

REVIEW

Compendium of Elections in Southern Africa, 1989-2009

D Kadima and S Booysen (eds)

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Under the codes of conduct agreed by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) certain political norms and standards should be observed and the following principles must lie at the heart of any electoral system: broad representation of diverse political interests and population groups, inclusiveness and the political participation of key actors, political accountability of parliamentarians to the voters, and a transparent and legitimate election process and outcome. Any analysis of elections in Africa in recent years must be placed within the wider debate about democracy and its application. Yet, prior to 2003 there were few 'codified sets of agreed-upon election principles' (p 4).

More than 200 elections took place on the African continent between 1989 and 2009 and 53 of those were in Southern Africa countries; some for the first time. The dynamics of those early elections were important, as democracy needed to develop at a local level, particularly in authoritarian or transitional states where the general population had little interaction with national political processes or leaders. Results were mixed, as demonstrated by this excellent, detailed study of 14 countries (the author of each chapter follows in brackets): Angola (Miguel de Brito), Botswana (Victor Shale), Democratic Republic of Congo (Denis Kadima and Dieudonné Tshiyoyo), Lesotho (Belinda Musanhu), Madagascar (Lucien Toulou), Malawi (Catherine Musuva), Mauritius (Roukaya Kasenally), Mozambique (Zefanias Matsimbe), Namibia (Lesley Blaauw and Sydney Letsholo), South Africa (Susan Booysen and Grant Masterson), Swaziland (Deane Stuart), Tanzania/Zanzibar (Grant Masterson), Zambia (Iloa Tip, James Gadin and Maureen Moloji) and Zimbabwe (Susan Booysen and Lucien Toulou).

The *Compendium of Elections in Southern Africa, 1989-2009* provides considerable material and insights into electoral processes and the ways in which they can be subverted. In the sorry tale of Zimbabwe, for example, the power-sharing arrangement is 'unlikely to end decades of electoral manipulation' unless it considers 'the prospect of a substantial constitutional revision and long-awaited electoral reforms' (p 656), while, in relation to Angola, concerns are expressed about the dominant party, the MPLA, and 'its access to resources and the government's machinery, and the predominant role of the pro-government state-owned media' (p 54).

The Electoral Institute of Southern Africa – now the Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa (EISA), publisher of the *Compendium*, has been, and still is, an especially important organisation within the region. Denis Kadima, EISA's executive director, rightly claims that the organisation's privileged position results from it 'having been there' over the years, conducting observer missions and grassroots examinations. But it does not merely analyse the conduct of elections, it takes a broader and necessary view of the wider political environment, namely: the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, the viability of political parties, the degree of institutionalisation of the party system, media freedom and freedom of expression, among other issues.

In their fascinating chapter on South Africa Booysen and Masterson examine in detail the impact of parliamentary floor crossing in 2005 and 2007 (a dubious and concerning procedure that took place under Thabo Mbeki's watch), revealing that the ANC increased its seats from the 279 it won in the 2004 elections to 293 in 2005. By 2007 this figure had increased to 297, giving it a massive '74.25 per cent of representation in the National Assembly' (p 443). The practice was finally outlawed in 2009.

The political party has often been seen as the weakest link in African democratisation, often lacking a constituency, political programme and financial transparency. Internal party democracy is often unknown and some opposition parties actually disband between elections. At times, dominant chiefdoms control the political sphere to such an extent that there are calls for the boycotting of elections. In Swaziland, for example, from 1998 onwards, trade unions, political parties and other elements within civil service called for such a boycott. Equally, the registration of voters can be problematic, with difficulties in obtaining national registration cards together with the strange presence of 'ghost voters' – those members of the electorate long since deceased.

Acceptance of the legitimate outcome of an election is critical in democratising states but on occasion political leaders and parties enter the electoral process with the expectation that they alone will win. Inevitably, the 'winner-takes-all' approach to elections excludes many and has given rise to calls for a greater emphasis to be placed on negotiation with other political groups / NGOs / stakeholders, as well as respect for and appropriate engagement with voters.

The *Compendium* acknowledges the difficulties and the many negative electoral occurrences, together with emerging international unease about the conduct of some elections in Africa, but makes the case that despite this 'there has usually been remarkable progress in the quality of elections in most Southern African countries' (p 8).

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