

The Sudan Syndrome: State-Society Contests and The Future of Democracy After The December 2018 Revolution

Ibrahim Elbadawi and Alzaki Alhelo

THE SUDAN SYNDROME: STATE-SOCIETY CONTESTS AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY AFTER THE DECEMBER 2018 REVOLUTION¹

Ibrahim Elbadawi and Alzaki Alhelo²

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Send correspondence to:
Ibrahim Elbadawi
Economic Research Forum
iaelbadawi@erf.org.eg

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² Department of Economics, University of Khartoum, Sudan.

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Abstract

Around 65 years ago when Sudan was about to gain its independence, it was described as a “bright spot in a dark continent.” Unfortunately, that optimism about Sudan could not have been more wrong. Instead, Sudan has come to be a country defined by conflicts, political instability, and development failures. To date, the country has experienced three long-reigning, dysfunctional, and autocratic military regimes interrupted by three popular uprisings (in 1964, 1986, and 2018-present). The first two led to short-lived democracies, while, as before, the demise of the last autocratic regime led to the formation of the current transitional government, entrusted with the task of preparing the country for democratic elections in 2023. However, this nascent transitional government was toppled by a palace coup on 25 October 2021 well before the much-anticipated election of 2023. This peculiar Sudanese political history came to be characterized in popular Sudanese literature as the “Sudan Syndrome.” The main research questions considered in this paper revolve around explaining this “syndrome,” drawing lessons for the current transition, and exploring how Sudan can break free from the vicious cycle that plagued its post-independence history toward the stable, prosperous, democratic state that was originally thought to be its destiny. We use the “narrow corridor” model of Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson as the main analytical framework for analyzing the phenomena and for drawing lessons for the current political transition in Sudan. Specifically, we ask three fundamental questions: how can Sudan re-enter the corridor following the recent setback in October 2021? How can the country broaden the corridor and stay in it toward a balanced and mature democratic project? Finally, how can the country engineer the national project for achieving these two objectives while accounting for both the political and economic agenda of the social contract?

Keywords: Sudan syndrome, narrow corridor, political marketplace, conflicts, democracy, autocracy, social contract.

JEL Classifications: D72, D74.

ملخص

منذ حوالي 65 عامًا، عندما كان السودان على وشك الحصول على استقلاله، وُصف بأنه «نقطة مضيئة في قارة مظلمة». لسوء الحظ، لم يكن من الممكن أن يكون هذا التفاؤل بشأن السودان أكثر خطأً. بدلاً من ذلك، أصبح السودان دولة محددة بالصراعات وعدم الاستقرار السياسي وإخفاقات التنمية. حتى الآن، شهدت البلاد ثلاثة أنظمة عسكرية طويلة الأمد ومختلفة وظيفيًا واستبدادية قاطعتها ثلاث انتفاضات شعبية (في 1964 و 1986 و 2018 إلى الوقت الحاضر). أدى الأعلان إلى ديمقراطيات قصيرة العمر، بينما أدى زوال النظام الاستبدادي الأخير، كما كان من قبل، إلى تشكيل الحكومة الانتقالية الحالية، المكلفة بمهمة إعداد البلاد للانتخابات الديمقراطية في عام 2023. ومع ذلك، أُطيح بهذه الحكومة الانتقالية الناشئة بانقلاب القصر في 25 أكتوبر 2021 قبل وقت طويل من الانتخابات التي طال انتظارها في عام 2023. أصبح هذا التاريخ السياسي السوداني الغريب يتميز في الأدب السوداني الشعبي باسم «متلازمة السودان». تدور الأسئلة البحثية الرئيسية التي تم تناولها في هذه الورقة حول شرح هذه «المتلازمة»، واستخلاص الدروس للانتقال الحالي، واستكشاف كيف يمكن للسودان التحرر من الحلقة المفرغة التي ابتليت بها تاريخه بعد الاستقلال نحو دولة ديمقراطية مستقرة ومزدهرة كان يعتقد في الأصل أن مصيره. نحن نستخدم نموذج «الممر الضيق» لدارون أسيموغلو وجيمس روبنسون كإطار تحليلي رئيسي لتحليل الظواهر واستخلاص الدروس للانتقال السياسي الحالي في السودان. على وجه التحديد، نطرح ثلاثة أسئلة أساسية: كيف يمكن للسودان العودة إلى الممر بعد الانتكاسة الأخيرة في أكتوبر 2021؟ كيف يمكن للبلاد توسيع الممر والبقاء فيه نحو مشروع ديمقراطي متوازن وناضج؟ وأخيراً، كيف يمكن للبلد أن يهندس المشروع الوطني لتحقيق هذين الهدفين مع مراعاة جدول الأعمال السياسي والاقتصادي للعقد الاجتماعي؟

“Sudan: Bright Spot in a Dark Continent”

(The cover page of *Newsweek* magazine on 23 February 1953)

I. Introduction

The above quote reflected a widely-held view about the prospects of Sudan, which was then poised to gain its independence from British colonial rule in 1956. The independence project was the product of a long struggle made possible by the efforts of disparate actors, including traditional and popular as well as small and modern political parties, the conference of school and college graduates, and other civil society groups. Therefore, despite the dominance of traditional parties, mostly supported by rural communities and followers of Islamic Sufi orders, the relatively sophisticated civil society and political class by the Arab and African standards of that time had laid the foundation for a vibrant multiparty democracy even before the country officially became independent.

Moreover, Sudan would emerge from colonial rule as the largest country in Africa and one endowed with immense agricultural potential, at the core of which is the more than two-million-acre modern Gezira scheme for irrigated agriculture. Furthermore, the colonial administration bequeathed to the country one of the best public institutions in Africa, including a distinguished educational system, decent infrastructure for agricultural research and extension, an independent judiciary and civil service characterized by professionalism and high efficiency, as well as effective service institutions, such as ports, railways, and post systems. The country, therefore, was seen as a rising African star with good prospects for building a stable democracy and robust modern economy.

Unfortunately, the optimism about Sudan could not have been more wrong. The reality is that despite the human and institutional capabilities that were available to the country at the dawn of independence more than 65 years ago, Sudan has come to be a country defined by conflicts, political instability, and development failures. So far, it has experienced three long-reigning, dysfunctional, and autocratic military regimes interrupted by three popular uprisings (in 1964, 1986, and 2018-present). The first two led to short-lived democracies, while, as before, the demise of the last autocratic regime led to the formation of the current transitional government, entrusted with the task of preparing the country for democratic elections in 2023. However, the latter transition proved to be even more precarious, and the transitional government was toppled by a palace coup on 25 October 2021 well before the much-anticipated election of 2023. The country’s peculiar political history has come to be characterized in popular Sudanese literature as the “Sudan Syndrome.”

The main research questions considered in this paper focus on explaining this “syndrome,” drawing lessons for the current transition, and exploring how Sudan can break free from the vicious cycle that plagued its post-independence history toward the stable, prosperous, and democratic peace that was originally thought to be its destiny.

Naturally, the literature has stressed the devastating impact of the multiple episodes of civil wars, which started shortly before the country's independence and have continued to shape its future ever since. The fighting stopped for more than a decade (1972-83) following the signing of a peace agreement between the first Southern Sudanese insurgency and the government of Gen. Gaafar Neimeri in 1972, but a deadlier and more destructive war erupted again for nearly 25 years until 2005. The signing of the so-called Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that year between Dr. John Garang's Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Ingaz regime³ of Gen. Omer al-Bashir put an end to the war and eventually led to the partitioning of the country and the creation of the state of South Sudan in 2011. However, while the agreement was being negotiated, a new phase of civil war erupted in the Darfur region in 2003. This earmarked a new tragic milestone since it was the first armed political conflict to occur in the northern part of the country since its independence. The fact that the two peace deals, which centered around power-sharing arrangements, were achieved under authoritarian rule explains why the first one could not be sustained, while the second led to the partitioning of the country, the flaring up of the Darfur insurgency, and the emergence of other conflicts in the southern Kordofan and southern Blue Nile regions, as well as communal violence in Eastern Sudan.⁴

Moreover, civil wars usually occur in economically backward and socially fractionalized societies when political institutions fail to manage diversity, resulting in the economic and political marginalization of social groups within a society. In turn, the looming existence of the civil war further aggravates the deep socioeconomic and political causes behind the onset of conflicts, such as political polarization, poverty, and inequality – especially “horizontal” inequality across regions and communities. In the shadow of violent conflicts, other factors, some linked to the path-dependence shaped by conflicts, are also at play in the case of Sudan. Political fragmentation in post-independence Sudan could also be seen in the legacy of the struggle for power between modern elites (trade unions and ideological political parties and the army) and the historically popular traditional parties, as well as in the contest between secular and religious elites within the rising modern political class.⁵

There is a large body of literature discussing how Sudan became so conflictive, ruled by relatively long-reigning military autocracies, short-lived democracies, fragile governance, and a disappointing development record.⁶ However, molding these diverse structural factors into a

³ “Ingaz” is an Arabic word for “salvation.”

⁴ The evidence from the literature is abound with the risks of unfulfilled or partial power-sharing agreements that were confined to a few social groups. The CPA was essentially an agreement between two military protagonists, the Ingaz regime and the SPLM. Therefore, it was not seen by the Southern Sudanese as compelling enough to assure them to vote for unity (Khalil, 2021). Moreover, it provided an example for the aggrieved Darfurian elites of the effectiveness of mounting armed struggles to achieve their political goals (Bormann and Elbadawi, 2021; Elbadawi, 2008).

⁵ Sudanese historians have diligently documented these divisive features of the Sudanese political discourses. See, for example, Fadwa Ali Taha (2019) and Ahmed Abu Shouk (2018).

⁶ See, for example, Ali, Elbadawi, and Elbatahani (2005), Ali and Elbadawi (2007), Elbadawi (2016), Elbatahani (2016), Elnur, (2009), and Wakson (1993).

coherent dynamic framework for explaining the Sudan Syndrome would require an overarching analytical framework. In our view, the state-building model of the “narrow corridor” explained in Acemoglu and Robinson (2018, 2019, 2020) (henceforth referred to as AR) provides an intuitive and coherent analytical approach to explaining the Sudan Syndrome. According to the AR theory, stable state-building requires a relative balance between the power of society and that of the elites controlling the state. In this case, the state and societies enter a “narrow corridor” where they mutually exert pressure on each other to ensure that the elites deliver the required public goods for state building and the society allows the state to gain the strength to do so. Instead, when elites dominate society, we have a despotic, not necessarily developmental, state, such as the Ingaz regime. Furthermore, they argue that even when state domination produces a strong despotic party, such as the Chinese Communist Party, eventually the polity will hit a snag due to the lack of accountability and contestability from the weaker society. On the other extreme, where society is too strong but also too fractionalized to permit the emergence of a strong central state, we have the case of a weak state, such as the cases of Lebanon and Somalia. This theory, therefore, constitutes a significant departure from most of the literature, which argues that a strong state must come first to modernize the economy, which would eventually facilitate the transition to a stable democracy and inclusive polity (e.g., Fukuyama, 2004; Huntington, 1968).

Articulating the AR model to the case of Sudan, we argue that the three massive popular uprisings managed to align societal strength with that of the military and civilian elites and forced an entry into the narrow corridor. However, the first two only managed to produce partial and relatively short-lived democracies, while, in this case, the jury is still out regarding the third, though the odds militating against a stable democratic transition are even more challenging. As described by AR, the entry into the narrow corridor is rather messy and fraught with struggles between the conflicting interests of the contesting groups (within society, within elites, and between society and elites). Only a few of such transitions are able to remain within the corridor and move upward, where both society and the state gain strength in a positive sum game. The failure to remain in and make progress in the corridor has almost always been associated with three major factors: the massive polarization within the society, the lack of credible institutions as arbiters for resolving conflicts, and major economic and political crises. All these factors, among others, were present in the first two political transitions, which provides important lessons for what needs to be done for the survival of the current transition. The third transition might very well travel along the same path unless, somehow, a broad democracy and freedom coalition emerges, a credible arbiter is found, and the current economic crisis is resolved in good time.

Against this backdrop, this paper asks three central questions on the historical legacy of power relations and the development of Sudan:

- How has the Sudan Syndrome become a self-reinforcing ensemble of constraints hindering democratic consolidation and viable economic development?

- To narrow the focus, what drives successful popular uprisings, and why do they fail to produce a stable transition to democracy?
- In the context of the AR framework, the Sudanese society has demonstrated its ability to enter the democratic and development corridor. However, because the corridor is rather narrow, how might Sudan “widen” this corridor and stay in it?

Section II starts by reviewing the legacy of conflicts and development crises in Sudan. This motivates the analysis of sections III and IV, which undertake a historical analytical narrative of political regimes in Sudan and highlight how elites’ failure to manage social diversity has set the country down a dysfunctional path of political polarization, instability, and aborted democracies. In this context, the two sections review the political and economic institutions and political economy considerations that governed the priorities for allocating resources (including the rentier resources), in addition to economic policies and other development strategies during the various political regimes that succeeded in ruling Sudan in the past 60 years. Section III covers the period before the coup of the Ingaz regime in 1989, which spans three types of political regimes: the conventional military-civilian regimes (1956-69); Gen. Nimeiry’s “May” regime (1969-85); and the third civilian democratic regime (1987-89). Section IV is devoted to the Ingaz regime (1989-2019). Section V reviews the collapse of the Ingaz regime following the December 2018 revolution and the current transition.

Section VI uses a graphical representation of the AR model to explain the Sudan Syndrome. It does so using the central logic of the AR model, which stipulates that the same factors that led to the collapse of the three authoritarian regimes of Generals Aboud (1958-64), Neimeri (1969-85), and al-Bashir (1989-2019) and the country’s entry into the “corridor” might have very well also contributed to the unraveling of the first three democracies and return to autocratic rule. Section VII draws lessons from Sudan’s past experiences for the current transitional period, asking the ultimate question as to how the country might break free from the nihilistic syndrome and transit to stable democratic civil peace and sustainable economic development. Section VIII concludes.

II. A legacy of polarization, conflicts, and underdevelopment

As a first order of approximation, it could be argued that the Sudan Syndrome is an epitome of a host of structural factors, most notably social and political polarization, conflicts, and economic underdevelopment. Such an analysis would require probing deep into the historical preconditions precipitated by the colonial encounter and the consequent political discourse chosen by the country’s founding fathers. This is important because the colonial legacy and its immediate aftermath had profound effects on the proclivity of the country to fall prey to civil wars and maintain non-inclusive public policy and development institutions, both of which have been major factors behind the ensuing dysfunctional nation-building that beset post-independence Sudan.

II.1 The challenges of managing social fractionalization and polarization

Historical, social, and geographic factors have all contributed to the nature and duration of the Sudanese conflict. In particular, Sudan is not only a fairly socially diverse country; it was⁷ also characterized by a major divide between the Arab and Arabized Muslim majority in the northern two-thirds of the country and the relatively underdeveloped and African-populated South. Based on the shares in total population of the major groups classified by religion, ethnicity, and culture, it can be shown that Sudan is polarized along a North-South divide in addition to other second-order – though by no means insignificant – country-wide cleavages along tribal, ethnic and regional lines within both parts of the country (Table 1).

The extent of the country's social fractionalization is confirmed by analyzing global indexes of (ethnic, cultural, and religious) fractionalization and polarization. Firstly, the definition of the social fractionalization index for a given country j is given by:

$$(1) \quad FRACT_j = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^N s_{ij}^2,$$

Where s_{ij} is the share of group i ($i=1, \dots, N$) in country j . This index gives the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a population belong to two different groups. This index reaches its maximum (at the value of 1) when each individual belongs to a different group.⁸ Secondly, the polarization index, which can be derived from a model of lobbying (see, for example, Esteban and Ray, 1994), is given by:

$$(2) \quad POLAR_j = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^N \left(\frac{0.5 - s_{ij}}{0.5} \right)^2 s_{ij},$$

where the right-hand side variables are as before. Note that this reaches a maximum when there are two equally sized groups in a society. As seen in Table 2, the Sudanese society is characterized by extreme fractionalization along ethnic lines ($FRACT > 0.71$) and by extreme religious polarization ($POLAR > 0.77$). While these indexes are comparable to the medians for Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), they are much higher than those for the world, the Arab world, and East Asia. Like SSA, the Sudanese society has been afflicted by long durations of conflicts due to the failure of its ruling elites to manage social diversity.

This major divide was further polarized by the colonial policy (of the British colonial administration), which was aimed at insulating the South from the North, pending its eventual

⁷ The “was” is meant to suggest that the “fundamental” divide pertains to pre-2011 Sudan, when the country was partitioned to create the nascent “Republic of South Sudan.”

⁸ This index was constructed by Alesina et al. (2003) for three types of fractionalizations: ethnic, language, and religious. They built more disaggregated and updated data than the data used to compute the well-known ethnolinguistic fractionalization index (ELF), which lumps together language and ethnic background and was based on data collected in the 1960s. Instead, these authors disaggregated population shares according to language and ethnicity in addition to religion. They also report the entire distribution of the population in terms of ethnicity, language, and religion for more than 180 countries.

integration into East Africa. This policy was finally reversed less than ten years before the country's independence; by that time, however, the two parts of the country had substantially drifted apart (Ali, Elbadawi, and Elbatahani, 2005).

The inherited legacy of the colonial encounter was further reinforced by the dynamics of civil war and the failures and lack of vision on the part of the Sudanese political elites following independence. The ensuing political landscape was, therefore, characterized by a high degree of political instability, which produced three short-lived democratic rules and three more long-reigning military regimes. Given the historical background of the rise of political parties and the nature of the inherited parliamentary democracy, the democratic regimes were characterized by highly polarized political practices that left very little room for the articulation, design, and implementation of long-term development. On the other hand, despite their long duration, the military regimes could not establish stable polity and their economic strategies were subject to reversals, corruption, and nontransparent management.

Table 1. Population of Sudan by major ethnic groups in 1956

Major ethnic group	Number of specific groups	Population	Share of population (%)	Comments
Arab	12	3,989,533	38.87	Major tribes include Baggara, Dar Hamid, Gawama'a-Budeiriya, Shukriya, Ga'aliyin, and Guhayna. Classification includes a specific group of "unknown."
Nuba	8	572,935	5.58	Specific groups relate to geographical locations in addition to Nuba-Mesiriya and a specific group of "unknown."
Beja	6	645,703	6.29	
Nubiyin	1	330,032	3.22	
Mainly Nilotic	9	1,982,503	19.32	Major tribes include Dinka-Northeastern, Dinka-Rweng, Dinka-Bor, Dinka-Southwestern, Fung tribes, and Nuer. Classification includes "other Nilotic tribes" and "unknown."
Mainly Nilo-Hamitic	5	548,593	5.35	Major tribal groups include Ethiopian tribes, Bari-speaking, Latuka-speaking, Didinga-speaking, and "others."
Mainly Sudanic	6	481,764	4.69	Major tribes include Moru-Madi, Bongo-Baka-Bgirma, Ndogo-Sere, Zande, "other" and "unknown."
Westerners	4	1,358,637	13.24	Tribes include Western Darfur, French equatorial tribes, Nigerian tribes, and "unknown."
Foreigners with status	NA	52,622	0.51	Not applicable.
Foreigners with no status	NA	206,517	2.01	Not applicable.
Miscellaneous	2	93,695	0.91	People with no known tribe.
Total	53	10,262,536	100.00	All of the above.

Source: Balamoan (1981, 152, Table 35).

Table 2. Social fractionalization and polarization in Sudan

Social fractionalization	<i>Ethnic</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Dominant Category*</i>
Sudan	0.715	0.719	0.400	0.719
Arab Median	0.320	0.058	0.067	0.320
East Asian Median	0.450	0.616	0.549	0.616
Sub-Saharan Africa Median	0.738	0.783	0.633	0.783
World Median	0.415	0.335	0.461	0.461
Sudan	0.650	0.630	0.774	0.774
Arab World Median	0.616	0.113	0.133	0.661
East Asia Median	0.680	0.652	0.719	0.719
Sub-Saharan Africa Median	0.628	0.565	0.769	0.769
World Median	0.603	0.491	0.706	0.706

Source: Tables 5 and 6 of Elbadawi (2004).

Notes:

- 1.* represents each country's highest value among the three categories (ethnicity, language, and religion).
2. Index range between zero and one and is based on equation (1) for fractionalization and equation (2) for polarization.

Moreover, the same colonial legacy that made the country essentially ripe for civil war has also been associated with a fault start with regard to economic and political institutions. It has been argued that the colonial powers devised what are now called “market-supporting” institutions where they decided to settle, while they opted for “extractive institutions” where they decided not to settle (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, 2001). Evidence from the economic growth literature has emphasized the importance of the rule of law and strong institutions for the growth and structural transformation of economies. Institutions promote growth by facilitating investment, learning, and innovation. It is also generally recognized that institutions evolve over long periods of time in response to the demands of social, political, and economic interactions. The evolutionary processes involved are influenced by the geography, history, and culture of the societies concerned.⁹ It is argued that colonial institutions persisted to the post-colonial period.¹⁰ These inherited institutions influenced growth and overall development in post-colonial developing countries. The legacy of these colonial institutions, we would argue, has been particularly devastating for Africa, including Sudan. Not only did the colonization of Africa remain much longer; it was, by and large, associated with “extractive” institutions.

⁹ The role of institutions in development has been the subject of an active debate in development and endogenous growth literature, especially with regard to the dependence on institutions and geography and whether the latter has an independent effect on growth and income levels. According to one strand of the literature, institutions have direct effects on income, while geography does not, though the latter influences institutions (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, 2001). Concluding that “institutions rule,” Rodrik et al. (2004) provide evidence in support of the above finding (see also Easterly and Levine, 2003). However, Sachs (2003) shows that malaria transmission, which is strongly affected by ecological conditions, directly affects the level of per capita income after controlling for the quality of institutions.

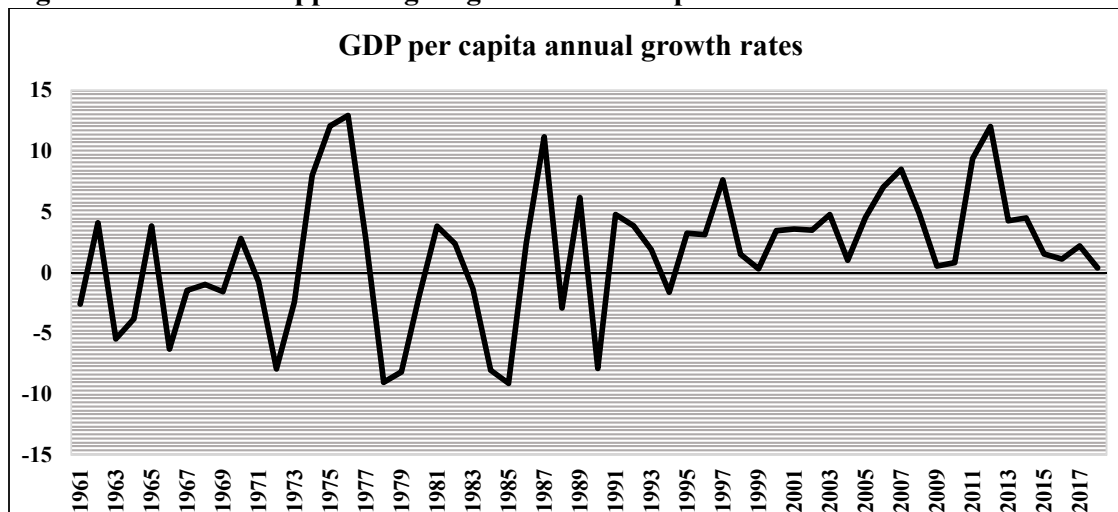
¹⁰ A leading African social thinker, Mamdani (1996:19), argues that the colonial state in Africa was “a double-sided affair. Its one side, the state that governed a racially defined citizenry, was bounded by the rule of law and an associated regime of rights. Its other side, the state that ruled over subjects, was a regime of extra economic coercion and administratively driven justice.”

Under the British colonial administration, the period 1899-1956 saw the laying of the foundation of the modern economy of Sudan. The pillar of this foundation was long-staple cotton. The cotton economy and the Gezira scheme were directly linked to the interests of the British textile industry and were aimed at providing reliable exports of raw and high-quality cotton to this industry. The emergence of the cotton-based irrigated agricultural sector during the colonial era has been associated with a whole ensemble of extractive economic institutions, especially with regard to the traditional rainfed rural economies in the western parts of the country. Therefore, it is not surprising that the whole modern economic system was conceived around irrigated agriculture and the cotton economy, where bureaucracy, infrastructure, development planning, and educational and health welfare systems were all geared toward this economy.

