

SUDAN - What they're saying about the elections



Photo: Ben Parker/IRIN

An election billboard encouraging people to vote in the coming polls - file photo

NAIROBI, 7 April 2010 (IRIN) - The 11 April elections in Sudan - the first for more than two decades - and the 2011 referendum on the status of Southern Sudan have prompted a flurry of reports. Most highlight the uncertain future facing a divided country still at grave risk of renewed war, despite the 2005 signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between north and south. All were written before the Sudan People's Liberation Movement decided to boycott some of the polls on 7 April.

Here follows a selection (in no particular order):

The **UK's Associate Parliamentary Group for Sudan** warns that with less than a year left in the CPA Interim Period that ends with the 2011 referendum, Sudan's peace process faces many hurdles and requires continued and intense international support to avoid collapse. [On the brink: Towards lasting peace in Sudan](#) provides an overview of recent armed conflict in various regions of Sudan and warns that a separate peace process in the east has had "little impact" on the ground. Issues of governance, human rights and resource management are also examined.

The Carter Center, the lead agency monitoring the polls, called for security to be improved, especially in Darfur and the east, where the "possibility of a genuinely open, inclusive, and secure campaign environment" has been undermined.

In a [detailed overview](#) of various aspects of the electoral process's final stages, the center, while stressing that campaigning has been largely peaceful, noted that three candidates (of the 16,000 running for more than 1,800 executive and legislative posts) had been shot, one fatally. This report also examines the media environment in the run-up to elections, and suggests that the number of polling stations may be insufficient to ensure maximum voter participation.

The **International Crisis Group** (ICG) paints the electoral process as "fundamentally flawed" because, as it claims in [Rigged Elections in Darfur and the Consequences of a Probable \[National Congress Party\] NCP Victory in Sudan](#), considerable fraud has already been perpetrated by the ruling NCP of President Omar el-Bashir, particularly in Darfur. Consequently, legitimacy will be denied the victors. The rigging was carried out, according to ICG, via manipulation of results of the 2008 census, gerrymandering and the passing of biased electoral laws.

"The consequences for Darfur are catastrophic," says ICG, suggesting that with unwanted leaders imposed on them, the people of Darfur will feel more marginalized and thus increasingly support violent means to bring about change.

Both the NCP and the government of Southern Sudan have jeopardized the fairness and credibility of the polls by restricting freedoms of expression and assembly, according to **Human Rights Watch** (HRW). HRW also reported intimidation of journalists and unequal access to state media.

Noting that Southern Sudan shares borders with five separate countries, the **Clingendael Conflict Research Unit** (CRU) of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations examines the "profound regional implications" in the likely event of a "yes" result in the referendum.

In Southern Sudan: the new kid on the block? Assessing the neighbourhood on the threshold of [Southern Sudan's self-determination referendum](#), CRU notes that secession would "affect the region's power configuration and reshape its security and economic environment", and points out that most countries in the region share political characteristics that favour rebellion and instability. This policy brief looks at each state's relationship with Southern Sudan and warns that any intervention must consider the bigger geopolitical picture.

By contrast, the **Rift Valley Institute** zooms into the details of why the upcoming elections are "fraught with difficulty" in [Electoral Designs - Proportionality, representation, and constituency boundaries in Sudan's 2010 elections](#). This report focuses on the highly contentious issue of how electoral districts have been created and how this could affect the distribution of power.

For the **Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre** (DRDC), the outcomes of the 2008 census, used to determine electoral constituencies and a basis for future wealth- and power-sharing agreements, has "created more problems than offered solutions".



Photo: Ben Parker/IRIN

A man takes part in an election rally in Southern Sudan -file photo

In [5th Population and Housing Census in Sudan - An Incomplete Exercise](#), DRDC blasted the process as "the most polarised, controversial, inconsistent and unscientific census to be organized in Sudan's history". A key reason for this was the exclusion from the exercise of large parts of Darfur, where hundreds of thousands of people live in camps.

The complexity of the polls is one of the main concerns of **Democracy Reporting International**, (DRI). In its [Assessment of the Electoral Framework](#), DRI and the **Center for Peace and Development Studies of the University of Juba** note that some voters in the South will have to cast up to 12 ballots. This gives rise to "a serious risk the elections may fail on logistical grounds". This report covers many technical aspects of the polls, from their legal framework to the process of appealing contested results.

The Enough Project's Maggie Fick argues that the "self-interestedness" displayed in deals about the CPA quietly struck between officials from the North and South in February 2010 posed long-term dangers on both sides of the border. In [Deal-making in Sudan](#), Fick laments that the "democratic transformation of Sudan has indeed been lost, or rather stolen, from the people of Sudan, by their leaders".

The CPA failed to deliver much of a peace dividend to most communities in one of the war's epicentres - Southern Sudan's Eastern Equatoria - according to the **Small Arms Survey** (SAS), which polled 2,400 households in the state about their most pressing concerns. In [Symptoms and Causes - Insecurity and Underdevelopment in Eastern Equatoria](#) (a paper that does not directly address the elections), SAS said the most common concerns related to education, healthcare and water.