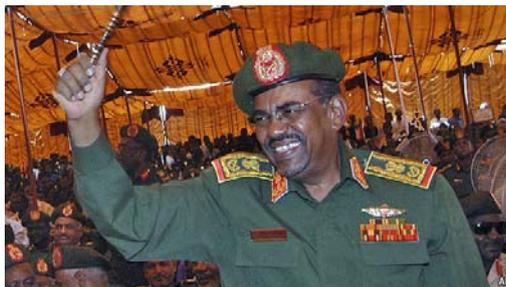


No surprises

Now that Bashir has won the election, what next for Sudan?



AFTER more than a week's delay, the results of Sudan's elections were announced on April 26th. It was a victory for the status quo. President Omar al-Bashir, who seized power in a coup in 1989, was confirmed as president, winning with 68% of the vote, while Salva Kiir, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), was confirmed as the president of the semi-autonomous region of southern Sudan.

The results will surprise no one. Mr Bashir's henchmen rigged the election to favour their man long in advance of the polls themselves. Both of the main Western election-observer missions, from America's Carter Centre and from the EU, have said that the elections did not meet "international standards", citing widespread irregularities on top of the usual logistical problems in a country as poor as Sudan.

As well as the rigging itself, several opposition parties pulled out of the election just days before the polls opened in protest against the unfairness of the contest. As a consequence, Mr Bashir's National Congress Party (NCP) faced little real contest in many parts of the country. Indeed, some were surprised that Mr Bashir's government awarded itself a comparatively modest 68%; when the first results started dribbling out, it was said that he was winning by more like 96%. It is possible that even the NCP initially felt that it had slightly over-reached itself.

In the south the SPLM faced even less competition. Just to make sure of their win, party thugs indulged in a spot of intimidation at some of the polling centres. The sweeping victory of Mr Kiir effectively confirms the division of the country into two distinct political entities, as the SPLM boycotted most of the poll in the north. Despite this its presidential candidate still got 21% of the vote against Mr Bashir.

With these elections out of the way, all parties will start to look forward to the next big event, the referendum on southern independence that is due to take place in January 2011. If the southerners vote for secession, as is likely, the formal break-up of a country that was largely a British colonial confection in the first place will ensue. The danger, though, is that the north will not accept southern independence, especially as the region contains most of Sudan's oil. Over the next few months, the NCP, SPLM, the UN and foreign diplomats will try to negotiate an amicable split. If they fail, there could be more violence between the two sides.

As for Mr Bashir, he will feel that the vote is at least a partial vindication of his stance against the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has indicted him for war crimes over the conflict in the country's western region of Darfur. However, the election will do little to alter the deadlock on this issue; those mainly African and Arab countries that back him will continue to do so, and the ICC will remain powerless to arrest Mr Bashir.

Fonte: The Economist, Apr. 27th 2010. Disponível em: <www.economist.com>. Acesso em: 28 abr. 2010.