Admittedly, the colonial administration created highly professional and efficient administrative and economic institutions, including a first-class educational system, sophisticated agricultural research infrastructure, a strong and independent judiciary and civil service, as well as efficient railway and post systems. However, the inherited institutional structure was obviously lopsided and was, therefore, not suitable for broad-based development aimed at elevating the entire country, especially the vast majority of the population in the rainfed regions. National income estimates for 1956 show that the Blue Nile region, the heart of agricultural development during the colonial period, was relatively better off than other regions of the country with a per capita GDP of about LS 42 (USD 118), followed by the North-East region, with a per capita GDP of about LS 33 (USD 92) and the North-West region with a per capita GDP of LS 27 (USD 76). The South fared much worse than the northern regions with a per capita GDP of around LS 14 (USD 39), reflecting years of neglect and marginalization during the colonial period. The poorest northern sub-region had almost twice the per capita income of the South (Ali and Elbadawi, 2007).

Unfortunately, only marginal changes were affected by this dominant development model, mainly due to the political instability that engulfed the country since its independence. Therefore, the national rule only managed to widen the country's major economic disparities among the regions. The failure to radically restructure the development strategy and the associated institutions not only produced disappointing growth (Figure 1), poverty, and deprivation; it also contributed to the conflictive discourse of Sudanese politics.

Figure 1. Sudan's disappointing long-run economic performance



Source: The World Bank.

II.2 Political polarization¹¹

Due to old historical factors relating to the domination of religious life in Sudan by Muslim Sufi religious orders, they came to dominate the political, social, and economic life of northern Sudan and the country. The Mahdist revolution that liberated the country from colonial rule and created the Mahdist state (1881-98) was the culmination of the Sufi influence on northern political, social, and economic life. The Ansar Movement (followers of the Mahdist Call) survived the collapse of the state and reinvented itself as a powerful religious, economic, and social organization during colonial and post-colonial Sudan. The rival Sufi order (the Khatmiyyah) also wielded considerable influence and emerged as the counterweight of the Ansar movement. The most influential civil society organization of that time, the Graduates' Congress, which purported to articulate the social and political demands of the society on a non-sectarian basis, eventually found itself split along the same sectarian divide. Two major parties eventually emerged: the Umma Party (UP), with largely Mahdist followers, and the National Unionist Party (NUP), with largely Khatmiyyah followers. The political platforms of the two major parties, which were identified at the time of the struggle for independence, revolved around the future of independent Sudan, with the UP arguing for independence from the two condominium powers (Britain and Egypt) and the NUP calling for a union with Egypt.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the very first parliamentary elections (1953) for a self-rule government were dominated by the NUP and UP, with 75 percent of the 92 seats from geographic constituencies going to the two parties aligned with the two major religious sects, including 46 for the DUP and 23 for the UP. However, due to the rivalry between the two parties and the absence of a clear majority in this and subsequent elections, democratic politics in Sudan were dominated by weak and unstable coalitions. Moreover, the two major

¹¹ This sub-section draws heavily from Ali and Elbadawi (2007).

parties had a history of splintering from within in various directions and for various reasons. The first split came in June 1956 when Khatmiyyah loyalists among the tribal leaders, religious agents, and fractions of the bourgeoisie with economic interests in rural areas of northern and eastern Sudan broke away from the NUP and formed the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). Some scholars studying the modern political history of Sudan have attributed these fissures to the divergent economic interests of the major social groups supporting these parties. In this context, Niblock (1987) identifies four major social origins of the members of the first parliament (tribal and religious leaders; ex-government employees and ex-army officers; merchants and farmers; and teachers and others) that clearly had divergent economic interests and different cultural backgrounds.

The already weak coalition democracies, due to the internal political fissures between and among the ruling parties, were further challenged by the Sudanese Communist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood Movement. The two starkly ideologically opposed political movements had much smaller popular bases, but they were able to muster considerable support among professionals and students. Coming from two different ideological perspectives, the two political forces attempted to contest the dominance of the two traditional parties. The Sudanese Communist Party, established in 1948, posed a challenge to the traditional parties in terms of its advocacy of distributive politics and its influence on unionized labor movements and professional associations. The Trade Union Movement was a major player, often at loggerheads with the ruling coalitions and the military regimes, and tended to be dominated by the left, especially the Communist Party. On the other extreme, the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which was to gain political ascendance in the mid-1970s, sought to challenge the religious credentials of the two parties by promoting a political message around the call for an Islamic constitution. In the face of the electoral dominance of the two traditional parties, both the communists and the Muslim Brotherhood found ways to influence the political discourse of the country, including by supporting and sponsoring military coups against the nascent Sudanese democracy.¹²

The disenchantment with the dominant role of the traditional parties in democratic electoral politics was not confined to just the “ideological” parties such as the Communist Party and the Islamic Charter Front; it actually pervaded a large segment of Sudanese professionals, the so-called “educated elites.” According to Mansour Khalid, the late leading Sudanese writer and politician,¹³ it is impossible to implement the principle of one vote for every citizen in a country like Sudan, where “three-quarters of which are illiterate, living in a standard of living below the human standard and anchored in the shackles of traditional emotional control.” The late

¹⁰ The Sudanese Communist Party and its left-wing allies supported Gen. Neimeri's coup in May 1969 and sponsored the failed coup in July 1971 by Major Hashim Al Atta, which led to a brutal reprisal by the Neimeri regime against the party. On the other hand, the NUP gained considerable influence when it emerged as a main supporter of the Neimeri regime since 1977 and until its collapse in 1985, which allowed it to mount a successful coup against the democratic regime that followed the March-April 1985 uprising. This regime was able to remain in power for some 30 years before its demise following the December 2018 revolution.

¹³ Mansour Khaled (1975).

Muhammad Hashem Awad,¹⁴ an academic and minister, analyzed the economic and social background of members of the pre-independence Consultative Council of Northern Sudan (1944), the Legislative Assembly (1948), and the first and second parliaments (1954-58). His analysis led him to dismiss the Sudanese parliamentary democracy as a “plutocracy” for “the rich, who prevailed, bringing together tribal and sectarian influence to the trifles of prestige and money.”¹⁵

Other commentators from the elites’ community vented their frustration by describing the coalition governments in the 1950s as representing “an alliance of the agricultural capitalists and the religious aristocracy with the latter exercising effective, undisguised, and unmitigated hegemony” (Ali, 1989, p. 119).

However, this view on the alleged dysfunctionality of the traditional party-dominated Sudanese democracy has been vigorously contested by others from within the same community of the “educated elites.” For example, Sudanese academic and leading Marxian social thinker Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim argues that the petty bourgeoisie and its modern powers suffer from what he called “electoral envy” toward the conservative or tutelary powers’ parties. He went on to characterize the essence of the Sudanese elites’ political identity crisis, which we quote below (Ibrahim, 2021, p. 7-8):¹⁶

“They are a minority in a political environment whose people vote for the parties of the traditional or Islamic inheritance class whenever they obtain universal suffrage. This class, which owned the tools of the state and was deprived of its authority, has always denounced its miserable share of rule in the parliamentary system, even though it was, according to its claim, the one who was qualified for the task. The harsh rule of these parties prevented them from developing a taste for liberalism, i.e., universal suffrage, describing it as “sectarian democracy.” They mean that the master in the sect and clan has power over the votes of his followers. Therefore, this elite has often invoked, at critical junctures in the governance of the nation, the necessity of establishing a ‘technocratic’ government, i.e., a government over which they are responsible for the function of vocational qualification. And it wants to compensate for all of this for the touchstone of the elections, which never achieved what its ships desired but rather empowered the hereditary class, which is strengthened by the masses. Here is the origin of the sickness of this class of democracy that guarantees the right to vote for all, and its waiting for it with coups that were guided by the tricks of the hereditary class that blocked its path to power.”

In view of the high social fractionalization and the apparent failure to design appropriate political systems for managing such fractionalization, it is not surprising that politics in the

¹⁴ See Awad (1968).

¹⁵ The quote is from Ibrahim (2021).

¹⁶ Translated from Ibrahim’s (2021) paper, which was written in Arabic.

country started off as factional and conflict-ridden and, hence, were highly polarized. Such a feature can be captured by a political polarization index defined as follows:

$$(3) \quad \text{Political Polarization Index (PPI)} = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^N \left(\frac{0.5 - \pi_{ij}}{0.5} \right)^2 \pi_{ij}$$

where π_i is the percentage of seats secured by a given party in an election and the summation is over the number of political parties (N). The maximum political polarization, an index value equal to one, obtains when there are only two parties with equal weights in the elections. Table 4 summarizes the results of the calculations of the PPI for all the elections held in Sudan. Except for 1953 and 1958, all other elections were partial in nature in the sense of excluding the Southern region of the country. The index is calculated for the number of seats secured by given parties as reported in the literature. Where there are numerous small parties, a category called “others” is used in the calculation of the index. The table shows a fairly high level of political polarization in the country during the democratic regimes based on the various democratic elections held in the country.

It is this relatively high level of political polarization that led to the political crises of fragile short-lived democracies, coups, and long-reigning dysfunctional military autocracies. Supporting this view about the devastating effect of political polarization in Sudan, Sudanese political scientist Hassan El Haj Ali argues that “the reasons for military intervention in power in Sudan could be attributed to the political polarization coinciding with the politicization of the military institution; so that military officers became stretch civilians inside, and the military coup became a continuation of the political process” (Ali, 2017, p. 53).¹⁷ In turn, this tragic political discourse produced a disappointing development record and exposed the country to destructive episodes of civil wars.

¹⁷ Translated from Arabic (Ali, 2017).

Table 4. Political polarization index for Sudan

Year	No. of parties	No. of constituencies	PPI	Governments formed during the period
1953	5	97	0.7798	NUP formed the first government. A coalition NUP-UP government was formed in February 1956. In June 1956, Khatmiyyah loyalists broke away from the NUP and formed the PDP. A UP-PDP government was formed in July 1956.
1958	3	127	0.8842	UP-PDP coalition government. UP handed over the government to the army generals on 17 November, owing to a threat of being deposed by a NUP-PDP coalition.
1965	6	173	0.7867	UP-NUP coalition for the period May 1965 to June 1966. UP split into two parties: Sadig's faction (SUP) and the Imam faction (IUP). SUP-NUP coalition government for the period June 1966 to May 1967. IUP-NUP coalition for the period May 1967 to June 1969.
1968	9	218	0.6616	IUP-NUP coalition for the period 1968- May 1969.
1986	7	260	0.7323	UP-NUP two coalition governments (June 1986 to May 1987 and June 1987 to May 1988); UP-NUP-NIF coalition government (May 1988 to December 1988); UP-NIF coalition government (December 1988 to March 1989); and the National Unity Government (March 1989 to June 1989).

Source: Ali and Elbadawi (2007, Table 11).

II.3 The civil war

There is now compelling evidence from the literature on the explosive combination of social cleavages, absence of inclusive political systems, and economic underdevelopment.¹⁸ The last two provide a strong case for grievance-motivated rebellion against the state, regardless of the structure of society. However, large-scale violence often happens in societies characterized by a major social divide (polarization), such as the one that existed between North and South Sudan, or even second-order social cleavages (fractionalization), which would fit the situation in Darfur that led to large-scale communal violence and a full-fledged civil war. Social cleavages facilitate recruitment and allow rebel movements to mobilize support among co-ethnics, who tend to harbor a strong collective view of being marginalized by the incumbent elites dominating the state. Furthermore, economic underdevelopment and deprivation, which are inextricably linked to conflicts, also reduce the cost of recruitment due to the presence of large pools of uneducated young, able-bodied youth for whom the opportunity cost of peace is very low. A widely quoted statement by the late Dr. John Garang de Mabior in his appeal to the Sudanese people on the founding of Sudan's People Liberation Army (SPLA) and the SPLM in 1983 made the case for rebellion in the most eloquent, if chilling, style:

“The burden and incidence of neglect and oppression by successive Khartoum clique regimes have traditionally fallen more on the South than on other parts of the country. Under these circumstances, the marginal cost of rebellion in the South became very small, zero or negative; that is, in the South, it pays to rebel.”

¹⁸ This is a vast and mushrooming literature. See Bodea, Elbadawi, and Houle (2017) for a recent extensive analysis and a review of the literature. Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000) also analyze the role of social cleavages and associated factors in African civil wars, while Ali, Elbadawi, and El-Battahani (2005) analyze the causes of conflict in Sudan and the historical preconditions leading to the civil war.

Though civil wars are themselves endogenous, as explained above in the Sudanese context, once ignited, they become the direct cause of untold human suffering, massive economic decline, and political instability. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Sudanese civil war has, by far, been the most significant factor behind the country's economic and political development crisis. Some of the consequences of the Sudanese civil war include:

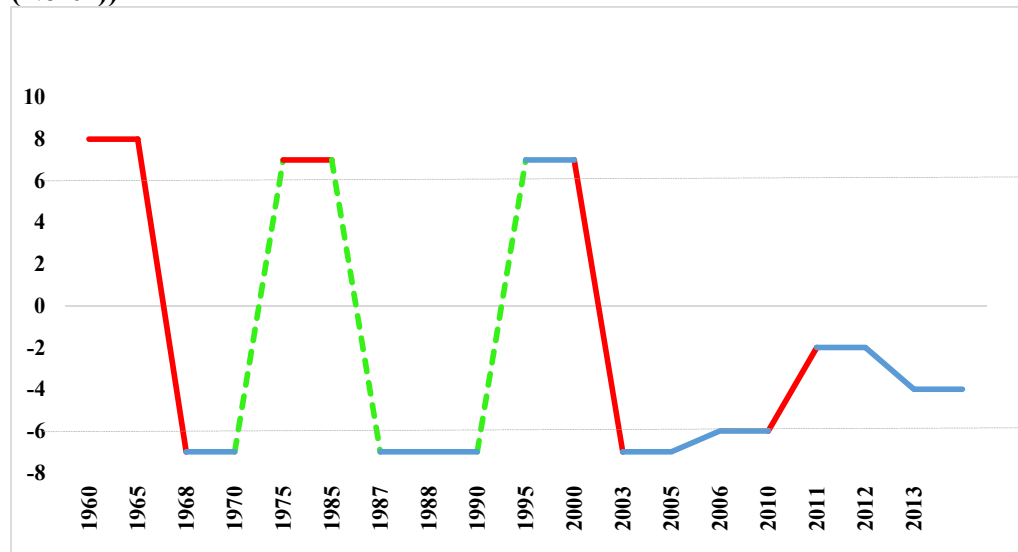
- Failure to develop and implement a long-term development vision due to the massive political instability precipitated by the war.
- Detrimental consequences for the nascent Sudanese democracy, including the creation of conducive conditions for repeated interventions by the military, which weakened and ultimately ended three elected civilian democracies.
- Loss of life and displacement of people, destruction of physical and environmental assets, and various other aspects of manmade human suffering and destruction.
- Misallocation of physical and human resources toward military activities and assets.
- Disruption of the country's external political and economic relations and the diminished legitimacy of the state (as a result of being forced to fight some of its own citizenry).
- Hatred generated by violence, which reduces trust in society, promotes opportunism, and reduces social capital.¹⁹

The political instability precipitated by the war produced two types of regimes, neither of which was effective in promoting equitable and sustainable development. Sudan has either been ruled by unstable short-lived democracies or long-reigning military regimes. Though the democratic rule has managed to provide a bargaining platform for addressing the interests of various social and regional groups in the North, they have, however, failed to address the major divide between the North and South. Moreover, the highly centralized parliamentary democracy has failed to evolve into, arguably, more suitable forms of democratic governance, such as federal presidential systems. We reckon that such a system would give more space to regions in formulating and implementing development policy while empowering a nationally-mandated presidential authority to ensure the continuity and stability of long-term development planning.

On the other hand, the tendency of military regimes to adopt force as a means of conflict resolution, including for the North-South civil war as well as other conflicts or movements of political dissent, has only served to aggravate the negative consequences of the civil war discussed above. Therefore, aside from the three short-lived democracies, Sudan achieved the lowest scores in standards of democracy, political rights, and civil liberties (Figure 2). Moreover, the country also fared very badly in terms of good governance, such as control of corruption, voice and accountability, and government effectiveness, especially during the 30 years of the Ingaz regime (more detailed discussion on this in section IV). This should not be surprising because in fractionalized societies, such as the Sudanese society, autocratic regimes will ultimately be captured by the special interests of regional, tribal, ethnic, or ideological persuasions.

¹⁹ Where the term "social capital" (e.g., Putnam, 1993) refers to the "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions."

Figure 2. Sudan: A story of aborted democracy (Authority Trends, 1956-2013: Sudan (North))



Source: Replicated from Polity IV Regime Trends: Sudan, 1956-2013²⁰

Attempts to quantify the economic costs of conflict have led economists to estimate the economy-wide cost of civil wars in terms of forgone growth. Analysis of the economic cost of civil war recognizes the fact that wars usually cause an immediate and substantial decline in output, and when they last long enough, they can also destroy the physical, human, and “social” capital of the affected countries. The loss of productive capital, especially human and social capital, takes more time to reverse. Economists distinguish between five effects of conflict (e.g., Collier, 1999):

1. Military destruction reduces the capital stock.
2. The government diverts its expenditure from economic services, such as health, to military expenditure.
3. Disruption raises the cost of transactions and lowers the cost of opportunistic behavior so that social capital starts to break down.
4. Because incomes are seen as temporarily low, agents will dis-save.
5. Finally, because investment opportunities are unusually poor and risky, agents will shift their portfolios abroad.

These five effects have implications both for the level as well as the composition of economic activity. During civil wars, per capita GDP is estimated to decline at an annual rate of around two percent relative to the counterfactual of no war. Moreover, the sectors that are intensive in, or are suppliers of, capital and transaction (e.g., manufacturing, construction, transport, distribution, and finance) tend to suffer more disproportionate losses. Therefore, civil wars not

²⁰ <https://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/sud2.htm>

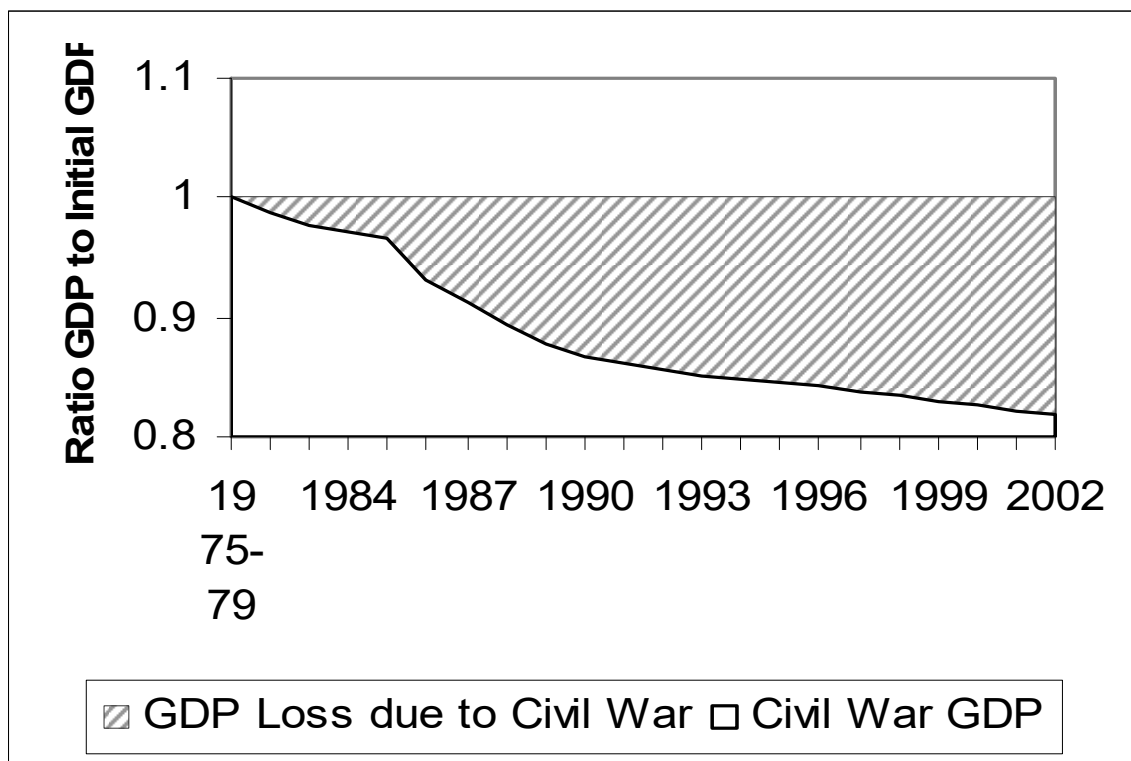
only reduce the overall level of economic activity; they are particularly damaging to the most dynamic sectors of the affected economy.

Therefore, analyzing the economic consequences and causes of civil war is central to understanding the growth and development process in Sudan. Elbadawi (1999) provides estimates of the possible costs incurred by Sudan during just four years (1989/90-1993/94) and due to just two of the above channels: (1) the intensity of the war, which is assumed to lead to political instability, the erosion of the state and civil society instruments, and the consequent decline in property rights and the enforcement of contracts; and (2) the diversion of the limited human, financial, and physical resources to the military ends. The estimates are, therefore, very conservative, yet they reveal how destructive the Sudanese civil war had been. According to these estimates, the civil war caused the country's investment ratio to be less than one-third of its potential level under normal conditions and reduced real national output growth per person by a cumulative rate of eight percentage points. Therefore, on average, the war can be looked at as having reduced real growth per person at an annual rate of two percent, confirming the global evidence referred to above.

In the same vein, in a conflict-oriented growth model, Bodea and Elbadawi (2007) estimate that the more than 20-year-long Sudanese civil war (1983-2005) cost the country more than two and a half years' worth of its annual GDP during 1975-79 (Figure 3). Expressed in terms of total absolute costs, they estimate that the *direct* dollar value in year 2000 USD would amount to USD 23 billion. Furthermore, they assess the total cost of the war as double this figure when they account for the post-conflict recovery period needed to bring economic activity to pre-civil war levels. Assuming that economic recovery from civil wars takes an equal number of years as the duration of conflicts (another 20 years),²¹ they estimate the total *direct* and *indirect* cost at about USD 46 billion (in fixed 2000 fixed prices). This is around twice Sudan's outstanding stock of external debt in 2005. This is, undoubtedly, a huge cost, although their estimate does not account for the negative externality of the Sudanese war in terms of excessive military expenditure and its associated health effects, including death, injury, and psychological scars.

²¹ This is a modest assumption compared to the ones adopted in the literature. For example, Collier, Chauvet, and Hegre (2007) assume that a civil war duration of seven years would require around 14 years of post-conflict growth of about 2.2 percent to revert to the pre-war per capita income level.

Figure 3. The costs of civil war in Sudan (as a ratio to initial GDP per capita in 1975-79)



Source: Bodea and Elbadawi (2007, Figure 5).

Note: The size of the area between the horizontal line $W(0)$ and the $W(t)$ curve is equal to the total costs of the war divided by the average per capita income in the initial period (1975-79), equal to around USD 309 in 2000 fixed prices.

III. Understanding the Sudan Syndrome: Unstable democracies, coups, and popular uprisings (1954-89)

The thought process for understanding the Sudan Syndrome starts with discussing three fundamental empirical regularities characterizing the dynamics of political regimes in post-independence Sudan: the three democratic regimes were unstable and short-lived, while the three authoritarian, military-led regimes were long-reigning, accounting for 52 long years of the 64 years of independent Sudan. Both types of political regimes failed to attain any learning from their repeated experiences, so much so that Sudanese democracies repeatedly fell prey to military coups, while successive military regimes eventually lost power to massive popular uprisings, despite their longevity and increasingly repressive measures.

We distinguish between three political regime types that ruled the country since independence until the Ingaz coup in 1989, briefly reviewing the extent of instability during democracies and social mobilization against the long-reigning autocracies and the making of the two popular uprisings.²²

²² Table 5, which was prepared by the authors from different sources, contains the list of all political regimes since before the country's independence until October 2022.

