

Executive summary

This review looks at the progress of democratisation in Algeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda from the end of the Cold War until today. The survey is not comprehensive, but investigates the countries' commitment to the following principles of democracy: the fairness of electoral systems endorsed by the African Union (AU); independent electoral commissions; sound voter registration systems; multi-party politics; inclusive states; term limits for heads of state and government; and the independence of the judiciary.

The review identifies many shortcomings in the eight countries (more in some than in others) across all seven commitments studied. However, the study focuses on the process of *democratisation*, and not on the existence of fully-fledged democracies. Viewed from this perspective, the picture looks brighter. All eight countries are more democratic today than in the late 1980s.

There are important differences between the eight: While a few (Ghana, Senegal and, particularly, South Africa) can be relatively satisfied with their progress, others (Algeria, Ethiopia and Uganda) took great strides in the late 1980s or early 1990s, but their democratisation processes have stagnated some steps short of democracy. Nigeria only returned to civilian government in 1999 and serious flaws are still apparent in its democratic system. The developments since 2002 in Kenya, however, provide grounds for cautious optimism. The same can be said for Algeria after the 2004 elections, which, although far from perfect, were a great improvement from previous efforts. In all eight countries, democratic gains are recent phenomena and can thus easily be reversed.

There is a concern that some of the countries under review will be stuck with a system that dresses an essentially authoritarian or one-party system in the garbs of democracy. Despite this, the review does not give cause for Afro-pessimism; the trend since the early 1990s has mostly been

a positive one. For an even brighter future, it is essential that all key stakeholders – from politicians, military officers, and judges of the state apparatus to civil society organisations, activists and ordinary voters – pull together towards the common goals set out by the AU and agreed upon by all of Africa's 53 states.