcome of discrimination and exclusion on an ethnic basis, ethnicisation of politics, conflicts of identities, and tribal conflicts that are all tied to – or revolve around – one major drive: the failure of the

ruling elite to deal objectively and neutrally with the mosaic of the ethno-cultural multiplicity of Sudan." [7]

6. Conclusion

Today in Sudan, many call for the adoption of the proportional representation system of elections instead of the one used since independence – the plurality majority, namely the FPTP type. The Sudan has adopted this type (the FPTP) in all its three democracies the post-colonial era. Some see that the Sudanese had adopted this type without being aware of its nature or examining its suitability to the country. They borrowed it from Britain – the state of reference. Experts in Sudan maintain that this plurality majority system has several demerits such as 1- It excludes the parties of minorities and decreases or narrows the opportunities for them to be represented in the parliament. 2- It encourages the emergence of regional, tribal, or ethnic political parties and groups; a trend which may jeopardize the national cohesion and unity. 3- Under this system many votes are lost and do not find representation. 4- This system foster partisan interests by giving room for manipulation, e.g., by modifying or changing borders, or numbers, of constituencies to serve the major parties and perpetuate their domination of power. [1]

On the other hand, experts advocate the adoption of Proportional Representation (PR) because:

a. It is fair and just in representing political parties.
b. It lessens the lost votes or those not represented.
c. Enables minorities to be represented and minimize exclusion.
d. Encourages parties to include in their lists leaders and elites of the minorities to win the support of their bases (masses).
e. Allows the representation of women and the new transitional forces.
f. Decreases regionalism and ethnic loyalties or other forms of traditional allegiance.
g. Help bring about effective and efficient government by the representation of elites and transitional forces.
h. Allows for the fair share of power - one factor for acceptability and political stability.

Generally, the electoral experience in the Sudan failed to bring about a model of two major party system. Consequently, conflict between the traditional and transitional elites has constituted the driving force for political tansformation. Also the electoral system in the Sudan was weakened by many factors and for many reasons such as the continual changes in elections acts and regulations, as well as of committees assigned to administer the electoral process. Thus, the 1965 and 1968 elections were conducted under new acts that differ from those of the 1953 and 1958. Also there was no permanent body to supervise elections (formed only recently by the present government) and parties usually accused the elections (ad hoc) committees of bias or of committing administrative infringements. In addition, there was no permanent record for voters.

For reform, it is advisable to cancel the so-called compromising councils, cancel the recommendation for candidacy, and issue code of ethics to control the political practice. It is also advisable that candidate should have the right to fair play on the media and that the Elections Authority should not intervene in publicity affairs or propaganda activities. Moreover, the government has to allot especial fund to finance and support democratic reform and promote the partisan performance.

It is true that political parties in Sudan, as in other parts of the world, are to act as effective political institutions to channel conscious political participation and help curb the impact of tribalism on electoral behavior. Unfortunately, in reality the major political parties function along sectarian lines. Therefore, the FPTP type of election will only generate a domination of 'narrow' majority. By this, I mean some sort of monopoly of the decision-making and legislation in the state – excluding the real majority of the masses who have access to parliamentary representation. As such, the proportional representation type of election remains an acceptable option in this connection.

Actually, democracy in Sudan requires a great deal of efforts to work properly in a state of poor political culture and the absence of adequate political awareness. The absence of this "infrastructure" may reproduce the state of vicious circle in which Sudan has been trapped since independence and might, therefore, perpetuate the state of instability and civil wars.

Abbreviations

BC: The Beja Congress
CPA: The Comprehensive Peace Agreement
FPTP: First Pass the Post
MIR: The Military Islamic Regime
NCP: The National Congress Party
NIF: The National Islamic Front
NSR: The National Salvation Revolution
PFP: The People's Federal Party
PPP: The People's Progressive Party
RSP: The Rural Solidarity Party
SANU: Sudan African National Union
SAPCO: The Sudanese African Part Congress
SCP: The Sudanese Communist Party
SNP: The Sudanese National Party
SPLM: The Sudanese People's Liberation Movement
SSU: The Sudan Socialist Union
TMC: The Transitional Military Council

UP: The Umma Party
UNDP: The Unionist Democratic Party

Author Contributions

Abdu Mukhtar Musa is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interests

References

[1] Al-Asam, Mukhtar, (2007). "Elections Systems" (in Arabic), a paper presented to a workshop organized by the Department of Political Science, University of Khartoum, Sudan, 27.12.2007.

[2] Al-Karsani, 'Awad al-Seed (2007), "The Electoral Experience in Sudan", a paper presented (in Arabic) to a workshop organized by the Department of Political Science, University of Khartoum, Sudan, 27.12.2007.

[3] Greenstein, Fred I., Personality and Political Socialization: The Theories of Authoritarian and Democratic Character. Volume 361, Issue 1, 1965. https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626536100108

[4] Hendawi, Hamza, Sudan under al-Bashir: Long history of turmoil, conflicts. https://apnews.com/article/8c637e57658243aca3ee36318a6b5e20 January 3, 2019.

[5] Mackenzie, W. J. M. (1968). Elections: The Functions of Elections; in: David Sills. The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, New York: Macmillan, 1968, Vol. 5.

[6] Musa, Abdu Mukhtar the *Underpinning Determinants of Voting Behaviour: the Case of Sudan.* African Journal of Economics, Politics and Social Studies. Vol 2. Issue No. (1), Nov. 23. Poland: Adam Marszalek Publishing House. p. 89. (2023). https://doi.org/10.15804/ajepss.2023.1.06

[7] Musa, Abdu Mukhtar (2022). Ethnic Politics in Sudan: Dynamics of Instability. African Journal of Economics, Politics and Social Studies (1/2022), Poland: Adam Marszalek Publishing House in cooperation with GRADO Publishing and Professor Czeslwa Mojsiewicz International Cooperation Fund. https://doi.org/10.15804/ajepss.2022.1.06

[8] Musa, Abdu Mukhtar (2009), *Darfur from State Crisis to Super powers Clash*, 2, Doha (Qatar): Al-Jazeera Studies Centre; Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc. (in Arabic) pp. 55-65.

[9] Musa, Abdu Mukhtar. Popular Uprisings in Sudan: Revolutionary Processes intercepted. Los Angeles, CA, USA, Advances in Politics and Society, Vol. 5. No. 1. Dec. 16, 2021. https://doi.org/10.22158/ape.v5n1p1

[10] Nhial, Mom Kou The People's Regional Assembly Elections of Novemb, r 1973, in: Al-Tayyib H. Attiyya, op. cit., p. 81.

[11] Salim, Muhammad Ahmed (2007), "Elections Laws and Political Life" (in Arabic), in: Al-Tayib Haj Atiyya (ed.), Elections (in Arabic), Khartoum: Peace Research Institute, p. 150.

[12] Sills, David (ed.), (1972) *the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: London: Macmillan: Free Press, Vol. 5, p. 12.

[13] Sills (ed.), the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (New York: London: Macmillan: Free Press, 1972), Vol 15.

[14] Stein Rokkan, (1968). Electoral Systems, in D. Sill, Elections, Vol. 5.

[15] Stokes (1968). "Voting Behavior", www.icpsr.umich.edu (Retrieved 2023-05-03).

[16] Stokes, Donald E. (1965). A Variance Components Model of Political Effects. In: David.