III.1 Traditional civilian-military regimes: Following the steps of colonial rule (1954-69)

The first Westminsterian civilian democracy (1954-58) was characterized by three short-lived, unstable coalition governments, reflecting the failure of the two dominant parties to secure a clear majority, which exposed these governments to the two-party rivalries as well as to their own factional politics and divisions. Sudanese historians diligently documented the sad legacies of the various coalition governments.²³ A summary of the extent of instability of these governments is provided in Appendix Tables A.1-2.

The pre-independence transitional government (1954-55) was destabilized by the major rift between the two main parties regarding the future of the country, where the Democratic Unionist Part (DUP) unionist agenda with Egypt collided with that of the total independence position of the UP and its independence coalition. The UP eventually prevailed but not before the violent March 1954 events between the police and the Ansar, which shook the foundation of the nascent Sudanese democracy. The two following coalition governments were also beset by conflictive coalition politics. Having resolved the independence question, global cold war politics started to influence Sudanese domestic politics. For example, US foreign aid became a major bone of contention, where the Sudanese Communist Party led the opposition to such aid.

Eventually, the army's high command put an end to the first democracy in November 1958, which was widely believed to be a palace coup executed at the behest of Mr. Abdalla Khalil, the then Prime Minister (PM), who thought a temporary military takeover might constitute a necessary shock to the political parties to agree on a common set of political agendas (Taha, 2019). Nonetheless, the military high command, led by Gen. Ibrahim Abboud, went ahead with measures to establish a full-blown authoritarian military rule.

²³ See, for example, Fadwa Ali Taha (2019) and Ahmed Abu Shouk (2018).

Table 5. The Sudanese governments (1954-2019)

Duration (yrs)	The coalition	PM's political affiliation	PM	Time
	NUP	NUP	Ismail Al-Azhari	Jan. 1954 to Jul. 1956
4		The first national government	Abd Alla Khalil	Feb-Jun. to 1965
	PDP and UP	Coalition government	Abd Alla Khalil	Jul. 1958 to Nov. 1965
	November 1958 Military Regime	Military	Gen. Ibrahim Aboud	Nov. 1958 to Oct. 1964
October 1964 revolution, the second democracy, and the 1969 coup (1964-85)				
			Mohamed Ahmed Elmahjoub	Jul. 1965 to Jul. 1966
4	NUP and UP NUP and UP (Al Sadiq Al Mahdi wing)	Coalition government	Al Sadiq Al Mahdi	Jul. 1966 to May 1967
		The second national government	Mohamed Ahmed Elmahjoub	May 1967 to Apr. 1968
	UP (Al Hadi Al Mahdi wing) and DUP	Coalition government	Mohamed Ahmed Elmahjoub	Apr. 1968 to Apr. 1969
16	May 1969 Military Regime	Military	Gen. Jaafar Muhammad Nimeiri	May 1969 to Apr. 1985
1		Transitional Civilian-Military	Gen. Abdulrahman Soar Al-Dahab	April: 1985-1986
	DUP and UP	UP	Al Sadiq Al Mahdi	May 1986 to Jun. 1987
	DUP and UP	UP	Al Sadiq Al Mahdi	Jun. 1987 to May 1988
3	Coalition between many parties including the National Islamic Front (NIF)	UP	Al Sadiq Al Mahdi	May 1988 to Mar. 1989
	Coalition between many parties excluding the NIF	UP	Al Sadiq Al Mahdi	Mar. 1989 to Jun. 1989
30		NIF	Gen. Omer al-Bashir	Jun. 1989 to Apr. 2019
3	Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC)	Transitional Civilian-Military	Abd Alla Hamdok	Sep. 2019 to Oct. 2021
1	October 2021 Military	Transitional Military	Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan	Oct. 2021 to Present

They were able to crush attempted coups during the first two years (Appendix Table A.3), but they were met with rising popular opposition, which gathered strength by the turn of the 1960s (Appendix Table A.4). Due to the worsening economic conditions and the civil war in the southern part of the country, the popular discontent scaled up into a major uprising that led to the collapse of the Abboud regime and the establishment of a transitional government tasked with preparing the country for a democratic transition to a popularly elected civilian government.

III.2 The post-October 1964 revolution: The second civilian democracy (1964-69)

The massive popular 1964 uprising, which came to be called the October revolution, was perhaps the first social mobilization of its kind in Africa and the Arab world. It was a powerful manifestation of peaceful people's power at the dawn of Africa's independence. However, the revolution failed to radically restructure the political system in a way that inculcates stability and economic legitimacy beyond the Westminsterian electoral competition. Therefore, like its predecessor, the second democracy once more produced four unstable coalition governments in the following four years before the next coup happened in May 1969. Also, akin to the first democracy, the government of the second democracy essentially adopted similar economic policies, responsibly handling public finance but failing to realize the necessity of radically restructuring the Sudanese economy. The exception was the short period of Al Mahdi's coalition government, which attempted to introduce new creative strategies for development and peacebuilding. For example, Al Mahdi's government spared no effort in peacebuilding, including convening the Round Table Conference, the Committee of Twelve, and the Conference of All Parties, which became the basis on which the peace agreement in Addis Ababa was later drawn in 1972. However, bogged down by conflicts within and between the two main parties at the time, the government collapsed less than one year after its formation in July 1966 (Appendix Table A.5).

The four governments were faced with major destabilizing episodes associated with internal coalition politics and increasing pressures from the left-leaning professional associations and the labor movement. These developments reflected a rising ideological struggle with the Sudanese Communist Party and its left-wing allies, which ultimately led to the decision by the ruling coalition to disband the party. These developments exposed the weak coalition government to the backlash from the left, which eventually led to the end of the second Sudanese democracy in May 1969, following a coup by mostly left-leaning junior and middle-rank officers.

III.3 The May authoritarian regime: An era of lost opportunities

The second military rule of Gen. Neimeri lasted around 16 years, spanning three distinct phases of "aborted socialism," "the Addis Ababa peace agreement," and "IMF-style stabilization."

Aborted socialism (1969-71)

The May 1969 regime, with its blatant authoritarian socialist ideology, was met with strong resistance from the populous traditional parties, which led to violent confrontations in March 1970, where the regime committed a massacre against the Ansar movement.²⁴ The regime's chaotic programs of confiscation and nationalization of leading businesses, enacted as part of its socialist agenda, was met with wide resentment. Furthermore, divisions within the ruling

²⁴See, for example, <https://ebook.univeyes.com/69451>

military council and the left-wing parties that constituted the power base of the regime eventually culminated in violent events in July 1971 that witnessed the launch and collapse of a coup from within the left-wing putschists, sponsored by the Sudanese Communist Party. The violence associated with this coup and the subsequent executions of the top civilian and military leadership of the Sudanese Communist Party earmarked the end of authoritarian socialism and a pivot by the regime toward a centrist, personalized authoritarian political order.

The Sudanese Socialist Union, a civilian-military alliance, was formed and declared as the only party legally allowed to engage in political activities, while all other political parties and independent civil society associations were banned. On the economic front, earlier socialist-inspired programs were abolished, and a new investment law was issued in preparation for a new stage of economic openness, inspired by the Egyptian experience under President Anwar Sadat. Nonetheless, the regime continued to use socialist slogans in its endeavor to counter the call for democratization by the big political parties and as an instrument of propaganda against its former left-wing allies (Elnur, 2009).

Squandered peace dividend (1972-83)

This phase was ushered by the signing of the Addis Ababa Peace Accord, putting an end to the civil war in southern Sudan that erupted in 1955, even before the country gained full independence from the Anglo-Egyptian colonial administration (1898-1956). This civil war pitted a separatist Southern Sudanese insurgency (the Anyanya Movement) against various Sudanese central governments, which were dominated by political elites hailing from the Arab and Arabized Muslim northern majority of the country. This conflict was settled in 1972 with the signing of the Addis Ababa Peace Accord, which awarded regional autonomy to the South but left the autocratic one-man rule of Gen. Neimeri in full control of the whole country. In addition to the arbitrary nature of the ruling regime, the implementation of the peace accord was affected by a plethora of difficulties associated with differences among the southern Sudanese. In 1983, Gen. Neimeri decided to subdivide the South into three sub-regions, blatantly contravening the AAPA. In the same year, he adopted a comprehensive Islamic penal code (the so-called Islamic September Laws). Therefore, the uneasy peace proved to be only a little more than a lull, and after only 11 years, a new civil war led by the SPLM/A erupted again in 1983.

The sad legacy of war and peace in Sudan is that the short-lived, unstable democracies that ruled the country were constrained before they could bring their peacebuilding agenda to fruition. In contrast, the long-reigning autocratic regimes had ample time to negotiate and make peace, driven by the desire to use peace as an instrument to shore up their grip on power. Therefore, peace under Gen. Neimeri could not be sustained and, even worse, it led to the partitioning of the country and the creation of the Republic of South Sudan under the kleptocratic Ingaz regime. As compellingly argued by prominent southern Sudanese writer Elias Niam Lyell Wakson (1993, p. 48):

“Permanent peace, and the establishment of the basis of political stability and good governance, cannot be achieved through illegal military dictatorships but only as a result of a broad-based dialogue with all the popular political forces in the country.”

Notwithstanding the post-conflict relapse and the continued political instability, including a daring attempt by a coalition of opposition parties to topple the regime in 1977 that led to major violence, this phase of the May regime had some successes on the economic front; though still akin to the political setbacks, the economic gains were eventually aborted. The peace dividends generated the highest growth rates in the history of Sudan, even compared to those of the oil era (2000-11) under the Ingaz regime (Figure 1). The growth spell was also associated with the “breadbasket strategy” pursued by Sudan as part of the six-year plan (1977/78-1982/83) built around expanding capital-intensive irrigated agriculture. This strategy managed to attract considerable investment from the capital-surplus Arab Gulf countries following the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the ensuing oil boom. However, the mismanagement of the breadbasket projects and the expansive fiscal policy under the fixed exchange rate regime led to a balance of payments crisis and the eventual collapse of the breadbasket strategy (Elbadawi, 1997).

Dysfunctional stabilization and structural adjustment programs (1978-84)

The declining economic fortunes of the country associated with the collapse of the breadbasket strategy were attributed to multiple macroeconomic distortions, including a massive spending spree, substantial real appreciation, and the expansion of the parallel market for foreign exchange. As the economic situation started to assume crisis proportions, the government concluded an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in September 1979, marking the beginning of a series of IMF-style stabilization and liberalization programs that dominated virtually the entire decade of the 1980s.

The central policies emphasized by the package were twofold: successive devaluation and the continuous shifting of imports (and, to some extent, exports) from the official market to the ‘legalized’ free parallel market. This way, it was envisaged that exchange rate unification would ultimately be achieved, and the parallel market would be integrated into the regular economy or perhaps squeezed into a ‘side show’ role. Unfortunately, the quest for liberalization in Sudan was a dismal failure and the parallel market continued to expand as economic conditions deteriorated even further, as indicated above.

Though the program’s failure was due to problems of sequencing and design features that are typical of the early brand of the IMF style of macro liberalization (Elbadawi, 1997),²⁵ the demise of the May regime reform experiment could very well be attributed to political rather

²⁵ For some more foundational critique of IMF stabilization and adjustment programs in the Sudanese context, see Ali (1985).

than just economic considerations. The regime was provided with considerable support by Western donors, largely because it was seen as a trusted ally rather than a committed reformer.

III.4 The March-April 1985 uprising and the birth of the third democracy

Having caused the resumption of the civil war, squandered the economic peace dividend, grossly mismanaged the economic window of opportunity provided by the breadbasket strategy, and failed to address the ensuing economic crisis, the Neimeri regime essentially ran out of options to hold on to power. As a last desperate move, the head of the regime attempted to play the religious card by trying to legitimize repression through the so-called Islamic Courts that were tasked with implementing *Al Adala Al Nagiza* (fast justice). Many atrocities were committed under this court system, including the execution of Ustaz Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, the leader of the Republican Brothers in January 1985, on apostasy charges.²⁶

Once again, the people of Sudan rose up in March-April 1985 and managed to topple an even more brutal dictatorship than the one they unseated in October 1964. Though the regime survived many violent and not so violent coups and civil wars, it finally succumbed to a peaceful uprising, which once more proved to be the weakest link of the Sudanese autocratic military regimes. The uprising was sparked by a strike on 7 March 1985, staged by the powerful railway workers' union. They were subsequently joined by professional associations, paving the way for nationwide civil disobedience. A unified leadership of unions and parties was also formed, and demonstrations spread inside and outside the capital (see Appendix Table A.6). The ruling party failed to mobilize enough support to counter the popular uprising in the streets of Khartoum and other major cities, neither could it persuade the military leadership to deploy the army to support the regime security forces in putting down the popular demonstrations. Eventually, taking advantage of the absence of Gen. Neimeiri in the United States for medical treatment, the army's High Command staged a coup in support of the uprising on 6 April 1985 and announced the establishment of a transitional hybrid military-civilian government, which successfully arranged free elections one year later and handed the power over to the newly elected government.

The newly elected democratic government was headed by PM Al Sadig Al Mahdi, the President of the UP, which attained the largest number of deputies in the Constitutional Assembly. Unfortunately, like its predecessors, the third democracy also failed to produce an absolute one-party majority or a strong governing coalition with a dominant party to emerge. Therefore, the divisive multi-party politics continued unabated (see Appendix Table 7). The government also inherited an economy burdened with foreign debts and suffering from the brunt of a crushing high-intensity civil war that raged throughout the last two years of the former regime.

²⁶Apostasy in Islam (Arabic: *ردة*, *riddah* or *ارتداد*, *irtidād*) is commonly defined as the abandonment of Islam by a Muslim, in thought, word, or through deed. An apostate from Islam is referred to by using the Arabic and Islamic term *murtād*.

Consequently, the economy continued to decline, and the inflation rate reached more than 40 percent due to the continued recourse to deficit financing.

Moreover, the elected government had to deal with the destabilizing tactics of the National Islamic Front (NIF), which gained experience and considerable wealth from its participation in the May regime. This well-organized and well-funded party resented attempts by the newly elected government to hold it accountable for its alliance with the former regime. Following its exclusion from the coalition government in response to popular pressure, the NIF retaliated by adopting subversive tactics aimed at weakening and undermining the legitimacy of the political system. Eventually, the NIF was able to mount a successful coup in June 1989, taking advantage of the open differences between the government and the army leadership on the conduct of the civil war, among other pivotal national agendas. This rift with the military was particularly devastating for the third Sudanese democracy because it was the first time the former attempted to directly challenge an elected government and demand specific political steps to be taken. Instead, the role of the armed forces since independence has fluctuated between mounting a coup and, if successful, directly taking power and refraining from direct influence in politics (Ali, 2017).

Thus, Sudan entered one of its darkest and most brutal political systems²⁷ under the Ingaz regime of Gen. Omer al-Bashir, who ruled the country with an iron fist for 30 years until the massive December 2018 revolution put an end to his regime in April 2019.

IV. The Ingaz regime and the making and demise of a kleptocratic state

It is widely believed by Sudanese scholars, journalists, and political actors that the NIF had planned to position itself for usurping power since they decided to partner with the regime of Gen. Neimeri, perhaps driven by their feeling of insecurity or ideological craving for imposing what they consider their “divine” Islamic agenda. They used the cover of supporting the war efforts to infiltrate the army and play the Islamic card to build the party’s resources by promoting the emerging Islamic banking industry. Therefore, despite being widely ostracized following the March-April uprising, the NIF was sufficiently empowered to mount a successful coup against another weak coalition government and, hence, put an end to the third democracy.

IV.1 The “Tamkeen” agenda and the privatization of the state in the name of Islam (1989-99)

Having concocted a plan for ruling Sudan well before the coup, the NIF wasted little time before starting to implement a far-reaching political and economic agenda aimed at essentially “privatizing” the state in the name of Islam as an exclusive property of the new political order.

²⁷ However, Ibrahim (2021) argues that despite its extreme brutality, the Ingaz regime should not be expelled from the Sudanese political fold as most Sudanese political commentators suggest. Instead, he thinks that it should be seen as the highest stage of the counterrevolution; hence it had close organic kinship with the counterrevolutions that clashed with the October 1964 and March-April 1985 revolutions.

This agenda came to be known in Sudanese popular culture as “Tamkeen” (an Arabic word for “empowerment”), giving an otherwise good concept a bad name, because it was meant to be exclusive empowerment for only the narrow popular base of the ruling NIF. The ruthlessness and draconian nature of the execution of the Tamkeen agenda had never been experienced in the modern history of Sudan. To a large extent, these measures also explained the insecurity of the NIF as it felt exposed to major challenges within the army as well as the civilian political movement.²⁸

The Tamkeen program included massive purges of civil service, police, and, especially, army and security institutions.²⁹ It also included the establishment of an ideological army and other state institutions almost exclusively staffed by loyalists of the NIF and co-opted supporters of the regime. This involved the transformation of the civil war into a “religious war” (Jihad) mainly waged by military militia manned by die-hard supporters and forcefully conscripted youth, in addition to the sweeping of shady privatization programs of national institutions for the benefit of the ruling elites and their supporters. In the context of Tamkeen, the regime also attempted to build a new business class through wide-ranging redistributive measures in favor of regime supporters by using fiscal and monetary policy tools, including a highly irresponsible inflation tax (Elbadawi, 2016).

State-owned enterprises were privatized at fire sale prices to members of the NIF, allowing the regime to build a new crony capitalist class that quickly dominated the Sudanese private sector.³⁰ For example, businesses owned by the followers of the former regime amounted to around five thousand companies with estimated assets of around USD 30 billion, which was almost half of the Sudanese GDP before the portioning of the country (Ali, 2013). In the same vein and as a result of the massive purges, the NIF loyalists dominated civil service, especially security, the military, and the police. The number of dismissed civil service employees under the so-called “public interest” ordinance was estimated at a whopping 73,600 during the period 1989-99 (Sudan Democracy First Group, 2014).

Therefore, Tamkeen could be understood as an attempt to indoctrinate Sudanese society and institutions according to the NIF version of Islamic political ideology as a longer-term strategy for holding on to power, and a short-term political instrument for eliminating potential opponents and rewarding supporters, both feeding into the ultimate goal of taking over the state (Maan, 2014). However, Tamkeen had significantly degraded state capacity, including with regard to very basic functions, such as exercising monopoly over violence, much less delivering health and education services and other public goods. Moreover, this political ideology pushed Sudanese politics and public policy into an “opportunistic social equilibrium,” where the “political marketplace” became (and perhaps remains, unfortunately) the main institution for a

²⁸ The challenges could be summarized as “a strong secular education system, unions and institutionalized political organizations, Sufi orders representing moderate Islam” (Elnur, 2009, p.67).

²⁹ For more details about the targeted institutions, see Elnur (2009, p.71-73).

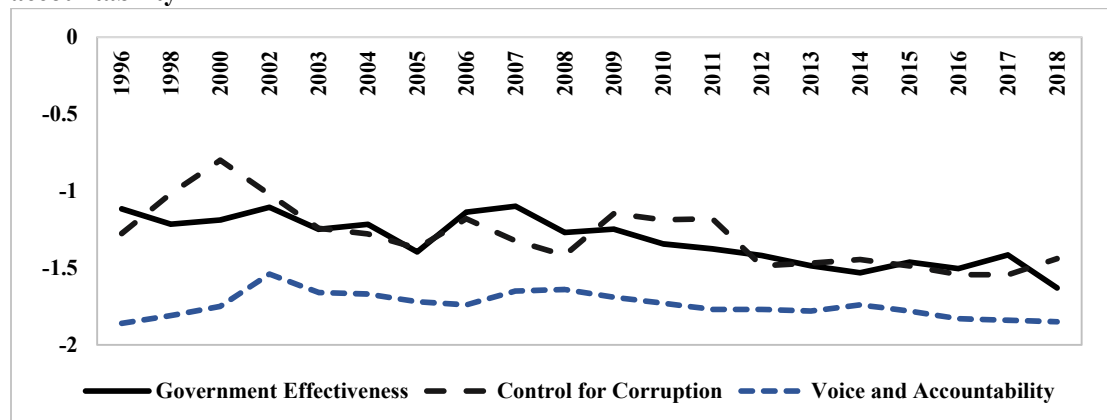
³⁰ For more details, see Sudan Democracy First Group (2014), for example.

political settlement. According to De Waal (2016, p. 1), the political marketplace is, “a system of governance run on the basis of personal transactions in which political services and allegiances are competitively exchanged for material rewards. A ruler bargains with members of the political elite over how much he needs to pay—in cash, or in access to other lucrative resources such as contracts—in return for their support. They exert pressure on him using their ability to mobilize votes, turn out crowds, or inflict damaging violence.”

Under the Tamkeen patronage system, state institutions lost meritocracy and professional capacity, while the entrenched crony capitalist class failed to create wealth beyond predatory and corrupt economic activities. Moreover, as a consequence of the ruling party’s preoccupation with empowering and monopolizing power in the face of a resistant society, the regime failed to design and implement a credible development vision for modernizing and diversifying the economy during the oil era (Elbadawi, 2016). This large-scale institutionalized patronage system became very divisive, so much so that Atta Elbatahani, a leading Sudanese political scientist, characterized the Sudanese society under the Ingaz regime as falling into two classes, the beneficiaries’ class whom he referred to as the ‘custodians,’ who reaped the fruits of economic rents and political participation, and the other class who he called the ‘victims,’ who were relegated to a mere tax base for government revenue (Elbatahani, 2016). It is not an exaggeration to conclude, as did Elbadawi (2016), that Tamkeen produced a syndrome of despotism, corruption, and state dysfunction never experienced in the modern history of Sudan (Figure 4).

As shown in the remainder of this section, Tamkeen turned out to be the Achilles heel that would eventually bring down the NIF and its Ingaz regime. We focus on three major phases: the breakdown of the ideological campus and divisions within the NIF and the ruling party; the eruption of the Darfur insurgency and the eventual partitioning of the country; and, the ‘sudden stop’ of the oil era, the consequent economic collapse, and the endgame for the Ingaz regime.

Figure 4. Sudan: A syndrome of institutional weakness, corruption, and lack of openness and accountability



Source: World Bank Governance Indicators (-2.5 (worst) to 2.5 (best)).³¹

³¹ <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports>

IV.2 The breakdown of the ideological campus and the advent of the oil era (1999- 2011)

At their various evolutionary stages, the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood movement, most notably under its new incarnation as the NIF, unabashedly boasted about its high moral standards and progressive Islamic renaissance agenda. In the same vein, its late intellectual and political leader Hassan Al-Turabi was revered by his followers. However, both the NIF and its leader eventually fell prey to the very Tamkeen political ideology that they espoused, with all its atrocities and violations of Islamic purity and morals they used to claim to have. The corrosive consequences of Tamkeen for the ruling NIF could not have been better articulated than by Dr. Eltighani Abdelgadir Hamid (2006), a leading NIF intellectual who characterized Tamkeen as an “alliance of the tribe, the market, and the security establishment”:³²

“... I referred to the signs of a strategic shift that occurred in the course of the Islamic movement. I mentioned that this transformation might crystallize in the direction of a tripartite alliance between the “tribe,” “the market,” and “security,” and alluded to the possibility that the tribe would “swallow” our modern Islamic organization, as if it would disappear in the forms of alliances, arrangements, and budgets in which the economic interest and tribal affiliation converge and are guarded by a network of cadres and security measures. Instead of the Islamic organization weakening the tribal loyalties or succeeding in incorporating them into the general Islamic loyalty, some tribal elements may multiply within our Islamic organization and use it “powered by the security services” for its regional and ethnic interests.”

Notwithstanding his claim that the “basic vision of the function of the organization was to bridge the gap between the Islamic ideal and reality on the one hand, and between the state and society on the other hand, that is, to be a space in which a national Islamic development program based on voluntary consent is generated,” like other disenchanting NIF intellectuals, he conceded that:

“But this vision was turned upside down when the Islamists took over the state apparatus in the middle of 1989. As soon as the party government was removed and replaced by the Salvation Government, the organization was removed as well, so it became natural in this case that communication did not often take place between the Salvation Government and society – only through the security services. All the political, military, and economic files became regularly transferred to the security services, which increased the tension between the government and society, and this is a mistake and a danger in itself, but the most dangerous thing is that this phenomenon has led to the disappearance of the institutional presence of the Islamic organization. This, on the one hand, led to generating a psychological and political gap. On the other

³²The article (in Arabic) is available at: <https://sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=322&msg=1206355388&m=1>

hand, it also led to tensions and a rift between the leadership of the organization and the leadership of the government.”

