

ABSTRACT

REVISITING ELECTIONS IN AFRICA

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Any analysis of elections in Africa over recent periods has to be placed within the wider debate about democracy and its application in Africa. (Deegan 2003) Democracy may be a 'learned trade' over time, yet certain critical factors affect electoral efficacy and political reform. Over 200 elections have taken place in Africa between 1989 and 2008. The dynamics of these elections are important as democracy needs to develop at a local level, particularly in authoritarian or transitional states in which the general population often has very little interaction with national political processes.

Results have been mixed and, at times, contradictory. Whilst earlier elections in Kenya were hailed a success, this had evaporated by 2007/2008 when violence surrounded the presidential and parliamentary elections resulting in the deaths of nearly 1000 people. Equally, while South Africa has been praised for its transition to democratic rule it now has to consider where a new president will take the country and the extent to which meaningful change has taken place at grassroots level. The number of those in poverty rose from 1.9 million in 1996 to 4.2 million in 2005. (South African Institute of Race Relations 2007) Often, it can be extremely difficult to remedy the impact of a flawed election in countries divided by violence and religious or ethnic hatred, for example, Cote d'Ivoire in the early 2000s.

This paper, based in part on empirical evidence in Botswana, Nigeria and South Africa, takes a critical view of the trajectory of elections in Africa and examines the extent to which continental, regional and international agencies might improve these processes and enhance democratic practices.