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Kenya and Zimbabwe: issues of democracy, electoral violence and civil participation

Mathebula, Duduzile

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ABSTRACT

Democracy can be a useful tool in Africa. It can open channels for foreign aid and ultimately development. Many African countries have struggled with the changes and expectations that democracy brings. They have opted for authoritarian regimes or one party state regime. Zimbabwe and Kenya represent some of these countries. Such countries have been unable to promote or perfectly place liberal democracy within their societies. The most salient issue in the democratization process of Africa has been the post colonial state. Transitions into democracy have not always gone well at all in fact many transitions remain stagnant.

This research investigates the problems surrounding the attainment of democracy in Africa, using the cases of Kenya and Zimbabwe. It seeks to understand the obstacles and challenges to the democratization processes in the two countries by focusing on the 2007/2008 contested elections as well as previous elections, and the attempts by external actors to deal with the results of the elections.

The citizens of Kenya and Zimbabwe have both been affected and impacted by the lack of democracy that has existed in each country. This research also investigates the role of citizen participation in the electoral process. For both countries to succeed in all regards there is a pressing need for regime change and institution building.

Keywords: democracy, elections, civil participation, electoral violence, Kenya, Zimbabwe