The above perspective is, of course, subject to criticism, in that it might be construed as an attempt to absolve the NIF, as an Islamic movement, from the tyranny, atrocities, and corruption of the very regime that it created and kept in power for, at least, the better part of those 30 long and tragic years. Nonetheless, Dr. Hamid’s analysis offers a compelling case for the corrosive role of Tamkeen’s tripartite alliance in the loss of the “ideological campus” of the movement, which eventually led to the splitting of its ruling party and the removal of its charismatic leader from power in early 1999.

For the following 20 years, Gen. al-Bashir wielded full control over the state, aided by rents from the oil sector, which quickly became the main source of foreign exchange and fiscal revenues since 1999. Unfortunately, rather than opening up an opportunity for the regime to modernize the country’s agro-industrial base and create job opportunities for the emerging youth bulge, the newly found oil rents became a facile source for financing an even more expanded and entrenched Tamkeen program. Now that the ideological base of the regime was weakened, Gen. al-Bashir felt the need to shore up his power base by expanding patronage to tribal and regional leaders while trying to maintain the allegiance of his NIF supporters. Therefore, the oil rent-enabled “centralized political marketplace” was contributing to regime survival at the cost of a squandered opportunity for transforming the economy. De Waal provides a compelling analysis of the functioning of the political marketplace during the first half (2000-05) of the oil era covering the political economy, the structure of political firms and strategies, and the organization of the marketplace (de Waal, 2019, Table 5, p. 9):

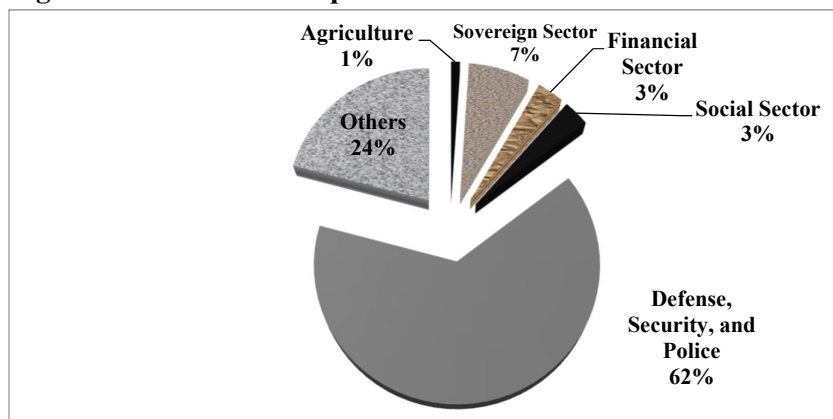
Political economy: “Return to rentiers, with a vast expansion of crony capitalism associated with oil, construction contracts, import-export trade, urban consumables, and private security. The benefits extended across the spectrum of the northern Sudanese political, economic, and social elite, and included the ‘near periphery’.”

Structure of political firms and strategies: “Political spending and the economy were restructured around the oil boom that enabled a tenfold increase in government spending. Al-Bashir consolidated power in Khartoum, using spending to bring most Islamists onside and to make a deal with the SPLM/A, thereby creating a new political settlement; however, the expulsion of the al-Turabi faction alongside the continuing rivalry with the SPLM/A created the conditions for war in Darfur; the Troika-IGAD coalition prioritized the resolution of the war in the south; Egyptian influence was reduced; democratization was made secondary.”

Organization of the marketplace: A centralized authoritarian kleptocracy at the center with a massively expanding political budget allowing for strategic political inclusion alongside a rivalrous oligopoly in the far peripheries (both established, with SPLM/A, and new, with dissident Islamists such as JEM), which created the conditions for new entrants to the political market in Darfur. The CPA was envisaged as a collusive duopoly between NCP and SPLM.

While rent allocation in the context of the political marketplace allowed al-Bashir to edge over Hassan al-Turabi, his former mentor, and consolidate his grip on power, the state withdrew from the social sector and public investment in agriculture dwindled to almost nothing (Figure 5). This is fairly consistent with predictions of the political economy literature,³³ which suggests that the best option for ruling elites to remain in power under mature democracies would be to invest rents in human capital (education, health, and social welfare) and other public goods (physical and soft infrastructures). Instead, under kleptocratic regimes, such as Ingaz, clientelistic deals tend to be the central strategy for the ruling elites, leaving investment in public goods as a residual, which was the experience of the oil era under the Ingaz regime.

Figure 5. Government expenditures and resource allocation in Sudan (2012 budget)



Source: Ministry of Finance and National Economy, 2012.

IV.3 The CPA, Darfur insurgency, and eventual partitioning of the country (2005-11)

The country entered a new monumental phase with the signing of a peace agreement in 2005 between the government of Gen. al-Bashir, led by the National Congress Party (NCP) and the SPLM/A, and brokered by heavy regional and international efforts. The peace agreement (referred to as the CPA) is based on a two-system, one-country formula during an interim period of six years. Therefore, under the CPA, a Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed, including the NCP (52 percent), the SPLM (28 percent), and the Government of South Sudan – dominated by the latter. The Sudanese army of the pre-CPA regime as well as the SPLA were to cohabit as two separate armies. Around 98 percent of the net revenues from the oil produced in the south was to be equally shared by the two governments, with two percent allocated to the producing states. Most significantly, the CPA also called for a self-determination referendum for the people of the South in 2011 to decide whether to partition the country or to keep it united, to be preceded by parliamentary, state, and presidential elections in 2009.

³³See, for example, Ali and Elbadawi (2016).

The grand vision of the CPA was best articulated by late SPLM leader Dr. John Garang, who envisaged a peace agreement that would eventually transform the politics and society into his vision of what he calls a “democratic new Sudan.” To articulate his views, he used what came to be known as the “Solution Modalities in the Sudan Conflict.” Dr. Garang argues that pre-CPA Sudan was best reflected by Model 3 (of Figure 6), which was an Islamic-Arab state. The dual of this political order is a hypothetical Model 4 of an Indigenous African Secular state. Both models, he argued, are not sustainable in the diverse Sudanese society. The main message conveyed by the two models was that the insistence of the ruling Northern Sudanese elites to maintain Model 3 was the reason why Sudan has been so conflictive, but it is equally likely that a “hypothetical” Model 4 would not bring peace to the country either. The ultimate goal, according to Dr. Garang, should be to transit to Model 1, which delivers the “transformed and democratic new Sudan.” However, given the then military stalemate, the only route to Model 1 must be through an interim “three-system administration” (Model 2).³⁴ The modality for achieving this transition would be based upon the free choice of the southern Sudanese through a referendum.

Though he expressed an unwavering commitment to the unity of the country, Dr. Garang nevertheless argued that the failure to create the right conditions for the new democratic Sudan would leave no option for the people of the South other than opting for the partitioning of the country (Model 5). The challenge for the people of Sudan, argued Dr. Garang, would be to scale up the areas of communality during the interim period (the shaded area of Model 2) to span the whole political landscape of the country, leading to Model 1.

The CPA succeeded in putting an end to the major historical civil war that immensely impacted the country. It could also be argued that it enhanced fiscal federalism and decentralization³⁵ and, to a lesser extent, broadened the space for political freedom. However, it eventually led to the partitioning of the country, which was increasingly recognized by many Sudanese, especially in the North, as a national disaster. Nonetheless, the “Islamawist”³⁶ elites of al-Bashir’s regime preferred partitioning the country to the risk of loosening their grip on power or even losing it altogether under Dr. Garang’s new democratic Sudan.

Moreover, the separatist camp attained the upper hand in the post-Garang SPLM/A,³⁷ while the lure of nationhood became irresistible for the people of South Sudan. Despite the loss of oil rents following the partitioning of the country, Gen. al-Bashir continued to maintain his kleptocratic regime for seven more years, aided by the discovery and large-scale exports of

³⁴ The eventual post-CPA governance structure turned out to be a two-system structure rather than a three-system one due to the objection of the NCP to having a northern entity.

³⁵ See Eissa and Ali (2022).

³⁶ “Islamawist” is a term used in Sudanese political jargon to describe political parties, such as the NIF, perceived to use Islam to advance their partisan agenda.

³⁷ Dr. John Garang died in a helicopter crash in South Sudan on 30 July 2005, just three weeks after the signing of the CPA.

gold.³⁸ On the other hand, the continued flow of oil rents facilitated the emergence of a parallel kleptocracy in the nascent state of South Sudan, under Gen. Salva Kiir Myardit. The oil rent also enhanced his ability to eventually end the South-South civil war and bring opponents from the rival Nuer and other tribes under the tenet.

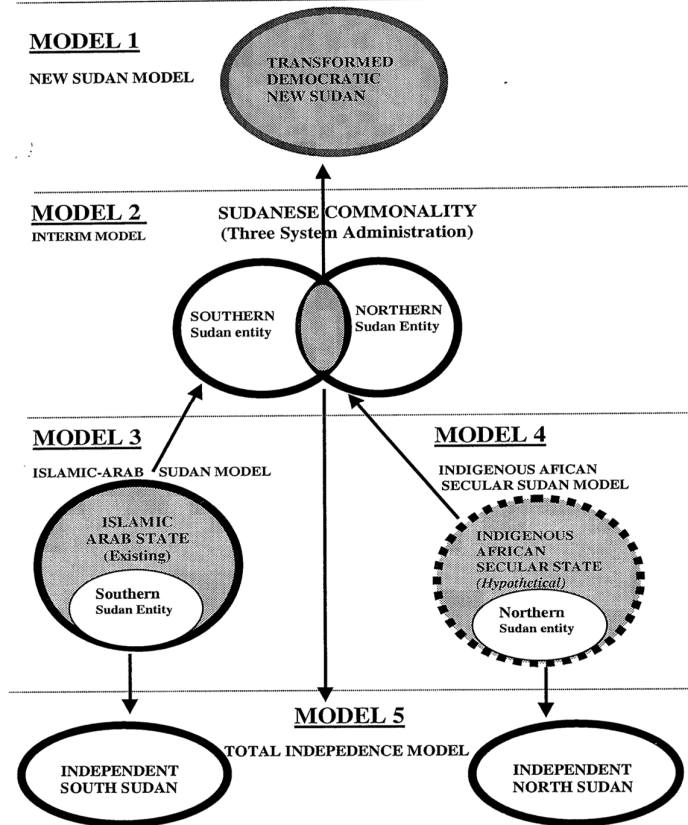
Therefore, contrary to the aspirations of Dr. Garang for a CPA driven by “two systems, one country,” the two emerging Sudan(s) actually resembled “one system, two countries.”

This outcome is consistent with predictions from the peacebuilding literature, which suggests that peace agreements confined to the military protagonists in the civil war, such as the CPA, are not likely to lead to inclusive post-conflict democratic transitions. Instead, even at the expense of complexity, peace agreements should avoid disenfranchising non-militarized stakeholders, such as political parties or local communities, who might have a strong popular following (Elbadawi, 2008). Even after the CPA and the end of the major civil war in 2005, military spending continued at a very high rate due to the Darfur insurgency.³⁹ Moreover, though the CPA remained in force, the mutual distrust between the NCP’s federal government and the Southern SPLM government – especially with regard to a potential future showdown for the control of the oil fields – meant that the arms race between the two armies continued unabated.

³⁸ Though de Waal argues that with the creation of the South Sudan state and the loss of most of the oil rent for Sudan, the marketplace could no longer be centralized, especially with the advent of gold as the main source for financing the marketplace. Instead, it became a “collusive oligopoly” in the center and the near peripheries and a “rivalrous oligopoly” in the conflict-affected far peripheries.

³⁹ The cost of the war in Darfur was estimated at around USD 30 billion, and military spending was estimated at 1/3 of the total cost (Ali, 2019).

Figure 6. Dr. Garang's grand vision of the CPA
SOLUTION MODALITIES IN THE SUDAN CONFLICT



Source: Elbadawi and Elbatahani (2010).

Elbadawi et al. (2008) build a game-theoretical model to highlight the risks of renewed violence in Sudan following the 2011 referendum as well as opportunities for conflict-mitigating policy intervention. The model is premised on the plausible assumption that the South would opt for partition if it expects that the North will not respond with force. The North, in turn, would acquiesce to partition if it expects a difficult and costly war to stop the Southern bid for independence. The model, therefore, predicts an arms race because military expenditure becomes an important signaling device for both sides. This was borne by the increased military expenditure by both the federal government as well as the government of South Sudan. For example, defense and military expenditure for Khartoum amounted to USD 1.175 billion (34 percent of USD 3.416 billion non-oil government revenues) in 2007, which far exceeded the extra expenditure that might have been necessitated by the civil war in Darfur at the time. Similarly, annual military expenditure in the South was estimated at USD 555 million, almost ten times its non-oil revenues (Table 2 of Elbadawi et al., 2008). Instead, average military spending as a percentage of government expenditure for most low and middle-income countries was 14-15 percent.

In their model, the authors also show that democratization could have provided a useful commitment device and resolved some of the credibility issues that contributed to such

excessive militarization by both sides. In view of the deplorable human development condition in Sudan, the opportunity cost of democratization for human development during the seven years of the CPA was quite substantial (Table 6). Moreover, democratization is also likely to have a much more significant impact beyond its positive influence associated with reduced military expenditure. A genuine democratic transformation might have actually made unity attractive to the Southern Sudanese. Moreover, even if the latter opted for secession, the two emerging democracies are likely to assign a higher value to economic interdependence and cooperation than any payoffs that might be reaped by conflicts and war (Khalil, 2021).

Therefore, the failure to democratize the peace process not only militated against unity but also condemned the two emerging countries to kleptocracy and tragic development crises.

Table 6. Development indicators, Sudan vis-à-vis SSA

	Sudan's millennium development goals	Average of northern states	Average of southern states	Sudan's national average ¹	SSA
Net primary school attendance rate (%)	100 (by 2015)	67	17	47	69
Ratio of girls to boys attending primary education	1 (by 2005)	0.91	0.76	0.85	0.89
Measles immunization coverage (%)	²	73	43	61	64
Proportion of births attended by skilled personnel (%)	⁽³⁾	70	33	55	44
Contraceptive prevalence (%)	⁽²⁾	9	4	7	23
Proportion of population using effective malaria prevention measures (%)	⁽²⁾	32	22	28	N.A.
Use of improved drinking water (%)	77.5 (by 2015)	55	62	58	56
Use of improved sanitation facilities (%)		38	7	26	37

Source: Sudan Table 3 of Elbadawi et al. (2008).

1. Simple averages are used for all indicators. Averages reported in the Sudan Household Health Survey are weighted by state; however, reliable estimates of weighted state populations are not available for use in calculation here.

2. The goal is to halt by 2015 and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and the prevalence of malaria and other major diseases.

3. The goal is to reduce 1990 maternal mortality by two-thirds.

IV.4 “Sudden” stops: Economic collapse and the endgame (2011-18)

As discussed, the leadership of the NIF and the Ingaz regime showed no concern about the impending secession of South Sudan. If anything, some saw the partitioning of the country as an opportunity for consolidating their grip on the northern two-thirds of the country. However, this turned out to be a fatal political calculus, because this monumental event actually earmarked the unraveling of the Ingaz regime and its eventual collapse in April 2019. The leaders of the regime grossly underestimated the tremendous impact of the loss of oil on the highly oil-dependent pre-secession economy in Northern Sudan.

The loss to the post-secession Sudan economy was substantial and impacted all sectors. According to IMF estimates, the country lost 75 percent of its oil output and around five to ten percent of its non-oil output. In terms of value-added, the overall loss is about SDG 50 billion (more than 26 percent of 2012 GDP), of which around 19 percent of GDP is in the oil sector. For the fiscal sector, the revenue loss for the government was estimated at SDG 12 billion (more than six percent of GDP), corresponding to the foregone oil revenues net of the transfers to South Sudan and the savings on wages of South Sudanese civil servants. As for the external sector, the loss of oil exports in 2012 amounted to a whopping USD 6.6 billion (12.9 percent of GDP). Finally, official reserves plumped by 17 percent (USD 0.5 billion), and that of the stock of bank credit to the private sector by seven percent (0.9 of GDP), corresponding to the amount of credit outstanding provided by the southern branches of Sudanese banks (IMF, 2012).

The ensuing economic crisis constituted an extreme case of what came to be known in the macroeconomic literature as “sudden stops.”⁴⁰ This phenomenon occurs when foreign investments and other capital flows feeding an economy believed to provide a safe haven or a high return for investment capital come to a sudden stop. It is usually caused by the discovery of hidden problems in the management of the economy or its exposure to severe economic or political shocks, such as the Latin American debt crisis of the 1990s. Though there is nothing “sudden” about what happened to Sudan, the failure to anticipate and respond to its consequences by the incumbent regime turned the secession of the South and the loss of most of the oil revenues into a “sudden stops” phenomenon of extreme crisis proportions (Elbadawi, 2011). In this context, this literature suggests that prior to the onset of the “sudden stop,” countries with fragile macroeconomic economic conditions are likely to be the most severely impacted. In view of its high oil dependency and weak macroeconomic balances before 2011, this prediction was borne out very clearly for the case of Sudan (Tables 7 and 8).

Table 7. Sudan’s macroeconomy before the partition

Current account, capital flows, and reserves (share of GDP)					
Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Current account balance	-15	-12	-9	-13	-8
Net foreign capital flows	11.4	8.3	6.7	7.8	7
of which short-term flows	1.7	1.8	2.2	3	2.5
FDI and portfolio flows	9.7	6.5	4.5	4.8	4.5
Foreign reserve (in months of imports)	1.8	1.2	1.1	0.4	1

Source: Table 1 of Elbadawi (2011).

⁴⁰ See for example, Calvo et al. (2006), Calvo et al. (2004), Krugman (2000), and Bianchi and Mendoza (2020), and the literature cited therein.

Table 8. Sudan’s macroeconomy before the partition

Year	Non-oil exports (share of GDP)				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Share of non-oil exports to total exports	9.8	5.2	4.6	9	9.5
Share of non-oil exports to total imports	8	6	6.3	8.2	10
Share of non-oil exports to GDP	1.6	1	1	1.3	1.4

Source: Table 2 of Elbadawi (2011).

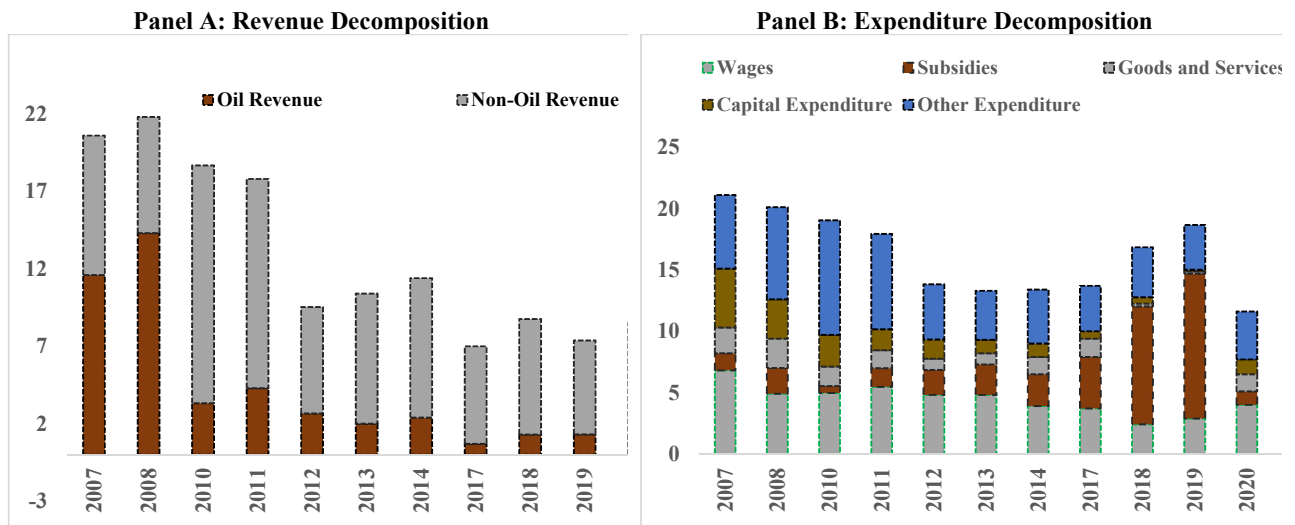
Therefore, akin to other country experiences, it is not surprising that the failure of the Ingaz regime to undertake robust economic adjustments to the extreme “sudden stops” associated with the secession of South Sudan had dire consequences for the economy. Indeed, the post-secession Sudanese economy continued to deteriorate and undergo severe crisis proportions, leading to the collapse of the regime and complicating macroeconomic management for the transitional government that followed. The loss of oil as a source of foreign exchange and public revenue required a major overhaul of the fiscal effort, downsizing, and better allocation of budgetary expenditure. Instead, the GDP share of tax revenue in 2011 was among the lowest in Africa and remained so (Table 9). On the expenditure side, after a brief respite, it rose considerably during the last three years (2017-19). This was driven by fuel subsidies, which accounted for a whopping 12 percent of GDP – more than the combined expenditures on wages, goods, and services in 2019 (Figure 7).

Table 9. Tax revenues (in percent of non-oil GDP)

Country	Egypt	Ethiopia	Kenya	Malawi	Rwanda	Sudan	Tanzania	Uganda	Zambia
2011	14.6	11.3	20.7	21.1	13.4	7.6	15.3	12.4	18.6

Source: IMF (2012).

Figure 7. Sudan’s post-oil fiscal stance (in percent of GDP)

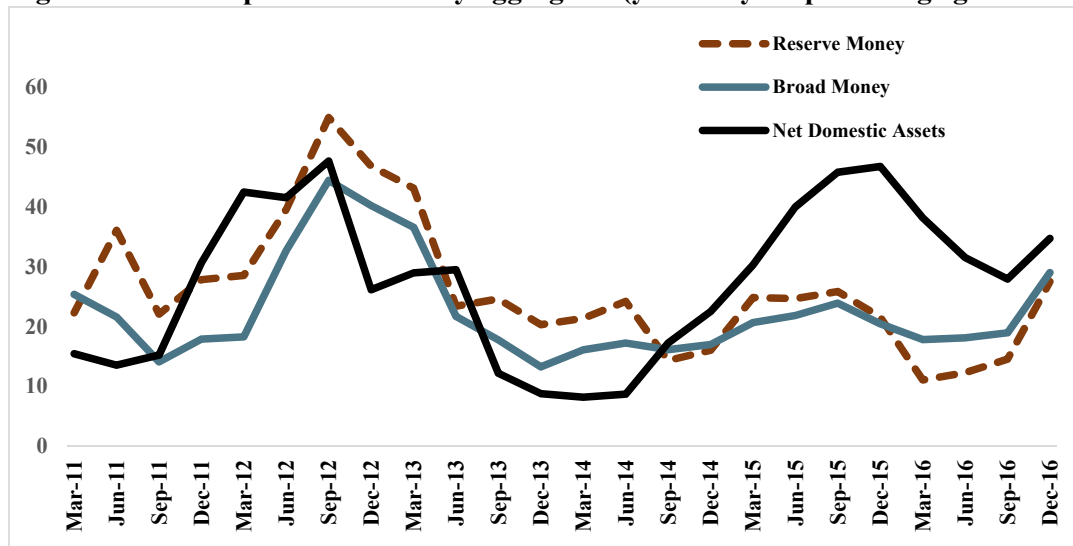


Source: IMF IV Consultations Documents (2013-2016-2019).

Due to limited external financing, the monetization of the deficit became unavoidable, fueling a vicious cycle of exchange rate depreciation and deficit expansion. With domestic fuel prices fixed in SDG terms, exchange rate depreciation automatically increased the size of the fiscal subsidy, which, in turn, increased deficit monetization, thereby adding further pressure on the exchange rate and inflation (Figure 8). The regime, therefore, callously pursued its expansive pre-secession macroeconomic policy, igniting a major inflationary spiral driven by food price inflation (Figure 9). The ensuing impact on the cost of living caused considerable hardship for the remaining seven years of the regime, further eroding its fast-shrinking popular base. Also, the failure to realign the exchange rate to more realistic levels commensurate with the loss of such a major asset in order to enhance the competitiveness of exports and rationalize imports led to deteriorating trade balances (Figure 10); a rising exchange rate premium between the parallel and official rates; and the absolute dominance of the parallel market for settling foreign exchange transactions (Figure 11).

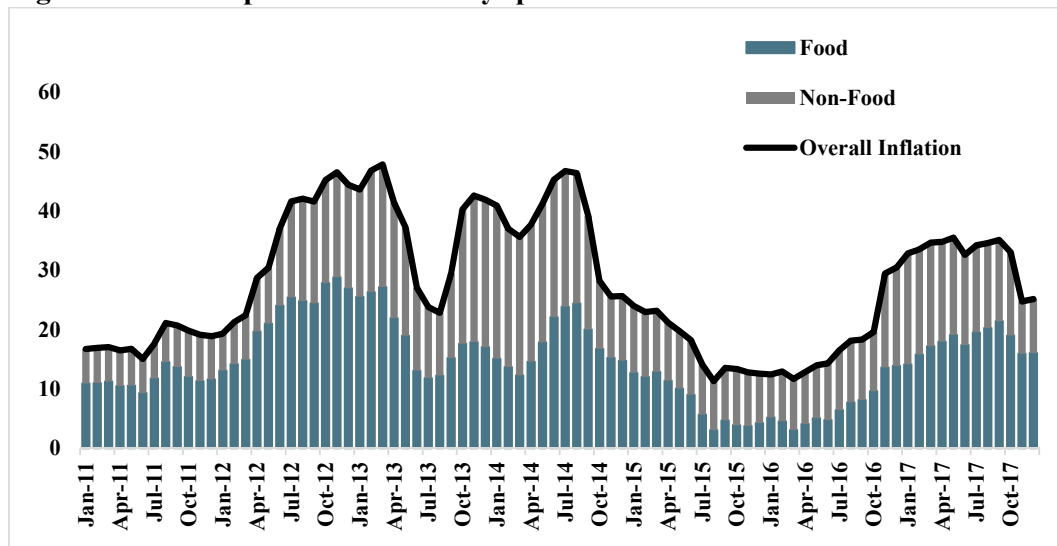
Once more, the economy pushed the cumulative anger and disdain for the blatantly kleptocratic and brutal regime over the hump, eventually leading to a phenomenal, unparalleled popular uprising, even by the standard of the rich Sudanese history of peaceful popular pretexts. Once the massive protests erupted in December 2018, it became clear that the endgame for the Ingaz regime was imminent.

Figure 8. Sudan's post-oil monetary aggregates (year-on-year percentage growth rates)



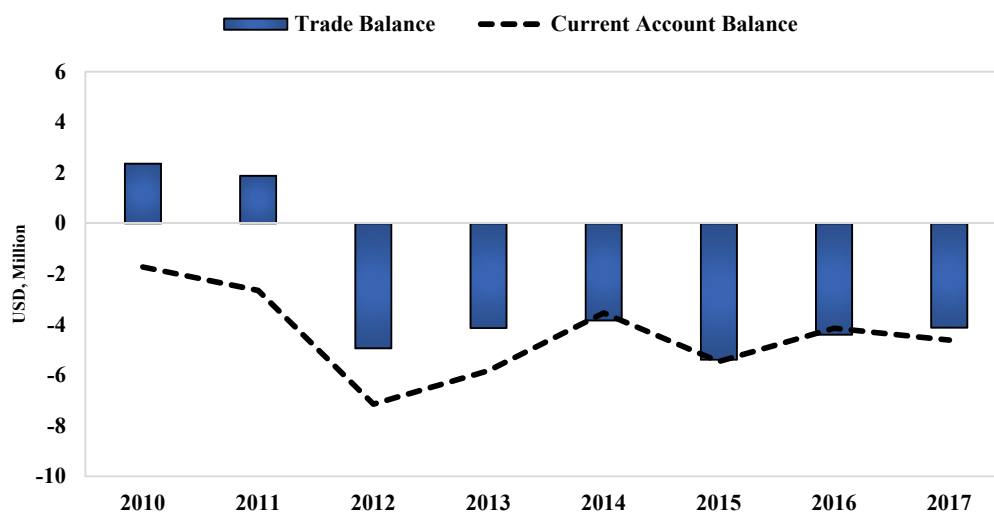
Source: CBoS.

Figure 9. Sudan's post-oil inflationary spiral



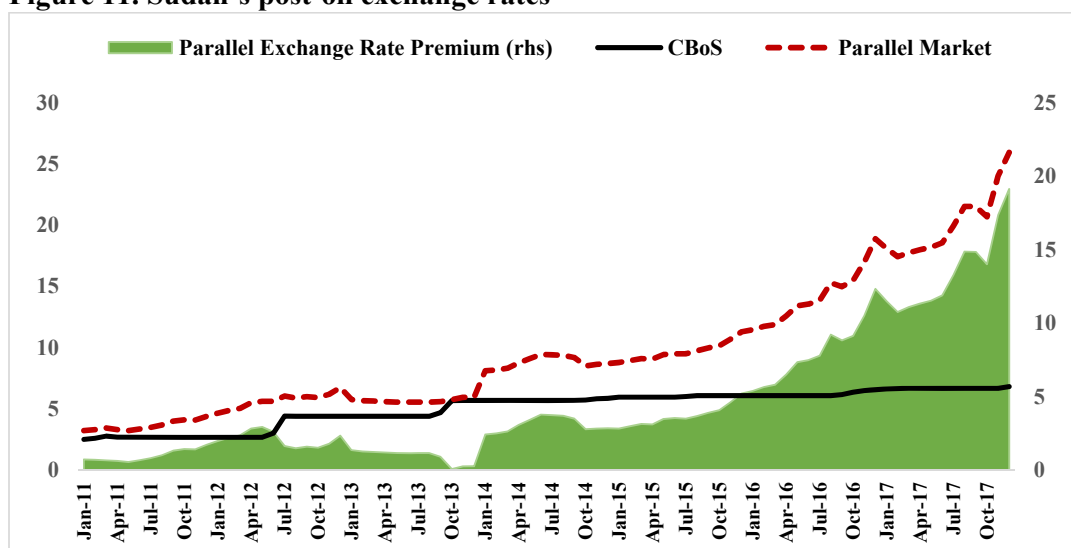
Source: CBS.

Figure 10. Sudan’s post-oil foreign account balances



Source: CBoS.

Figure 11. Sudan’s post-oil exchange rates

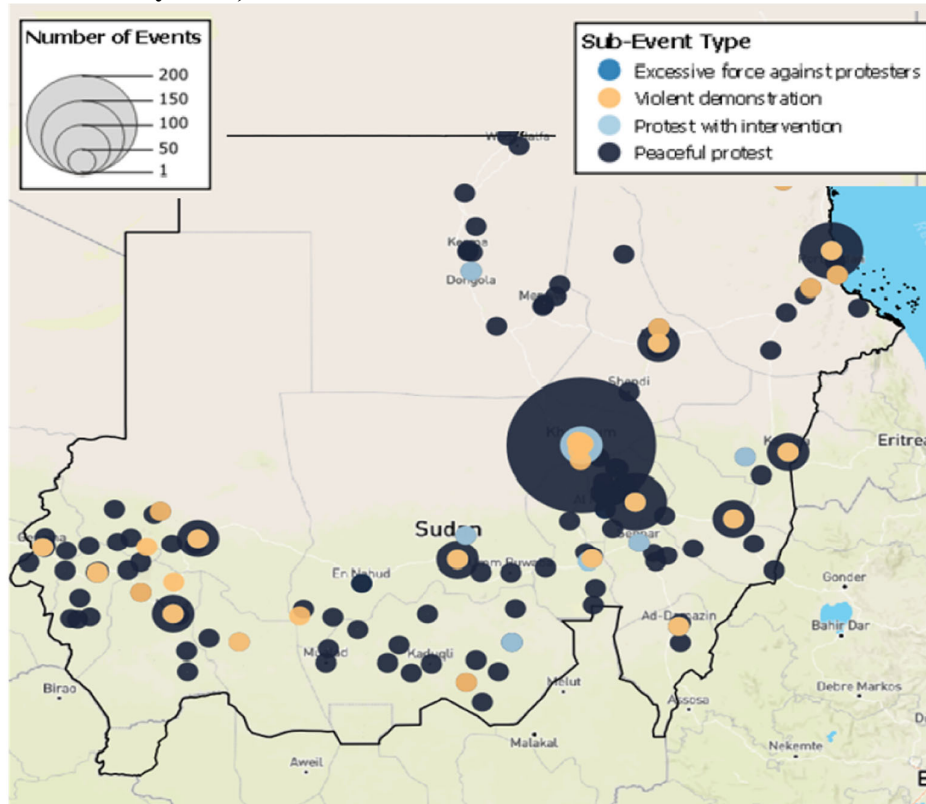


Source: CBoS.

V. The “glorious” December revolution and its aftermath (December 2018- present)

The popular uprising that deposed the Ingaz regime is often referred to as the “glorious” December revolution. This is a richly deserved designation, we would argue. The massive protests in all cities, townships, and villages that spanned the vast geographic expanse of the country were unparalleled in the history of Sudan (Figure 12).

Figure 12: The December revolution: Geography and size of protests (7 December 2018 - 10 February 2022)



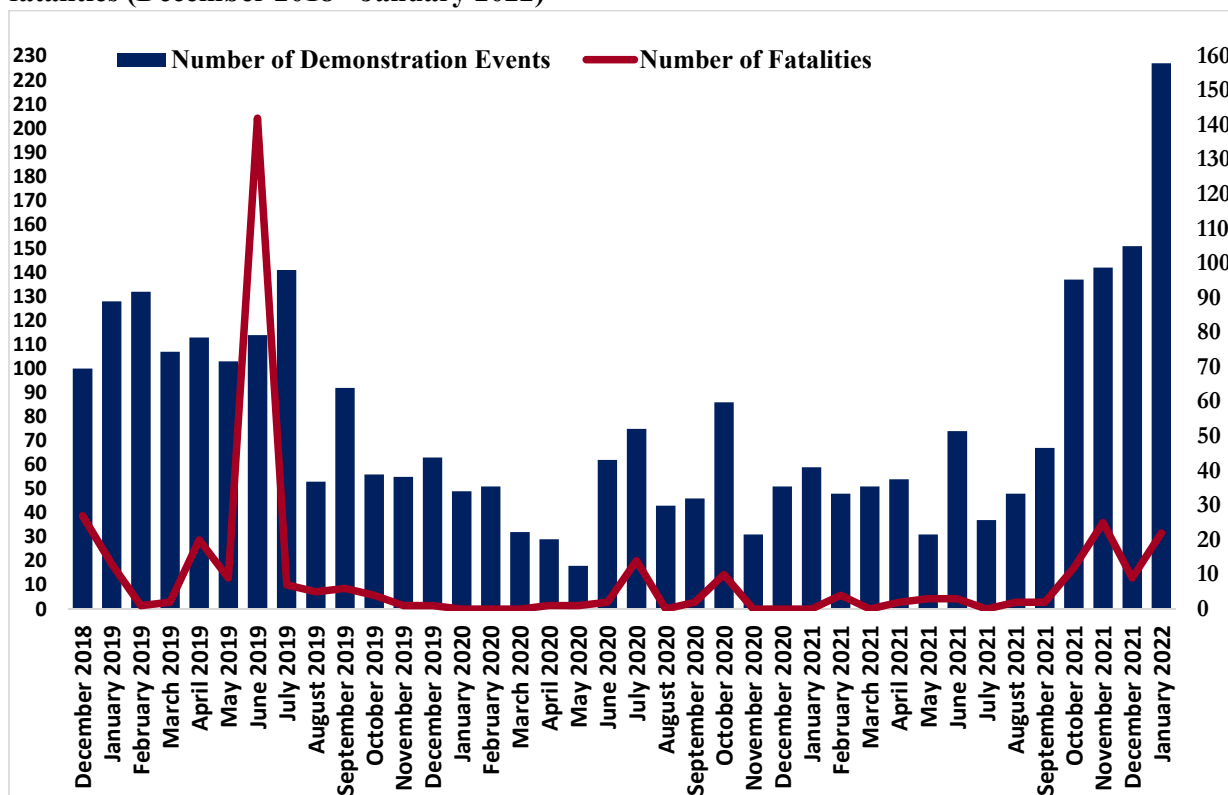
Source: Elaborated by authors from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).⁴¹

While the Sudanese people inside the country took to the streets, their fellow citizens in the diaspora staged massive demonstrations in major cities around the world, calling for the international community’s support for the revolution. The resilience and determination shown by the people of Sudan, especially the youth, to continue the struggle for more than three and a half years before and after the collapse of the Ingaz regime is extremely remarkable. Unfortunately, the Sudanese youth had to pay a heavy price, including hundreds of casualties and several thousand injuries throughout three periods of brutal campaigns to suppress the rebellious population during the last five months or so prior to the collapse of the Ingaz regime, the following five months of the Transitional Military Council’s (TMC) rule, and since the October 2021 coup (Figure 13).

41

[https://mptf.undp.org/project/00132776?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_Paid_Se_arch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=CjwKCAjwKmaBhBMEiwAyINuwDIZGK89N-NOZ_QCm8MTY3H2xVOiBLY8DM9vKeAz4I91bfBsuqeLIBoCYaUQAvD_BwE\)](https://mptf.undp.org/project/00132776?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_Paid_Se_arch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=CjwKCAjwKmaBhBMEiwAyINuwDIZGK89N-NOZ_QCm8MTY3H2xVOiBLY8DM9vKeAz4I91bfBsuqeLIBoCYaUQAvD_BwE))

Figure 13. The December revolution: Number of demonstrations, events, and reported fatalities (December 2018 - January 2022)



Source: Elaborated by authors from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

Notwithstanding its immense popularity, youthfulness, glory, sacrifices, and the promise it entails for the people of Sudan, the December revolution has been challenged every step of the way by formidable forces from within its ranks and foes alike. The counterrevolutionary coalition was driven by the entrenched interests associated with the political marketplace.⁴² The messy ride of the revolution has so far traveled through four stages: the onset of the December revolution and collapse of the Ingaz regime; the TMC and the sit-in at the Sudan Army Forces High Command massacre; the Constitutional Declaration and the Transitional Government; and the Juba Peace Agreement and 25 October coup.

V.1 The onset of the December revolution and the collapse of the Ingaz regime

The revolution was sparked by deteriorating economic conditions and extreme hardship when the Ingaz regime essentially ran out of options for dealing with the burgeoning budget crisis. However, as important as they might have been, economic considerations were only a “collective action” catalyst for mobilizing the Sudanese people for a larger cause. The street protests that broke out in several Sudanese cities in the second half of December 2018 quickly mushroomed into a full-blown popular uprising against the regime, gathering strength and cohesion in the following few months and culminating in the tremendous show of “peoples’

⁴² See de Waal (2019) and Gallopin et al. (2021).

power” in the sit-in at the Army High Command on 6 April 2019. This followed a call by the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) for a march to the headquarters to demand that the army side with the people of Sudan and depose the regime of Gen. al-Bashir. Five days later on 11 April, the military ousted the regime and established a transitional military council, headed by Gen. Awad Ibn Auf, the First Vice President of al-Bashir and Chairman of the Supreme Security Committee.

Throughout its long reign in power, the Ingaz regime was met with fierce opposition manifested in multiple coup attempts, civil wars, strikes, and protests. However, the regime was able to hold on to power by resorting to extremely harsh measures and deploying skillful cooption and divide-and-rule tactics. The alleged regime’s perpetrated massacres associated with the civil wars in Darfur are considered the most glaring examples of the regime’s brutality, which eventually brought international condemnation and legal action by the International Criminal Court.⁴³ The regime also did not refrain from using extreme violence to foil attempted coups and discourage future ones as well as suppress peaceful popular uprisings. The summary execution of 28 officers from the 1991 attempted coup and the brutality of the measures deployed to quell the peaceful 2013 uprising where more than 170 young protesters were shot dead are two more examples in the midst of untold atrocities. The regime was also very effective in sowing divisions among political parties and armed insurgency. In this context, the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) became a lead institution in concocting “bogus” power-sharing agreements and political reconciliation initiatives, all facilitated by the well-funded political marketplace during the decade of the oil era. Furthermore, to discourage and preempt internal coups, al-Bashir sought to achieve a “balance of terror” within his military by maintaining three independent institutions: the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The success of the revolution in ousting such a well-entrenched, kleptocratic, and battle-hardened regime is truly remarkable, though not necessarily inexplicable. The triumph of the revolution, if temporary (as the subsequent developments show), builds upon a repertoire of a rich revolutionary legacy. However, the challenges posed by the Ingaz regime were far more daunting for any peaceful civilian uprising. Nonetheless, the December revolution proved to be far more versatile and resilient than its predecessors.

Firstly, in view of the extreme brutality and injustices of the Ingaz regime, the grievance felt by the people of Sudan, especially among the youth, was unparalleled in the country’s modern history. The demographic bulge during the last 30 years has deeply transformed Sudanese demographics, with the below 30 years age group accounting for almost 70 percent of the population. This – coupled with massive deprivation and youth unemployment associated with the regime’s ill-fated Tamkeen economic policy – facilitated collective action, enabling an overwhelming scale of social mobilization. Secondly, the internet-savvy and horizontally-

⁴³ More resources on Sudan and the International Criminal Court can be found in these links: [sudan-icc_q-a_final.pdf \(fidh.org\)](#) and [Darfur, Sudan | International Criminal Court \(icc-cpi.int\)](#).

organized youth population in Khartoum and other major cities managed to build robust hybrid networks that integrated large-scale online social mobilization with personalized activism within the urban neighborhoods. Thirdly, the impersonal, shadowy leadership style of the SPA during the early phase of the revolution provided rallying symbolic guidance for collective action and mass mobilization. The SPA smoothly morphed from an association of professionals in 2012 militating for fair wages to an effective shadowy leader of the revolution along with the resistance committees. Sudanese academic Saadia Malik (2022, pp. 1502) phrases it aptly:

“The committees acted as the Sudanese Professional Association’s grassroots foundation, transmitting SPA’s messages received through social media to neighbors who did not have access to such communication technology.; indicating that significant synergies exist among the December revolution actors. Members of the Resistance Committees have also served as collective action leaders, as they are building trust and fostering a sense of community through the process of informationally connecting people and coordinating collective action.”

Fourthly and very importantly, the sustained massive street protests facilitated unprecedented opposition unity. On 1 January 2019, the main opposition forces, including political parties, armed resistance movements, the SPA, and other civil society and professional organizations, signed the Declaration of Freedom and Change. The document, which demanded the removal of the Ingaz regime and the formation of a transitional government, the end of civil wars, and the convening of a constitutional conference, marked the birth of the Forces of Freedom of Change (FFC). The birth of the FFC meant that the revolution was led by a political coalition with a popular mandate and a coherent revolutionary agenda.

V.2 The TMC and the massacre at the army high command sit-in

The tumultuous events that followed the formation of the TMC revealed major fissures within the Supreme Security Committee, the security clique around Gen. al-Bashir that eventually toppled his regime in response to the massive social mobilization and the sit-in. Only three days after the TMC assumed power, its leader, Gen. Ibn Auf, resigned due to intense pressure by the rebellious youth, who saw his leadership as an egregious signal of the continuity of the former regime. Almost immediately after this resignation, an open power struggle emerged, leading to the elimination of the NISS as an independent actor in the military power structure and the consolidation of power in the hands of Gen. Abdelfattah al-Burhan, who was named TMC Chairman and General Commander of the SAF, and RSF Commander Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Daglo (Hemedti) as Deputy Chairman. These crucial days led to what turned out to be a durable reconfiguration of the balance of power among the security institutions inherited from the al-Bashir era, resting upon two dominant poles: the SAF, led by al-Burhan, and the RSF, led by Hemedti, in an uneasy alliance during and after the formation of the TMC.

Despite public statements by TMC leaders stating that they see their role as “enablers” and “complementary” to the revolution and that they are “committed to handing over power to the people,” their negotiation with the FFC exposed the military leaders’ resolve to continue wielding strong influence in shaping the political, security, and economic landscape during the transitional period. It seems that their key instrument in this context was reinventing the political marketplace of Gen. al-Bashir’s era, with a “cooperative” oligopoly between SAF and RSF ruling supreme. On the other hand, the rebellious masses at the sit-in and elsewhere in the country were demanding that the TMC hand the power over to a civilian transitional government. Against this backdrop, the negotiations between the TMC and the FFC reached a deadlock, and the sit-in and street protests continued all over the country.

The sit-in at the SAF High Command became the nerve center of the revolution. As eloquently put by Malik (2022, pp. 1505):

“The sit-in redraws a mental map of Sudan within its borders. It envisioned a multi-ethnic and multicultural Sudan with peaceful coexistence. Sudan as a whole was present in a fluid and carnival sense, challenging the underlying typographic narratives.”

In the same vein, leading Sudanese poet and writer Alim Abbas Mohamed Nour (2022, pp. 2-3)⁴⁴ poetically describes it as an epic act of genius:

“Cohesion, expression, diversity, coexistence, convergence, slogans, and everything that reflects the image of Sudan in its creative diversity; multiple cultures, beliefs, and languages, in an epic visual-acoustic painting; noble human solidarity, in terms of values, morals, and principle; and sympathy, synergy, and altruism.”

Instead, the sit-in also became the prime target for the foes of the revolution. Not only was Gen. al-Bashir reported to have tried and failed to get his generals to forcefully disband it, but the remnants of the Ingaz regime, the so-called “people defense brigades,” actually violently attacked the peaceful protesters, which could have led to a bloodbath if not for the intervention of young officers and soldiers at the Army High Command, who exchanged fire with the brigades and managed to chase them away.

Unfortunately, the massacre did happen under TMC’s watch on 3 June 2019 when the SAF violently disbanded the sit-in camp. This tragic event set the TMC on a collision course with the mass movement, leading to an immediate general strike and massive street protests throughout the country on 30 June, the day when Gen. al-Bashir toppled the democratically elected government of Al Mahdi some 30 years ago. It became clear to the generals of the TMC that they cannot impose their vision of a military-led transition, especially since their purported commitment to a democratic transition lost the little credibility that it might have had before

⁴⁴ Translated from Arabic by the authors.

the massacre. The intensity of the contest between the TMC military elites and the democracy movement led the Arab troika of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE on the one hand, and the US and UK on the other, to become more actively engaged. In coordination with the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the quartet of the US, UK, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE applied a coordinated effort, putting pressure on the TMC and FFC to quickly agree to a power-sharing agreement drafted by the AU Peace and Security Council based on the negotiations between the two parties prior to the sit-in massacre. The agreement, known as the Constitutional Declaration, was signed in August 2019.

The Constitutional Declaration provides three levels of government during the transitional period: the federal level, the provincial level, and the local level. It also establishes the three bodies of the transitional government consisting of the Sovereignty Council, the Cabinet, and the Legislative Council (the Parliament), which has the power to pass legislation and oversee the executive branch. Under this transitional constitution, the structure and key mandate of the transitional government included:

- An 11-member sovereign council with five military members and six civilians chosen and mutually agreed upon by the FFC and the TMC.
- A transition period of three years and three months, led by a military member for the first 21 months and a civilian for the following 18 months.
- A PM appointed by the FFC and a cabinet of ministers to be nominated by the FFC and appointed by the PM (with the ministers of defense and interior nominated by the military).
- A 300-member legislative council formed after the creation of the sovereign council and cabinet, at least 40 percent of whom must be female.
- A “transparent and independent investigation” into events following the eruption of the Sudanese revolution, including the Khartoum massacre.
- Building peace and preparing for free and open democratic elections following the 39-month transition period.

V.3 The Constitutional Declaration and the transitional government

The Sudan Transitional Government (STG) had to address a challenging set of national political, security, and economic agendas, including (1) lifting the country from the US-designated State-Sponsored Terrorist List (SST); (2) undertaking sweeping economic reforms for addressing the economic crisis, improving economic welfare and livelihood, and rehabilitating Sudan as a member in good standing of the international development community; (3) achieving peace with the armed resistance movements; (4) undertaking security reforms; (5) eradicating Tamkeen and prosecuting inherited corruption; (6) undertaking vast legislative reforms; (7) revisiting the federal system; and (8) preparing for elections and the democratic transition.

Perhaps the STG's most notable success was removing the country from the SST list and rehabilitating it as a member in good standing of the international development community. In large measure, these commendable achievements were facilitated by the outpouring of international support for the Sudanese revolution and the youth of Sudan. The STG economic reforms and renewal agenda were also met with considerable appreciation by major bilateral donors, most notably the US, the UK, member countries of the European Union, and the Arab and African partners of Sudan. These countries and others constituted the "Friends of Sudan" group, which, together with the World Bank, sponsored the USD 800 million Family Support Program. The program was established by the STG as a major social program for containing the potential social impact of austerity associated with the much-needed fiscal and monetary stabilization.

Moreover, the STG was able to separate the path to restoring the country's relationship with the multilateral development institutions from the one associated with its removal from the SST list. Despite international goodwill, removing the country from this list was not automatic and took some precious lead time before the country could extricate itself from it in December 2020. Nonetheless, initial consultations and subsequent negotiations on economic reforms with the IMF, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank started as early as September 2019, following the formation of the Cabinet. The STG signed a fast-track Staff Monitored Program - Upper Credit Tranche (SMP-UCT) agreement with the IMF in June 2020. In just nine months, the Boards of the IMF and the World Bank announced in March 2021 that, subject to the clearance of its arrears, the country would be eligible to normalize its relations with the multilateral institutions and eventually receive massive debt relief under the Highly-indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative.

Facilitated by several Western partners,⁴⁵ Sudan's arrears to the IMF, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank were cleared three months later in June 2021. This major development was immediately followed by a decision by the Executive Boards of the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) and the IMF declaring Sudan to have taken the necessary steps to begin receiving debt relief under the enhanced HIPC. This paved the way for Sudan to become the 38th country to reach this milestone, known as the HIPC Decision Point. At this point, Sudan became eligible to access IDA grants and IMF financial resources to stabilize the economy and provide for much-needed social programs. In 2024, the second step, known as the HIPC Completion Point, kicks in, where Sudan's external public debt will be irrevocably reduced by more than USD 50 billion in net present value terms, representing over 90 percent of Sudan's total external debt.

⁴⁵ Sudan's arrears to the IDA were cleared on 26 March 2021 through bridge financing provided by the US, reimbursed with the proceeds of a Development Policy Grant primarily funded from the IDA's Arrears Clearance Set Aside in IDA19. The arrears to the African Development Bank Group were cleared on 12 May 2021 through bridge financing provided by the government of the UK and contributions from Sweden and Ireland. The bridge loan from the UK was reimbursed via the proceeds of a policy-based operation grant. Finally, the arrears to the IMF were cleared on 29 June 2021 with the assistance of bridge financing from the government of France, which the authorities reimbursed using front-loaded access under the new IMF financial arrangement.

The first “technocratic” transitional government presented a national economic program based on a robust economic vision, aimed at strengthening the mandate of the Ministry of Finance over public money and economic governance; undertaking deep institutional, fiscal, and monetary policy and exchange rates reforms; and restructuring the banking sector, among others. Though controlling inflation proved to be more challenging, the program started to make progress on the social agenda, the unification of the exchange rate, and the liquidation of the parallel market for foreign exchange. Some other notable achievements included the implementation of the new salary structure, the Family Support Program, and the reallocation of expenditure in the 2020 budget in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for larger outlays to education, health, and other social services.

Moreover, though the economic vision and programs undoubtedly formed a full-fledged renaissance project and came as a product of the Sudanese vision, it also overlapped with the SMP agreement (Elbadawi, 2020). The important strategic results of this agreement were beginning to be seen before the fateful October 25 coup put an end to them. Despite the major challenges faced by the STG and the limited progress in other areas, Sudan was on course to score fundamental economic milestones:

- First and most importantly, joining the HIPC initiative, which is expected to reduce Sudan's external debt from more than USD 60 billion to less than USD 15 billion. Out of 40 countries covered by this program, Sudan would be the beneficiary of the largest debt relief in the history of HIPC, accounting for more than a third of the resources that have been deployed for this initiative since it was launched in 1996.
- Second, promoting far-reaching institutional reforms by extending the ownership and oversight of the Ministry of Finance to encompass all the economic interests of the military-security institutions, which was one of the key conditions for debt relief and the rehabilitation of the country in the international development community.
- Third, receiving annual grants of at least USD one billion as direct budget support from the World Bank and other soft loans from the IMF to support the balance of payments...etc.
- Fourth, the flow of institutional investments – by the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank and the African Development Fund of the African Development Bank, for example – which usually provide financing for strategic development projects, in turn enabling countries to attract further investment by the private sector.

The economic reform and renewal program had the potential to promote progress in other key areas such as financing security reforms and peacebuilding as well as creating jobs for a large pool of unemployed Sudanese youth. Unfortunately, the STG’s economic agenda was slowed down by domestic headwinds. In our view, the dissonance of visions and the primacy of ideological approaches over objective scientific ideas on the part of some members of the FFC coalition created a state of despair and skepticism about the efficacy of the entire economic reform project. This derailed the reform agenda, especially the macroeconomic programs

related to fiscal and monetary policies and exchange rates, which constitute the “pole of the mill” for any credible program of economic reform.

Unfortunately, the civilian-led government failed to make similar progress in other critical areas, such as the constitution of the legislative council, the constitutional court, and other key commissions; security reforms; investigating the sit-in massacre and other crimes against the civilian population; and transferring the commercial economic entities of SAF, RSF, and other security institutions to the Ministry of Finance. However, the capacity of the STG to successfully address these supreme national agendas was substantially limited by the entrenched influence of the main beneficiaries of the political marketplace, civilian and military alike. In particular, the supporters of the so-called “Islamic Movement” remain in denial and deeply disgruntled about the reality of being so roundly rejected by the people of Sudan and subsequently removed from power. Indeed, their blatant delusionary behavior merits their dismissal by the late Imam Al Sadig Al Mahdi as the “aggrieved right.” The STG was undoubtedly met with large-scale, subversive counterrevolutionary challenges.

Moreover, the STG’s shortcomings could also be attributed to conflictive contests within both the FFC and the military leadership as well as the grave differences between the two partners. Firstly, the FFC leadership was clearly more interested in maintaining its participatory but cumbersome horizontal structure and was therefore unable to agree on a timely constitution of the transitional institutions stipulated in the Constitutional Declaration. Secondly, the FFC and the PM grossly underestimated the limits to criminally investigating the sit-in massacre, which might end up incriminating their partners. Moreover, both lack the candor to level with the families of the victims and the public, allowing them to possibly make the case for an alternative form of transitional justice, such as the South African “Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” Thirdly, the military leadership showed little interest in moving forward with security reforms, nor were they willing to enable the Ministry of Finance to exercise control over their massive civilian commercial companies and other economic interests. It is clear that both types of reforms are not compatible with the imperatives of the political marketplace, which the military leadership seemed to have reconfigured as a “cooperative” monopolistic kleptocracy and wished to maintain it as an instrument for peaceful cohabitation between SAF and RSF. Unfortunately, such a security regime is neither compatible with the fundamentals of a modern professional army nor with its eventual accountability to an elected civilian democratic government.

However, the other fatal mistake that would ultimately bring down the short-lived constitutional STG was the decision by the FFC and the civilian government to acquiesce to the intense desire of the military partners to lead the peace negotiations, while failing to push for a broad-based peace process that would also empower civil society from the conflict-affected regions of the country. The lopsided Juba Peace Accord that ensued (signed in October 2020) led to the dissolution of the technocratic government and the formation of a largely political quota government, dominated by the FFC and the armed resistance movements that

signed the Accord. As the unfolding events attest, the Juba Accord was a watershed event that would have dire consequences for the Sudanese revolution.

V.4 The Juba Peace Agreement and the 25 October coup

On 25 October 2021, the Sudanese military, led by Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, took control of the government in a military coup; dissolved the cabinet and the Sovereignty Council; declared a state of emergency; placed the PM under house arrest; and detained several ministers and FFC leaders. The coup was (and still is) met with massive protests organized by the youth resistance committees in the capital and other major cities across the country. The SPA, FFC, and other major civilian groups also called for civil disobedience. The putschists responded with massive arrests of youth, leaders of political parties, and professional and civil society activists. They also resorted to brutal force in a futile attempt to crush the street protests (which continue until the time of writing this paper), but at a very high cost (as shown in Figure 13). The coup leaders also failed to mobilize sufficient external support, though they did receive tacit but lukewarm support from some of Sudan's Arab partners. For example, one day after their takeover, the AU suspended Sudan's membership, pending a return to power of the STG. Two days later, the European Union, the US, and other Western powers stated that they would continue to recognize the Hamdok cabinet as the constitutional leaders of the STG. Therefore, faced with robust domestic resistance and almost universal external condemnation, Gen. al-Burhan negotiated and signed a 14-point agreement with Hamdok, instating him as PM and stipulating that all political prisoners would be freed. However, the FFC, SPA, and, very importantly, the youth resistance committees, all rejected the deal. The massive street protests continued with an increasing toll of casualties, as the putschists continued to respond by applying brutal force. Eventually, Hamdok resigned on 3 January 2022.

With the benefit of hindsight, it could be argued that the 25 October coup was, in fact, a “creeping coup” in the making, waiting to happen over the horizon as far back as the early stages of the civilian-military partnership. It became clear that the military partners were a far cry from the earlier transitional military leaders, such as Gen. Swar El-Dahab and his colleagues at the Military Council, who strictly adhere to their national mandate of safeguarding the transition to democracy following the popular March-April uprising in 1985. Instead, the current military partners seem to harbor a far more ambitious political agenda. It is not surprising, therefore, that the two partners were unable to make progress on some of the key transition agendas, such as security reform and the establishment of the constitutional court. Moreover, the military leadership continued to resist restrictions on the commercial activities of SAF, RSF, and other security agencies, or transfer their non-military economic assets to the Ministry of Finance.

An ominous early signal of the impending coup was manifested in the developments following an aborted military coup in September 2021, allegedly perpetrated by remnants of the former regime. Though the coup plotters were archenemies of the revolutionary camp, including the FFC, this event miraculously turned out to be a launching pad for an emerging

counterrevolutionary coalition, which came to be known as the “palace coalition,” after they staged a sit-in at the Republican Palace. Despite attempts by the PM to mediate between the FFC and the military leadership, the two partners were increasingly drifting apart. Just one month after the attempted coup, the new coalition held protests in Khartoum in October calling for Gen. al-Burhan to seize control and take over the government. Unsurprisingly, while the self-proclaimed “pro-military” protesters were allowed to stage a sit-in outside the presidential palace in Khartoum for almost five days, security forces continued to violently suppress the mass movement that took to the street in Khartoum and other major cities in opposition to the palace coalition and supporting the civilian government. Whether it was coordinated with the military leadership or not, the October sit-in became an enabler for the coup, which took place just five days after the coalition lifted their sit-in.

The signing of the Juba Agreement in October 2020 and the subsequent participation of the Juba signatories of the armed resistance movements in the new political quota government in February 2021 marked a major shift in the balance of political power in favor of the military component in their increasingly bitter contest with the FFC. The military component had a head start in the peacebuilding efforts when they took initiative in negotiating with the armed groups in Juba as early as September 2019, immediately after the formation of the STG. Despite the participation of the civilian component of the STG in the Juba negotiation, its abdication of the leadership role to the military leadership set the stage for a de facto political alliance between the two military protagonists, which did not only undercut the FFC but also undermined the transition to democratic civil peace. This alliance was manifested in the leading role of the leadership of the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM/A), Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and some other Darfurian rebel groups of the Juba Agreement in the palace coalition. The members of these movements also closed ranks with the supporters of the former regime in their common objective of dissolving the government. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Juba groups supported the coup and continued to participate in the post-coup regime.

It is unfortunate that the Sudanese armed resistance movements had a history of cutting deals with authoritarian military regimes well before the Juba Peace Accord and the October 2021 coup. For example, while they refrained from making peace with the civilian governments following the October 1964 and March-April 1985 revolutions, the Southern Sudanese Anya rebels and SPLM made peace with the tyrannical regimes that emerged from their tactical mistakes to not accept repeated peace overtures from the nascent Sudanese democratic governments. The Darfurian SLM followed suit and joined the Ingaz regime, if briefly, as part of a short-lived deal. All along, the military leadership had grave concerns about the transfer of the Sovereignty Council Chairmanship to the civilian partners, as required by the Constitutional Declaration. Such a milestone would almost certainly revive the dormant Investigation Commission into the sit-in massacre, which is a matter of great concern for the military component. Moreover, the military leadership remained opposed to the activities of the Commission for Dismantling Empowerment and Eradicating Corruption, which exposed and highlighted military commercial activities and military-owned commercial interests. Therefore, there is no question that in the absence of an amicable resolution of the sit-in

massacre that would somehow absolve the military leadership, there was a strong motivation for the coup, pending the opportune time when the balance of power swings in favor of the potential putschists. As discussed, the Juba Agreement constituted an important milestone in this regard, which was also reinforced by the weakening of the cohesion of the FFC coalition. In the post-Juba period, the Sudanese Communist Party abandoned the coalition and also orchestrated the partition of the SPA.

However, the coup was a desperate gamble that has, so far, failed to tame the popular protests or win international support. Although the partners to the Juba Agreement favored immediate tactical gains, which they reckoned would be better secured by siding with the military, the much-needed finance for the peace entitlements was no longer available. Nonetheless, the coup managed to derail the much-anticipated march toward the democratic transition in the aftermath of a truly glorious revolution. The country is now reliving the melancholy Sudan Syndrome that afflicted its nation-building and renewal since its independence more than 65 years ago.

In the next two sections, we use the AR narrow corridor framework to explain why the Sudan Syndrome is so entrenched. After that, we discuss the lessons to be had in order to extricate the country from this syndrome and steer it back to its constitutional path toward democratic transition and democratic civil peace.

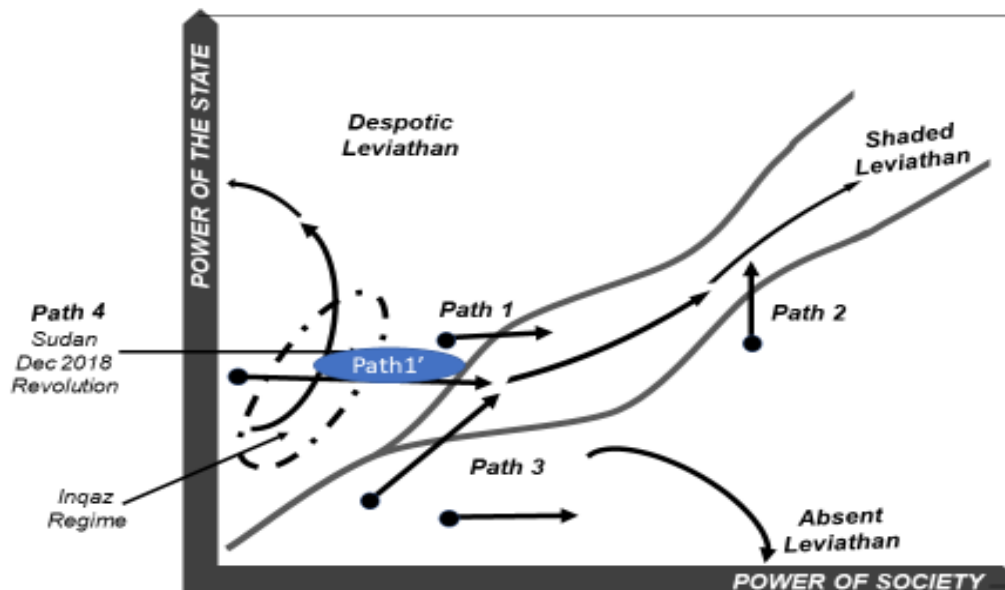
VI. Explaining the syndrome: The “narrow corridor” model

According to AR, when elites dominate society, the outcome is likely to be a despotic state or a “Despotic Leviathan,” as in the case of China. On the other hand, when society becomes too strong for a central authority to emerge, we have a very weak state, an “Absent Leviathan,” as in Lebanon and Somalia. The state under a Despotic Leviathan, they argue “possesses a monopoly of violence and is able to raise taxes, regulate society, and provides public goods.” However, because power is not broadly shared, there is no representation and no accountability; hence, society is rather weak and dominated by the elites. In their view, this state is not necessarily strong because since elites dominate society, there is no incentive for them to strengthen the state beyond a certain limit. Moreover, a despotic state may actually be a very weak state, with no capacity or interest to raise taxes and deliver public goods, and it may even fail to secure the most basic function of exercising monopoly over organized violence, though it can be as brutal and repressive as the Despotic Leviathan. They refer to such a state as “Paper Leviathan,” which is usually found in countries plagued with civil wars, coups, and other forms of civil strife. The fourth type of state in their model is found in a narrow corridor between excessive state and societal power. The balance of power between state and society is argued to be a powerful motivator for inculcating mutual trust and constructive competition between the state and society, where both get stronger as they move up along the narrow corridor, which AR call “the Red Queen Effect.” In their view, this effect “undergirds the emergence of strong states,” which they denote as a “Shackled Leviathan.” They also stress that the state is primarily

“shackled” by the power of society, not because of an ingenious constitution or clever institutional designs.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2018) present a sophisticated game theoretic model of the narrow corridor. For this paper, however, a graphical representation of the model as depicted in Acemoglu and Robinson (2020) tailored for the case at hand suffices for describing the zone of attraction of the four state-building outcomes and the dynamics of the transitions associated with them (Figure 14). The horizontal axis represents the power of society, while the vertical axis codes the power of the state. The narrow corridor traces the hypotenuse of the square formed by the two axes. Inside the corridor, the dynamics take both the state and society upward toward the Shackled Leviathan, where both society and state accumulate mutual trust and strength. Instead, outside the corridor, the polity will converge to either Despotic Leviathan or Absent Leviathan. A key point to note is that this simple graphical representation accounts for the idea that the despotic state will always be weaker than the shackled state because elites under the former have no interest to do better once they achieve their dominance over society. On the other hand, the state remains much weaker when society is strong but in a fragmented way, where the “bonding” social capital across groups is low.

Figure 14. The AR narrow corridor



Source: Adapted from Acemoglu and Robinson (2020).

As depicted in the figure, in the AR model there are several pathways to the corridor, depending on the location of polity relative to the corridor. For example, from the basin of attraction of an Absent Leviathan, getting into the corridor would require strengthening the state, but in a way that allows society to remain strong so that polity continues to stay in and progress within the corridor (paths 2 and 3). On the other hand, starting from the sphere of a Despotic Leviathan,

the objective should be to strengthen the society to be able to control the state but, for the same reason, without undermining the capacity of the state (path 1).

A key historical insight of high relevance to Sudan from the AR model is that despite the weakness of the state or society, an entry into the corridor is possible, if only in its narrowest part, as long as their strength is somewhat balanced. It is pertinent in this context to quote AR's analysis of the state of polity in the US in 1788 (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2020):

“...The Constitution strengthened the state against society. The Bill of Rights strengthened society against the state. This was still a pretty weak state. There would be no income tax until the 20th century and the Constitution reserved for the individual states any power not specifically allocated to the federal state. But it was also a pretty weak society; there was still slavery and women were also second-class citizens in many ways. But the key thing was that there was a balance between the power of the state and the power of society. The United States was in the corridor.”

The analysis of the various structural factors shaping the path of state-building in Sudan (e.g., civil wars, social polarization, resource curse, and frequent economic crises) makes clear that both society and state were weak in Sudan. Therefore, it could be argued that the three Sudanese uprisings emerged from a locus of a Paper Leviathan polity, strengthening the power of society along the horizontal axis and thereby leading to a major realignment of relative strength between state and society. In the typology of Figure 14, the three uprisings created a balance between two essentially weak contenders, leading to an entry into the narrowest segment of the corridor (along path 1).

As discussed above, the most salient features of the political history of post-independence Sudan could be aptly described by episodes of massive societal mobilization, associated with the economic and political developments that weakened the grip of the despotic regime. This process ultimately led to the collapse of long-reigning despotic but institutionally weak regimes (Abboud, 1958-64; Nimeri, 1969-86; and Ingaz, 1989-2018). However, though the first two transition regimes led to free and open elections, the ensuing democratically elected regimes were unstable and short-lived (1965-69 and 1986-89).

So far, we have argued that the AR framework provides an intuitive and coherent analytical approach to explaining the entry into the corridor. However, explaining the Sudan Syndrome requires asking the question of why the country failed to remain in the corridor, much less move up along the narrow corridor toward a Shackled Leviathan state.

In their historical analytic narrative, Acemoglu and Robinson argue that entry into the ‘narrow corridor’ is rather messy and fraught with struggles between the conflicting interests of contesting groups (within society, within elites, and between society and elites). Therefore, it

is not surprising that only a few of such transitions are able to remain within the corridor and move upward, where both society and state gain strength in a positive sum game. An important finding in this context is that the failure to remain in and make progress in the corridor has almost always been associated with three major factors: massive polarization within the society, lack of credible institutions as an arbiter for resolving conflicts, and major economic/political crises. All of these factors, among others, were present in the first two political transitions, which provide important lessons for what needs to be done for the survival of the current transition.

While entering the corridor has been chartered territory for Sudan, the real challenge has been remaining inside the corridor long enough to strengthen the nascent democracy. This issue has been a big concern for some leading Sudanese thinkers and politicians. For example, Abdel Aziz Hussain Alsawi, a writer and leading thinker in the Ba'th Arab Nationalist Movement, argues that there is no way to dismantle the dilemma of the Sudanese democratic fragility except by working to dismantle the dilemma of lack of societal enlightenment in parallel: "There is no democracy without democrats, and there are no democrats without enlightened citizenry." He reckons that the Sudanese political parties are the main cause of the problems, both the popular traditional and the modern parties alike (Alsawi, 2012, p. 12):⁴⁶

"The electorally large parties (the Uma and the Democratic Unionist) were not a suitable environment for the maturation of the enlightenment renaissance stock, with varying degrees, due to the predominance of sectarian weight in their formation, while the "qualitatively" large parties that are most representative of the modern powers (Marxist-communist, Religious-Islamic, and, later, Nationalist Baa'thist Arab) were ideologically incompatible with the liberal democratic system."

He credits the populous "sectarian" parties for politicizing sectarian loyalties into partisan politics, in that it helped graduate politics beyond tribalism and regionalism. He also credits the other partisan style for forming Sudan's broadest window for interacting with the currents and movements of change in the world and playing the main role in shaking the backward social and cultural environment and awakening the popular classes about their rights. However, the most fundamental conclusion of Alsawi's perspective lays the blame directly at the doorsteps of the Sudanese political class (p.12):

"... the two patterns, each for its own reasons, constituted the major obstacle in the path of rooting democracy as a general awareness and an applied practice, and thus blocked the lifeline of enlightenment and revival."

Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim (2021) agrees with Alsawi, in that the weakness of the "social base" of liberal democracy is the fundamental culprit behind the Sudan Syndrome. However, he argues

⁴⁶ Translated from the Arabic text of Alsawi's (2012) book.

that the Sudanese elites, who eschew electoral politics, should bear the main responsibility. He accused them of being a “two-faced group about democracy.” Democracy is the ideal system for the group as a modern urban class. At the same time, it tends to have very little success in the electoral process; hence, they turned against the system altogether by concocting and abating coups.

However, we should not ignore some serious and early initiatives for addressing the Sudan Syndrome. In particular, Al Mahdi, the late Sudanese thinker and former PM, proposed a government of national unity as far back as the 1960s. In motivating this initiative, he argued that the electoral parliamentary system was not capable of absorbing new and important societal forces, such as labor and student unions and other civil society organizations. He also pointed out the following in this context:⁴⁷

“The intellectual elite feels a kind of isolation towards the vast majority of citizens who fall under the banner of traditional, tribal organizations...etc., and this leads to divisions, fissures, and problems.”

This issue is very important for the cohesion of the democratic system because both left-wing and religious elite parties have used these federations and organizations against coalition governments that they feel do not represent them, thus destabilizing parliamentary democracy in the country. Even worse, these parties resorted to military coups and the elimination of the entire democratic project. Accordingly, the initiative of the national government that the then-young PM advocated with urgency since that early time could have strengthened democracy in the country, or at least contained the consequences of what Ibrahim (2021) dubbed as the “electoral envy” of the Sudanese elites.

The third transition might very well travel along the same path as its two predecessors unless, somehow, a broad democracy and freedom coalition emerges, a credible arbiter is found, and the current economic crisis is resolved in good time. Subscribing to insights from the AR model and accounting for the wisdom of the aforementioned Sudanese thinkers and leaders, among others, we propose a national project for growing out of the Sudan Syndrome in the next section.

VII. Toward a national project for growing out of the syndrome

Following the 25 October coup, Sudan was no longer inside the AR corridor. Instead, the struggle shifted from within to outside the corridor due to the unraveling of the forces of the December 2018 revolution and the coalescing of the counterrevolutionary followers of the former regime and the Juba Agreement partners from the armed resistance movements around the military leadership. However, the military camp has its own internal fissures, while the

⁴⁷ Translated to English from the Arabic text, as quoted in Elbadawi (2022, p. 7).

commitment of the Sudanese youth to the struggle for restoring civilian rule has meant that the current political equilibrium is fragile and could very well swing back in favor of a civilian-led democratic transition. Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to ask three fundamental questions as to how the country might re-enter the AR corridor; broaden the corridor, stay in it, and eventually move upward toward the Shackled Leviathan; and how to engineer such a hefty national project.

VII.1 Getting back into the corridor: Challenging but not uncharted territory

It is clear that getting back into the corridor requires that society regains its cohesion and the unity of purpose that propelled the discontent with the Ingaz regime into a large-scale uprising, forcing the collapse of that regime. In particular, the FFC and other political democratic parties that were signatories to the Constitutional Declaration must close ranks and agree on a broad democratic coalition that should also include the political parties and institutions that defected from the old regime and declared their unwavering commitment to civilian-led democratic transitions, most notably the People's Congress Party. Moreover, all democratic forces, including political parties, armed resistance movements, and professional associations, must adjust to the reality of the youth movement as a watershed phenomenon that has already changed Sudanese politics for good. They must, therefore, refashion their national narrative and restructure their institutions accordingly.

However, re-entry into the corridor would also require reversing the current revival of the counterrevolutionary forces and their attempts to build alliances with the military leadership, which has aspirations for maintaining the rents from the political marketplace as well as concerns about investigation into the sit-in massacre and the aftermath of the 25 October coup. The Juba signatories are also most interested in protecting what they considered the gains they were able to achieve in the Juba Peace Agreement. Hence, they have been willing to forfeit their revolutionary ideals and join a coalition anchored around a coup that has actually reversed so many potential gains to the very regions and communities whose rights they claim to be fighting for. There are the tribal leaders, some (if not most) of whom were used to partaking in the rents associated with the political marketplace during the former regime. Moreover, they also feel ignored and marginalized by the largely urban-based, youth-led emerging political order shaped by the December revolution.

Re-entry into the AR corridor to achieve a viable democratic transition will be far more challenging under the current conditions compared to the previous uprisings in 1964 and 1985, and even relative to the brief episode following the first phase of the December revolution. In the aftermath of the 25 October 2021 coup, the already bad legacy of the Ingaz regime has become even worse: communal violence and collapse of law and order; multiple and potentially conflictive institutions of “organized violence”; severe economic crises and the dominance of the “political marketplace”; weak link effects associated with long isolation, such as extreme and even Don quixotic political postures by some parties that have so far been callously

oblivious to the realities on the ground...etc. Therefore, restoring the democratic transition would require a coherent, compelling strategic national narrative premised on the achievement of the central objectives of the revolution, but also openness to entertain bold and skillful tactical initiatives to facilitate an efficient and safe pathway for achieving the envisaged objectives.

A discussion of the elements of the strategic national narrative and associated tactical initiatives follows. First, the democratic coalition should be rebuilt around the recently-launched interim constitution by the Sudanese Lawyers Association, which was widely debated by civilian democratic forces, including youth resistance committees, political parties, and professional associations. This constitution has laid the criteria for defining who should belong to the democratic coalition, which calls for enfranchising all entities that submit to the overall spirit and specific articles of this constitution. This will pave the way for significantly expanding the democracy coalition and therefore strengthen its capacity in the contest with followers of the Ingaz regime, who continue to harbor subversive tactics against the December revolution. The FFC has taken the important step of critically assessing its reign as a ruling coalition during the first phase of the STG. Building upon this important milestone and collaboratively developing a national narrative with other partners in the coalition would be a defining step toward building a viable national democracy coalition.

Second, the political agenda of the rebellious Sudanese youth movement is a sharp-edged triangular political space centered on the “Three No’s”: no negotiation, no partnership, and no bargaining with the military junta and its supporters, which has been recently enshrined in the People’s Power Charter⁴⁸ of the youth resistance committees. In view of the long suffering and sacrifices of the successive generations of Sudanese youth, which culminated in this continuing popular uprising, it is understandable that the youth’s national narrative would be very high in the maxims of the revolution but have no room for tactical compromises. Nonetheless, the Three No’s constitute a state of mind for the Sudanese youth, who have been the bedrock of the popular uprising all along. Therefore, it is incumbent on all national actors, including the political parties, professional entities, and other civil forces – even the military institution and international and regional facilitators, to understand the youth factor as an epitome of a deep demographic, social, and political phenomenon that is here to stay. Sooner or later, these young people will be the ones leading the political movement and state institutions, both civil and military. Therefore, for reasons of enlightened self-interest as well as national responsibility, all pro-democracy partners should refrain from attempting to polarize the youth movement to achieve narrow partisan goals. If the ultimate aim is to strengthen society’s resolve to restore the transition to democracy, the unity and “horizontal” structure of the youth movement should be a common goal for all. This, however, should not prevent political parties from developing their programmatic agenda, leadership, and organizational structures with the objective of attracting youth, who constitute the largest demographic group in the country. On the other

⁴⁸ [الميثاق الثوري لسلطة الشعب \(resistancecommittee.com\)](http://resistancecommittee.com)

hand, it should become clear by now to counterrevolutionary actors that achieving their subversive designs will not be easy due to this youth factor.

More importantly, national and foreign actors hoping to build a broad consensus around a plan for resolving the current political impasse must start by leveling with the youth resistance committees. In this context, they must first position their proposed initiatives at the heart of the youth-inspired political space to build goodwill and trust as far as the commitment to the central maxims and goals of the revolutions remains the binding factor. This should provide an opportunity for deliberative, respectful, and cross-fertilizing engagement with youth that might, hopefully, smoothen the acute angles of their political space and pave the way for the much-needed breakthrough in the required tactical compromises.

Third, the national call to the SAF and other security and law enforcement agencies should be one of respect and recognition of their critical importance as sovereign Sudanese institutions. However, the message should make clear that the time has come for the military leadership to realize that the politicization of uniformed forces and their domination of the political and financial markets in Sudan is no longer acceptable to the people of Sudan. The military leadership should be open to the narrative on the virtue of this transition from even a purely professional viewpoint. According to robust global experiences, democracies are far more capable than autocracies in building more powerful, better trained, and more efficient armies that are naturally more effective in defending national security and the territorial integrity of their countries as well as avoiding unnecessary foreign wars. It is pertinent in this context to recall words of wisdom from the late Sudanese statesman, former PM Al Mahdi, who argued that:

“The greatest achievements of the Western civilization for mankind are twofold: the peaceful transfer of power among the political elites according to the free will of the people; and the subordination of the military institution that has a monopoly on legitimate organized violence, to the elected civilian authority.”

Furthermore, economic growth literature suggests that in post-civil war societies that managed to achieve good political governance and programmatic consensual democracy, the GDP can be doubled in seven to ten years due to the high catch-up growth associated with post-conflict recovery.⁴⁹ In turn, if the revenue share of the GDP remains fixed, doubling the GDP could lead to doubling the public funds available to finance the budget. This should make it possible for the post-conflict democratic Sudanese state to find much more resources to modernize the army and better equip other uniformed institutions than the rents of the monopolistic military companies and other rentier activities in the mining and trade sectors.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Collier and Hoeffler (2002), Elbadawi (2008, 2012), Ali and Elbadawi (2005), and Sharmila et al. (2021).

The supreme national interest of the country calls for the military leadership to commit to the building of a modern unified professional army, a civil police force, and capable intelligence and security agencies. It also calls for the military leadership to turn over all the commercial economic assets to the Ministry of Finance and put an end to all purely commercial economic activities. In return, the social contract with military, security, and law enforcement agencies should be a solemn commitment that the elected civilian government will allocate the necessary resources, including for building an advanced military industry. The achievement of these major transitions requires the “participation” of the military leadership in the transitional civilian-led government, but we hastened to stress that this should be participation in the specific functions associated with the reforms of the military and other uniformed institutions. However, it should be a “functional” participation, not a “constitutional partnership,” as had been the case under the Constitutional Declaration. Such participation is necessary for methodically ending commercial activities and liquidating the non-military economic assets of the military and other uniformed institutions under the joint supervision of the leadership of the military establishment and the Ministry of Finance. The participation of the military is also critical for implementing the security arrangements related to the Juba Agreement and the peace project in general. This constitutes a fundamental departure from the dysfunctional broad-based “partnership” between the military leadership, the FFC, and the Juba Agreement signatories of the armed resistance movements.

The cooperation of the military leadership on these grand agendas almost certainly requires addressing their concerns regarding the potential fallout from the investigation into the sit-in massacre and other atrocities allegedly committed by the military and uniformed agencies. The families of the martyrs and the democracy coalition had to consider the appropriate form of transitional justice that would hold the culprits accountable while facilitating the pathway for achieving the central goals of the revolution. In this context, the South African approach to transitional justice should be seriously considered.

Fourth, the national narrative regarding the Juba Agreement and other armed resistance movements should also be equally respectful to their struggle, their martyrs, and the sacrifices they made, which help to incrementally degrade the coercive capacity of the Ingaz regime. However, for the sake of building robust and sustainable democratic civil peace, the Juba Accord armed struggle movements should abandon their current counterrevolutionary tactics and fully embrace the revolutionary camp. The SLM of Abdel Wahid Nour and SPLM north of Abdel Aziz Al Helo should be responsive to the peace overtures under the current transitional regime. An intransigence and extreme agenda would only weaken the democratic movement and contribute to another authoritarian backlash in the future (Ibrahim, 2021). A repeat of previous tactical mistakes on the part of the armed resistance movements would, therefore, constitute a major setback to the Sudanese democratic civil peace project. These movements must also realize the depth of the transformations that have occurred in the conflict-affected societies due to the youth movement, which, like the rest of the country, has managed to mobilize massive protests in cities and towns in Darfur, South Kordofan, and the Blue Nile.

Like the political parties, the armed resistance movements would also need to deal objectively with the political agenda posited by this formidable new player in the Sudanese political landscape.

Therefore, a critical compromise that must be considered by the armed resistance movements, the youth resistance committees, and the political parties should be to consider the Juba Agreement a step in building a peace process that needs to be integrated into a robust National Peace Conference. The envisaged conference would provide seats at the table for all entities and communities in the conflict-affected regions, not just the armed resistance movements. The financing of the peace program for reconstruction would achieve positive discrimination in favor of communities and regions affected by conflicts through a national development plan for enhancing health and education services, fighting poverty, and building infrastructure for modernizing agriculture and other economic sectors. This approach is more effective in promoting democratic civil peace than financing peace through a quota system associated with specific entities or movements, such as the case of the Juba Peace Agreement. However, the central component that pertains to the security arrangements would be maintained and mainstreamed under the national peace conference.

Fifth, one of the most critical but unfinished agendas in the country's nation-building project relates to the federal system of government. Before the coup of the Ingaz regime in June 1989, the unified Sudan (North and South) was governed by three levels of government: federal, regions, and governorates within regions. Although the system was and continues to be dominated by the federal government, the two lower levels of government, especially the regions, had powers to raise tax revenues and were also responsible for some local services, including education, health, water, and electricity. The Ingaz regime introduced an expanded system of federal government, whereby the regions were divided into states (*wilayat*) and localities (*mahalyat*) within states. Moreover, the tax powers and service delivery responsibilities of subnational governments were significantly expanded following the CPA in 2005. After the partitioning of the country in 2011, there are now 18 states – three times the number of the historical regions of northern Sudan – and a whopping 189 localities. One might think that this may be a move in the right direction, assuming that smaller geographic units inhabited by more homogeneous population groups with similar preferences might mean more efficient subnational governments, such as tax authorities and providers of social services.

Instead, these changes in the federal structure turned out to have grave political and economic consequences. At the political level, states tend to be highly polarized in Sudan, mostly dominated by two or three large tribal communities. In fact, this tribal state architecture was not a random process but an outcome of a grand political design concocted by the Ingaz regime since its early days in power, designed to build an alternative power base around tribal entities and undercut the traditional popular political parties. The two major traditional parties (UP and DUP) have, in fact, managed to loosen the narrow tribal loyalties and establish broad-based political order straddling regional and tribal affiliations. Therefore, the dismemberment of the historical regions into smaller tribal-based states constituted a major setback to the country's

progress on political modernization and national renewal. However, the new subnational government structure had served the centralized authoritarian kleptocracy style of the Ingaz political and financial marketplace during the oil era, where the federal government offers the rents to the non-elected governors of the states who mobilized tribal-based political support to the regime in Khartoum. Instead, following the partitioning of the country and the loss of the centralized oil rents, the marketplace became decentralized, where state governors exercised largely unfettered taxation powers. Nonetheless, with the loss of oil rents, social services deteriorated considerably. Even worse, communal violence started to flare up in some periphery states since the waning days of the Ingaz regime, posing a major challenge to the transitional government of the December revolution.

On the other hand, the historical regions of Sudan do not lend themselves to such polarization. Ample evidence suggests that under the old region-based subnational government system, political elites realized that they had to be part of broad coalitions across tribal and community lines in order to succeed in federal and regional elections alike. For example, this happened in greater Kordofan and in Darfur during the Neimeri regime and, of course, during democracies. Moreover, compared to the states-cum-localities system of subnational governments, the consolidated regions-cum-localities have much stronger fiscal capacity and leaner bureaucracy. Also, the six regions are not necessarily incompatible with the objective of service delivery and choices reflecting preferences by more homogeneous communities. This is because there are localities within regions that could be tasked with delivering a wide range of services. Furthermore, development experiences suggest that successful economic transformation hinges upon building development corridors around major cities in localities. For example, a recent major study argues that the structural transformation and modernization of Sudanese agriculture requires an integrated network of such corridors around major cities (Elbadawi et al., 2022).

Therefore, reforming the current subnational system of government should have been one of the highest priorities of the STG. Subscribing to the above discussion, going back to the historical regions should be seriously considered. Including this issue in the national renewal agenda is important in its own right. Moreover, it would also avail an opportunity for the largely urban-based democratic forces to engage the traditional Sudanese communities in a way that gives them space in the national agenda for restoring the constitutional process. This would amount to bonding the social and political capital between the “old” and “new” Sudan(s), contributing to the project for repositioning the country back on the pathway toward the democratic transition.

VII.2 Broadening the corridor, staying in it, and eventually moving upward toward the Shackled Leviathan

Building upon the fundamental agenda of the nation-building and renewal project associated with reentering the AR narrow corridor, such as peacebuilding and other national goals required for the democracy coalition to regain its lost unity of purpose and strength, the national

project should also anticipate how to broaden this corridor and stay in it long enough to allow the “positive sum” elite-society contest to move forward and eventually reach the stability and maturity of the Shackled Leviathan democracy. In this context, we need to address two challenges that have eluded the country’s past democratic transitions. At the political level, the failure to manage the contest within the democratic forces in the aftermath of the successful uprising had short-circuited democratic rule and opened the floodgates for coups and long-reigning authoritarian regimes. Relatedly, on the economic front, the failure to achieve meaningful, transformative, and equitable economic and social development left the country in a state of poverty and deprivation, which, in turn, became the root cause of civil wars, coups, and political instability. These two failures in the Sudanese national project are at the heart of the wretched Sudan Syndrome. Addressing these two failures requires an encompassing social contract, accounting for both the politics and economics of the national project.

The politics of the social contract: One of the most puzzling issues is why the Sudanese elites failed to learn from the dismal experiences of the divisive and unstable parliamentary coalition governments under the Westminsterian democracy. They blindly adopted it and never thought about alternative political systems that might be more adaptive to the inherent social and political polarization they had to contend with. Although the autocratic presidential system has been disastrous for the country, it might fare much better under democracy. A mixed presidential-parliamentary system with bicameral legislature might be better suited for Sudan. Firstly, a cohabitation between a popularly elected president and a PM elected by parliamentary majority, ala the French system, should provide the right balance between the much-needed political stability on the one hand, and restraint on presidential authority on the other hand. Moreover, the bicameral legislature along the American political system would go a long way toward addressing the imperatives of decentralization and delegation of meaningful powers to the regions. According to this system, the regions would be equally represented in the upper chamber and in proportion to their share in the total population of the country in the lower chamber. This would mean that populous regions like Darfur, Khartoum, and the central regions would have larger shares in the legislature.

However, though the proposed restructuring of the political governance system is a necessary step, it is by no means sufficient for guaranteeing the stability of the envisaged fourth democracy. To ensure that most (if not all) political actors have a stake in the success and stability of the democratic system, the political establishment would also need to form a government of national unity for the envisaged fourth democracy following an open and free election. Naturally, such a government would reflect the relative weights of the contenders in an open and fair election, but it should not be based on pure electoral competition. There seems to be an emerging consensus among the Sudanese political establishment that ending the legacy of a one-term elected democratic government requires such an initiative. For example, since the early days following the collapse of the Ingaz regime, Al Mahdi declared that the UP would be committed to a government of national unity, even if it managed to win 80 percent of the

vote.⁵⁰ Reflecting upon his experience as the PM of the third democracy government, he argued that the civil war in the South and the opposition from the left, coupled with the lack of strong commitment to a unified agenda by the two leading parties, all exposed the government to the subversive designs of the then NIF and paved the way for the success of its coup in June 1989. Therefore, Al Mahdi reckoned that the stability and resilience of future post-election democracies hinges on a national consensus around a social contract to be implemented by a broad-based coalition of political parties, former armed resistance movements, and representatives of civil society and professional associations.

The economic agenda of the social contract: The economic agenda of the envisaged social contract should be inspired by the iconic slogan of the revolution: “Freedom, Peace, and Justice.” To fulfill the legitimate aspirations of the people of Sudan embodied in this remarkable revolutionary slogan, Sudanese political elites in the government and opposition alike must strive to achieve “economic legitimacy” and should not attempt to justify their claim to power only on “revolutionary” or “electoral” political legitimacy. In this context, the program and the entire economic thought must be guided by three governing principles:

First, the program must be “revolutionary” to lay the foundations for the deep and radical political and economic transformations required for achieving the goals of the revolution of freedom, peace, and justice:

- The transition from an authoritarian state at war with its own people, to a secure democratic state.
- The transition from a corrupt, predatory state to a state of law and institutions that are accountable to its people.
- The transition from a clientelistic, regional-tribal quota state to a just, universal social welfare, comprehensive national development state.
- The transition from a narrow-based rentier economy to a multi-polar, regionally and sectorally diversified economy.
- The transition from a low-productivity economy to a knowledge-based economy with a highly qualified and productive young labor force.

Secondly, the proposed “revolutionary” economic program must also be “rationalized” by contemporary economics in terms of being guided by a well-rounded scientific method for formulating development policies and programs using mainstream economic models and robust databases to simulate and assess their potential effects and efficacy in achieving development goals. Therefore, this program must be a Sudanese recipe guided by science and the lessons from successful international experiences of relevance to the prevailing conditions

⁵⁰ Al Mahdi’s address at Gezira Aba, Sudan on 6 December 2019 (in Arabic): <https://www.alsadigalmahdi.com/%d8%ae%d8%b7%d8%a7%d8%a8-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d9%85%d8%a7%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b5%d8%a7%d8%af%d9%82-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d9%87%d8%af%d9%8a-%d8%b1%d8%a6%d9%8a%d8%b3-%d8%ad%d8%b2%d8%a8-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3/>

in the Sudanese economy. Furthermore, such a program must receive broad support from the social and political forces in the country and the cooperation of the regional and international development community.

Subscribing to the above overarching national project, it is imperative for all Sudanese stakeholders to recognize that the first order of business must be to stabilize the macro economy, restructure the budget, and eradicate the rampant corruption and “Tamkeen” of the Ingaz regime. This would entail liquidating the illegal capital accumulation of the parasitic Ingaz business and political class within a bona fide framework of the legal systems in force and consolidating the oversight of the Ministry of Finance over all public assets and resources in the state. Diligently and collectively reforming and completing this unfinished agenda in the short run would pave the way for implementing a longer-term economic revival and national renewal plan. This plan would aim to achieve rapid and sustainable growth within the framework of a tight program for a structural transformation of the economy that contributes to building peace and providing equal opportunities for breaking free from poverty and marginalization. An average annual growth during the first seven years of the December revolution at a rate of 10 percent⁵¹ would double the GDP; broad-based growth at this rate should also reduce poverty by about 70 percent and achieve good progress on other UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030; and there should be deep structural transformations to modernize the Sudanese economy based on young, highly productive labor with sectoral and geographic growth poles.

VII.3 Engineering the national project

The success of the proposed ambitious national project would hinge on the ability of the people of Sudan to rehabilitate the lavish social capital of the early days of their glorious revolution and pivot to a new transformative, win-win social equilibrium. To achieve this, the people of Sudan must agree, within the framework of meaningful and transparent societal dialogue, on a comprehensive social contract that defines the concept of economic legitimacy. The social contract would, in turn, provide “commitment technology” for easing and coordinating the potentially divergent politics and political economy considerations associated with the inherently conflictive interests in the diverse, even polarized, Sudanese society.

The start has to be an effective exchange of ideas. This defines a political marketplace in which people express their national aspirations on the demand side and elites respond with ideas and programs on the supply side (Diwan, 2022). In this context, the people of Sudan’s demand for a better life in a secure, well-functioning society would illicit a supply of ideas about how best to achieve their aspirations. The interaction between supply and demand in this political-economic marketplace determines the “social equilibrium.” The quality and popular legitimacy of the social contract determines the type of social equilibrium that would ensue. Therefore, a

⁵¹ Such growth rates are common for well-managed economies coming out of conflicts. The rule of 70 is a growth mathematical formula, which suggests that the number of years needed for doubling the size of the economy is equal to 70 divided by the average growth rate.

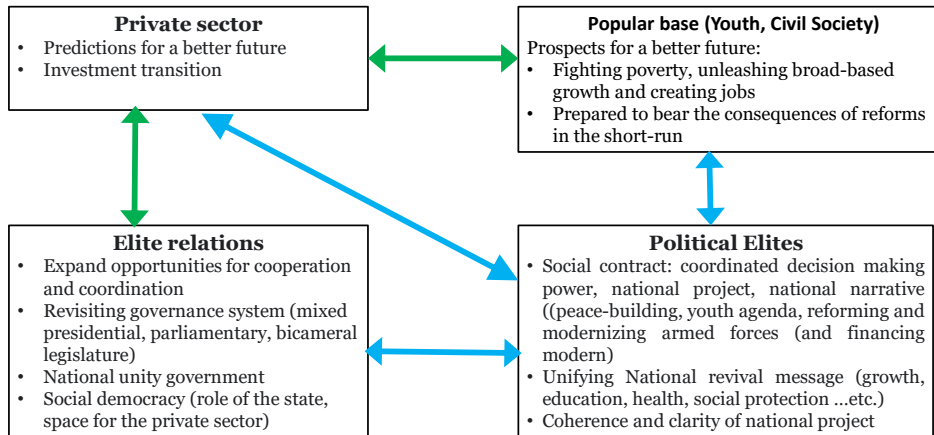
cooperative social equilibrium that inculcates trust and cooperation in a society and, therefore, promotes stable democracy, strong institutions, and transformative development requires a broad-based, well-thought-out social contract.

An important instrument for promoting the social contract is a compelling, unifying “national narrative.” The literature suggests that national narratives are more effective when they are “culturally specific” and “credible” (Collier, 2019). In this context, the lessons from other country experiences could be helpful not for trying to clone them, but for understanding the processes behind the transformation they were able to achieve. Regardless of the differences in political ideology, the processes behind the phenomenal economic transformation of China are very important to consider and learn from. As explained by Professor Paul Collier, China’s “scaffolding” for achieving its transformation had four building blocks (Collier, 2019, p. 6-7):

“The first was an overarching narrative spread around the population, namely to rebuild a prestigious, proud China. The second was a political leadership that encouraged intensive, rapid social learning to understand what would work within the local context. The third was to evaluate the performance of those who held positions of authority and hold them to account for success and failure. The fourth was decentralization, used to foster yardstick competition across jurisdictions, further encouraging experimentation on a local scale.”

Subscribing to the above analysis, Figure 15 presents the key components of a proposed social contract premised on meeting the aspirations of the Sudanese society (youth, civil society...etc.) by the political elites, who would commit to a social contract aimed at fulfilling the public’s demand for a better life. Success hinges on elite cooperation in implementing the social contract, providing space for the private sector to contribute to investment transition, and, very importantly, developing an inspiring forward-looking national narrative to inculcate trust and tolerance for reforms by society. As shown in the figure, the transformative project is a social learning experiment of interactive, cross-fertilizing engagement among the key actors: the society and political and economic elites.

Figure 15. How major transformations can lead to building a political settlement for an economic revival project in Sudan



Source: Adapted from Diwan (2022).

Finally, launching the national project along the above proposal requires a national “arbitrator” accepted by most parties of the youth, political movement, and civil society, in addition to the military establishment and the armed resistance movements. As discussed above, insights from the narrow corridor framework and Sudan’s own experiences suggest that the absence of such an arbitrator in light of the fragmentation and crises that engulfed post-revolutions in Sudan, especially the ongoing December revolution, was one of the main reasons for the totalitarian backlash that pulled the country out of that narrow corridor leading to democracy and sustainable development. Unfortunately, Sudan does not have a credible institutional arbitrator with a strong record of independence, but it has a distinguished group of elder statesmen, stateswomen, independent professionals, and tribal and community leaders, including the owners of the national Return to the Platform of Establishing the Glorious December Revolution initiative, which comprises patriotic figures worthy of playing this role. Now is the time for this honorable group to reintroduce a more nuanced and updated version of their initiative, echoing the message of hope and inspiration with which they concluded their memorandum:

“It is a historic opportunity to return to unity and the founding point to return to the revolution’s glory, and to return to the people their hope and confidence in their political and societal components and revive their aspirations for a tomorrow worthy of the homeland and commensurate with the sacrifices that were made and the blood that was shed in the glorious December revolution.”

VIII. Conclusions

The Sudanese post-independence political and economic development history is dominated by a syndrome of fragile, short-lived democracies, military coups leading to long-reigning autocracies, and massive popular uprisings weakening and eventually deposing the authoritarian regimes and paving the way for free elections and yet another fragile democracy

ripe for a new coup, and so on. So far, the country experienced three long-reigning, dysfunctional, autocratic military regimes deposed by three popular uprisings (in 1964, 1986, and 2018-present). The first two led to short-lived democracies, while, as before, the demise of the last autocratic regime led to the formation of a transitional government entrusted with the task of preparing the country for democratic elections in 2023. As discussed, the current transition has been derailed by a “creeping coup” that eventually took the fateful stage of deposing the constitutionally established transitional government in October 2021. However, the coup has drawn vigorous opposition from the “former” civilian partners of the military and, even more importantly, massive street protests by the youth. Moreover, the international development community immediately froze multilateral and bilateral support to Sudan, including halting debt relief and IDA grants. This unfortunate predicament of the country’s national project came to be characterized in the popular Sudanese literature as the Sudan Syndrome.

Structural factors undoubtedly constitute the underlying causes behind the making of the Sudan Syndrome. Social polarization produced major challenges to the founding fathers of the country’s independence, who failed to recognize the critical importance of fulfilling the Federal Pledge as a means for resolving the Southern civil war. In a candid admission of the leaders of independence and the leadership that succeeded them, himself included, Al Mahdi acknowledged that the Northern Sudanese elites made a fatal mistake by thinking that the Arabization and Islamization project would help unify the country. However, he distinguished between the voluntary approach under the short-lived Sudanese democratic governments and that of the long-reigning military regimes, especially under Ingaz. The implicit assimilation project had undoubtedly fanned the flames of the civil war in Sudan. Moreover, political polarization within the Northern Sudanese elites opened the floodgates for coups and long-reigning military rule. In turn, the unconstitutional change of government through coups ended up short-circuiting democratic consolidation toward developmental, programmatic multi-party politics. Short-lived, fragile democracies were unable to build peace, while authoritarian regimes were not capable of sustaining it. In addition, due to the high political polarization and limited reign in power, the Sudanese democratic governments could not stabilize the massive macroeconomic distortions inherited from military regimes, nor could they achieve meaningful national renewal and economic development to address the root causes of conflicts and national malaise that best the country since its dependence more than 60 years ago.

However, we argue in this paper that the structural factors associated with the overall social and political fractionalization as well as the stark polarization between the North and South do not provide a sufficiently compelling framework for explaining the Sudan Syndrome. While such structural factors help highlight the seriousness of the challenges at hand, there is a need for an analytical framework explaining the key phenomenon behind the syndrome: why has the Sudanese society been strong enough to resist and eventually topple authoritarian regimes (i.e., enter the corridor), but has so far failed to remain in it and make progress toward the shackled state?

We argue that the AR framework provides an intuitive and coherent analytical approach to explaining the Sudan Syndrome, including, at least partially, accounting for the above fundamental question associated with the syndrome. As described by AR, the entry into the narrow corridor is rather messy and fraught with struggles between the conflicting interests of the contesting groups (within society, within elites, and between society and elites). Only a few of such transitions are able to remain within the corridor and move upward, where both society and the state gain strength in a positive sum game. The failure to remain in and make progress in the corridor has almost always been associated with three major factors: massive polarization within the society, lack of credible institutions as an arbiter for resolving conflicts, and major economic/political crises. All of these factors, among others, are present in the first two political transitions, which provides important lessons for what needs to be done for the survival of the current transition. The third transition might very well travel along the same path leading to authoritarian reconsolidation, unless, somehow, a broad democracy and freedom coalition emerges, a credible arbiter is found, and the current economic crisis is resolved in good time.

Against the backdrop that post-25 October coup Sudan is already outside the corridor, we ask three fundamental questions. How might the country re-enter the AR corridor? How can the country broaden the corridor, stay in it, and eventually move upward toward the Shackled Leviathan? Finally, how can the country engineer such a hefty national project.?

(i) How to re-enter the corridor

We should fully appreciate the reality that, compared to the latter phase of the Ingaz regime as well as the two previous uprisings in 1964 and 1985, rebalancing the balance of power in order to re-enter the corridor will be far more challenging under the current conditions. Nonetheless, we consider five interrelated agendas:

1. The democracy coalition should be rebuilt around the recently launched interim constitution by the Sudanese Lawyers Association, which was widely debated by civilian democratic forces, including youth resistance committees, political parties, and professional associations.
2. Since the youth factor is an epitome of a deep demographic, social, and political phenomenon that is here to stay, other actors in the Sudanese scene should strive to seek common ground with the youth movement on the strategic goals of the December revolution as well as initiate deliberative, respectful and cross-fertilizing engagement with them to achieve a much-needed breakthrough in critical tactical compromises.
3. The national call to the SAF and other security and law enforcement agencies should be persuasive and respectful, but sufficiently forthright about the need to end the politicization of unformed forces and their domination of the political and financial markets in the country. In this context, the role of the military during the transition should be in the form of a “functional participation,” not a “constitutional partnership,” as had been the case under the defunct Constitutional Declaration.
4. The national narrative toward the signatories of the Juba Agreement and other armed resistance movements should also be equally respectful but should call upon them to

appreciate the need for a critical compromise, considering the Juba Agreement as a step in a peacebuilding process that must be augmented and integrated into a robust National Peace Conference.

5. Reforming the current federal system of government should be one of the top national agendas, which would also avail an opportunity for the largely urban-based democratic forces to engage the traditional Sudanese communities in a way that gives them space in the national agenda for restoring the constitutional process. In this context, a return to the historical regions in lieu of the current state system should be a critical discussion for bonding the social and political capital between the “old” and “new” Sudan(s).

(ii) How to broaden the corridor and stay in it

Building upon the initiative to broaden and strengthen the democratic coalition to facilitate re-entry into the corridor, the national project should continue the process of honing up a unifying, well-thought social contract for broadening the corridor, allowing the “positive sum” elite-society contest to move forward within the corridor toward a stable and peaceful democratic order. The proposed social contract would cover both the political and economic agenda of the national project.

The politics agenda of the social contract entails revisiting the dysfunctional Westminsterian democracy in the Sudanese context and possibly considering a mixed presidential-parliamentary system with bicameral legislature, which should be better suited for imparting stability and the appropriate checks and balances to a political landscape plagued with divisive polarization, such as Sudan. However, even if the alternative political system is adopted, it would likely not be enough to deliver the desired stability for future elected governments, especially the hoped-for fourth democracy. One way to further shore up the effectiveness and stability of such a government is to ensure that most political actors have a stake in the system. This might be achieved by considering forming a government of national unity, following an open and free election.

The economic agenda of the social contract should be inspired by the iconic slogan of the December revolution of freedom, peace, and justice. Achieving these legitimate but challenging aspirations requires that Sudanese political elites not justify their claim to power solely on “revolutionary” or “electoral” political legitimacy; they should also be held accountable for earning economic legitimacy. Following a short-term program for stabilizing the economy and weeding out the corrupt Tamkeen legacy of the Ingaz regime, the economic program should be transformative, forward-looking, and inspiring. We argue that a well-managed post-conflict Sudanese economy should be able to deliver a more than ten percent annual growth rate over the first seven to ten years, leading to the doubling of the country’s current GDP. Such growth would reduce poverty by more than 70 percent and allow the country to make good progress on other UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. However, achieving and sustaining such growth must be part of a deep structural transformation plan for

modernizing the economy based on young, highly productive labor with sectoral and geographic growth poles.

(iii) How to engineer the national project

This hinges on the capacity of the Sudanese society to develop and open a political marketplace of ideas to nurture a meaningful and transparent societal dialogue, leading to a viable social contract to underpin the national project. An important instrument for promoting the social contract is a compelling, unifying, culturally specific, and credible national narrative. Drawing from the Sudanese economic and political context, we discussed the building blocks of a social contract, accounting for an economic and political agenda for promoting political settlement and national renewal. We stress that the successful execution of the social contract must be a living process of social learning and interactive, cross-fertilizing engagement among the key actors: the society and the political and economic elites.

Finally, launching the national project along the above proposal requires a national arbitrator largely accepted by the youth, political movements, and civil society, in addition to the military establishment and the armed resistance movements. Unfortunately, Sudan currently lacks a credible institutional arbitrator with a strong record of independence. Nonetheless, Sudan is endowed with a distinguished group of elder statesmen, stateswomen, independent professionals, and tribal and community leaders who could act as arbiters, helping the country break free from the current low-trap impasse.

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Annex: Destabilizing Events in Democracies and Resistance to Autocracies

Table A.1. Events that affected the effectiveness of the first transitional government (1954-55)

Event	Date
Formation of the first transitional government (Ismail Al-Azhari as PM).	Jan. 1954
Clash between Ansar and the police in which 34 people were killed.	Mar. 1954
Cabinet reshuffle to tighten siblings' party on power.*	May 1954
Cabinet meeting held without the presence of Mirghani Hamzah and Khalaf Allah Khaled (the Khatmiyya sect).	Dec.1954
Three Khatmiyya ministers dismissed for their explicit call for independence.	Dec.1954
Formation of the independence front.	Jan.1955
NUP supports independence.	Mar.1955
Approval of the evacuation of foreign forces from Sudan law.	Au.1955
Withdrawal of confidence from Al-Azhari's government.	Nov.1955
Meeting of the two masters/lords to unite against Al-Azhari's government and call for a national government.**	Dec.1955
Declaration of independence of Sudan from within the parliament.	Dec.1955

Source: Taha (2020).

Notes: *: refers to the "Republican Brothers"(الإخوان الجمهوريين), later also came to be know the Republican Movement (الحركة الجمهورية). **: Abdelrhman Elmahadi, the leader of the Insar and Ali El-Migani, the leader of the Khatmiya, the two largest Islamic Sufi religious groups in Sudan that dominated Sudan's political scene since the country's independence.

Table A.2. Events associated with the successive governments during 1956-58

Events	Date
Three ministers resign from the government (after submitting a memorandum to form a national government).	Jan.1956
The “Anbar Gouda” incident, where 195 farmers were killed in the village of Gouda in the southern part of the White Nile State.	Feb.1956
Formation of the PDP (inclusion of the Republican Independence Party, Mirghani Hamza).	June 1956
Withdrawal of confidence from the Al-Azhari government and submitting his resignation.	Jul.1956
Abdullah Khalil chosen as PM.	Jul.1956
Announcing the government of Abdullah Khalil without the participation of the NUP.	Jul.1956
The 1958 elections.	Feb. 1958
Formation of a new government led by Abdullah Khalil (a coalition between the PDP and the UP).	Mar.1958
Demonstrations against the US aid law in El-Obeid led by Hajj Al-Taher and Hassan Zarrouk (Communist Party).	May 1958
Demonstration in Omdurman against the aid law in front of Ismail Al-Azhari's house (organized by supporters of the NUP).	May 1958
Ansar demonstration near the dome of Imam Al Mahdi in support of the American aid law.	May1958
US aid law permanently approved by the parliament.	Jul. 1958
Formation of a national front hostile to the government of the two masters/lords* (with the participation of the NUP, the Anti-Colonial Front, and other parties).	Oct.1958
Ali Abdel Rahman (a PDP leader) calls for a national government.	Jul. 1958
Consultations between the UP and the NUP to form a new coalition government without the PM’s participation (sponsored by Al Sadiq Al Mahdi).	Aug. 1958
Reports indicate the possibility of an alliance between the PDP and the NUP against the government of Abdullah Khalil.	Oct.1958
Popular resistance to the US aid law.	Oct.1958
The first military coup of November 1958	

Source: Own preparation based on Taha (2020).

Notes: *: Abdelrhman Elmahadi, the leader of the Insar and Ali El-Migani, the leader of the Khatmiya, the two largest Islamic Sufi religious groups in Sudan that dominated Sudan's political scene since the country's independence.

Table A.3. Events associated with Aboud's rule (the first military coup)

Events	Date
Recognition of all agreements concluded since 1956, including the US aid law.	Nov.1958
Formation of the first government for the New Testament.	Nov.1958
Coup attempt by Abd al-Rahim Shanan and Muhi al-Din Ahmad Abd Allah. Deportation of Ahmed Abdel-Wahab (VP and member of the Coup Council) due to doubts about his loyalty to the UP.	Mar.1959
Another failed coup attempt by the same group.	Mar.1959
Another failed coup attempt in cooperation between Al-Rashid Al-Taher Bakr (the observer general of the Muslim Brotherhood) and some army officers.	May 1959
Recognition of all agreements concluded since 1956, including US aid law.	Nov. 1959

Source: Own preparation based on Taha (2020).

Table A.4. The road to October 1964

Events	Date
Support to the coup by most parties.	Nov. 1958
Issuance of the Sudan Defense Force Law.	Nov. 1958
Dissolution of all unions.	Nov. 1959
Trial of Al-Shafi' Ahmed Al-Sheikh.	Dec. 1958
Closing of the Sudan Trade Union newspaper.	Dec. 1958
First labor strike.	Nov. 1959
New union law.	1960
Railway workers strike, pro-worker demonstrations.	Jun. 1961
Dissolution of Railroad Trade Union.	Jun. 1961
Al Sadiq Al Mahdi sends a memorandum to the army asking them to return to the dwellings.	Jun. 1961
Memorandum of the University of Khartoum Union for the return of the army to its dwellings.	Oct. 1959
University of Khartoum students strike in solidarity with railway workers.	Dec. 1959
Memorandum of the parties calling for the return of the army to its dwelling	Nov. 1959
Memorandum of the Union of the University of Khartoum and the Union of Students of the Technical Institute for the return of the army to its dwellings.	Nov.1960
Negotiations between Al Sadiq and the regime failed, and the residency of Al Sadiq and Ahmed Al Mahdi was determined.	Nov.1961
A note by the parties condemning the torture of detainees.	Jan.1961
Lawyers' Association raises a memorandum against the torture of political detainees.	May 1961
Political party leaders arrested and sent to Juba.	Jul. 1961
Demonstrations against the captivity of political leaders.	Jun. 1961
Mawlid massacre (some supporters were killed by the police).	Jul. 1961
Death of Al Sadiq and the partition of the opposition parties.	Jul. 1961
Release of political leaders.	Aug. 1961
Farmers' strike.	Oct.1961
Suspension of the KUSU Executive Committee by the Chancellor of the University for a full academic year.	Feb. 1962
Symposium on the problem of South Sudan at the University of Khartoum.	Dec. 1963
Arrest of the KUSU Executive Committee.	Dec. 1963
Martyrdom of a University of Khartoum student (Ahmed Taha Al-Qurashi) at the hands of the police after they intervened to break up a symposium at the University of Khartoum by force.	10 Dec. 1964

Table A.4. The road to October 1964 (contd.)

A large number of Khartoum University professors submit their resignations, and the funeral of the martyr Al-Qurashi turns into a popular demonstration.	14 Oct. 1964
Communist Party calls for escalation to overthrow military rule.	21 Oct. 1964

Call for a general strike by the Central Trade Union Office	22 Oct. 1964
Communist Party calls for a rally around the National Front that announced the political strike.	22 Oct. 1964
Lawyers' strike, judges dismissed and arrested.	24 Oct. 1964
VP forms military courts for members of the National Front.	25 Oct. 1964
First meeting of the National Front at the University of Khartoum's Professors' Club.	24 Oct. 1964
Aboud dissolves the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the Council of Ministers.	25 Oct. 1964
Agreement on the national accord in the house of Imam Al Mahdi.	25 Oct. 1964
Demonstrations across the country against the military rule.	26 Oct. 1964
The appointment of Sir Al-Khatim El-Khalifa as PM.	27 Oct. 1964
Dismissal and arrest of junior officers supporting the revolution.	29 Oct. 1964
Communist Party refuses to arrest pro-revolutionary officers.	30 Oct. 1964
Radio statement via the National Front to protect the revolution from a possible military coup.	7 Nov. 1964
Protests continue until mid-November.	9 Nov. 1964
Aboud's resignation.	9 Nov. 1964
Issuance of the Sudan Defense Force Law.	15 Nov. 1964

Source: Own preparation based on Taha (2020).

Table A.5. Events that occurred during the period of the second democratic rule (1965-69)

Events	Date
Appointment of Mohamed Ahmed Al Mahjoub as PM.	Jun. 1965
Crisis arises in Parliament due to the Sudanese delegation's leadership of the African Summit in Accra, Ghana.	Oct.1965
Parliamentary Committee and Executive Committee of the Federal National Party decide to accept the coalition again.	Nov.1965
Proposal to withdraw confidence from the Mahjoub government for its failure to achieve the goals of the revolution.	Jul.1966
New PM elected (Al Sadiq Al Mahdi).	Jul. 1966
Abdul Majid Abu Hassaboa appointed as Minister of Trade by the President of the Sovereignty Council without the approval of the PM.	Dec.1966
Failed coup attempt led by Khaled Ahmed Hussein Othman.	Dec.1966
Fall of the government of Al Sadiq Al Mahdi in Parliament.	May 1967
Formation of a national government led by Mahjoub as PM.	May 1967
Resignation of 91 members of the Constituent Assembly.	Feb. 1968
Dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by the Sovereignty Council.	Feb. 1968
New coalition government.	May 1968
Workers' strike.	Aug.1968
Student demonstrations in the capital and the states.	Nov.1968
Veterinarians' crisis (collective resignations).	Dec. 1968
Central administration workers' crisis.	Dec. 1969
Al Jazeera staff crisis (mass resignations).	Jan. 1969
Undersecretaries' crisis (the ministries of finance, health, foreign affairs, and media) to promote the civil service agent to the same rank.	May 1969
The second military coup of May 1969	

Source: Own preparation based on Taha (2020).

Table A.6. The road to April 1985

Events	Date
Railway workers went out in a demonstration and in solidarity with the city of Atbara in protest of the deterioration of the economic situation.	7 Mar. 1985
Government announced the implementation of an economic reform program in agreement with the IMF.	25 Mar. 1985
Huge demonstrations in Khartoum initiated by students at Omdurman Islamic University.	26 Mar. 1985
Huge demonstrations in Khartoum and the attack on the headquarters of the Sudanese Socialist Union.	27 Mar. 1985
Gen. Neimeri left to the United States of America for treatment and news spread that the president withdrew 14 million Sudanese pounds to cover the trip.	27 Mar. 1985
Solidarity of the police officers' association with the uprising.	27 Mar. 1985
Strike of the union of Khartoum Hospital doctors.	28 Mar. 1985
Statement by the authorities criminalizing demonstrations, arresting protesters, and bringing them to immediate trials.	29 Mar. 1985
Extension of the strike of the union of Khartoum Hospital doctors.	30 Mar. 1985
Arrest of students and union leaders, including doctors and lawyers.	31 Mar. 1985
Agreement on a political strike by a number of trade unions until the fall of the regime.	1 Apr. 1985
Socialist Union organizes a parade to support the regime (with weak participation, which shows the lack of cohesion of the system).	2 Apr. 1985
VP and Director of the Security Apparatus Major Gen. Omar Mohamed Al-Tayeb fails to convince the armed forces to declare a state of emergency.	3 Apr. 1985
Opposition to the regime widens (more than 30 general unions join civil disobedience).	3 Apr. 1985
Demonstrations spread to popular neighborhoods in Khartoum.	3 Apr. 1985
Authorities' decision to reduce the prices of bread and some basic commodities.	3 Apr. 1985
Some of the President's assistants escape abroad (Press Secretary and Legal Adviser to the President).	3 Apr. 1985
Implementation of the political strike, the continuation of demonstrations, and the closing of Khartoum Airport.	4 Apr. 1985
Demonstrations spread in other cities (Atbara, Madani, and Port Sudan).	4 Apr. 1985
Al Sadiq Al Mahdi invites the army to intervene and put an end to the government and, the president's statement that he is still in his position.	5 Apr. 1985
A unified leadership for the uprising is formed from unions and parties, and a charter for the gathering of national forces to save the country is signed.	5 Apr. 1985
Army intervenes and deposes Neimeiri to stay in Cairo, where he arrived that day.	6 Apr. 1985

Source: An Arabic essay about Intifada.⁵²

⁵² <https://bit.ly/3mIYH00>

Table A.7. Political events during the third democratic period 1986-89

Events	Date
Coalition government.	May 1986
Formation of a new coalition.	Jun. 1987
DUP decides to withdraw from the government.	Aug. 1987
DUP and UP decide to continue the coalition.	Oct.1987
New coalition with the participation of the NIF.	May 1988
Agreement between DUP and SPLM (freezing Islamic Sharia laws and other provisions).	Nov.1988
DUP decides to withdraw from the government again.	Dec. 1988
Reshuffle from several parties in the government.	Feb.1989
Armed Forces memorandum.	Feb.1989
New government without the participation of the NIF.	Mar.1989
Inquiries by the armed forces to the government about its position on the political situation.	Mar. 1989
Program of parties and trade unions to form a new government and the government's resignation within 24 hours.	Mar. 1989
Constituent Assembly decides to stop deliberating and discussing the criminal law based on Islamic law.	Apr. 1989
June military coup	Jun. 1989

Source: Own preparation based on Taha (2020).

Table A.8. The most important events (1989-2021)

Date	Event
1989	The politics of empowerment, Islamist control over power and the economy, and the beginning of society's resistance.
1989	Security management of the economy.
1991	Economic collapse.
1992	Privatization.
1996	US sanctions and the beginning of the isolation of an international system.
1999	The split of the NIF.
1999	The beginning of a new era and the change of the system to a more pragmatic version.
1999	Production and exportation of oil and the beginning of the era of economic growth stimulated by oil.
2003	The outbreak of the Darfur war.
2005	The signing of the CPA and the sharing of power and wealth between the NCP and the SPLM.
2010	Elections held and al-Bashir wins.
2011	The failure of the unity project and the secession of South Sudan.
2012	The beginning of the economic crisis (after the separation).
2013	Popular uprising of 2013.
2015	Elections held and al-Bashir wins again.
2018	December revolution.
2019	al-Bashir's fall.
2019	Formation of the transitional government.
2021	Forces of the revolution dispersed and the October 25 coup d'état.