

# Conclusion

A relatively clear picture has gradually been building over the course of this study. This is that there is a palpable difference between Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and South Africa, on the one hand, and Algeria, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Uganda, on the other. The latter group tends to fare worse on most of the indicators studied here. They also have in common the existence of powerful political actors who operate outside the norms and principles of democracy.

In Algeria and Nigeria, the role of the military remains central for understanding the political dynamics of the country, although in Nigeria they have receded more into the background and there are some positive signs that the same may be happening in Algeria. However, considering the long history of military coups in Africa's biggest country, the potential interference of the military if election results go against their preferred candidate (despite rigging and manipulations) still overshadows Nigeria's democratisation process. There are nevertheless many redeeming features of Nigeria's political system such as the relatively independent judiciary and the many improvements that have taken place since the return of civilian rule in 1999. In Algeria, the process of democratisation has received many setbacks over the last 15 years, but has been given a long-needed boost by the conduct of the 2004 presidential election.

In Ethiopia and Uganda, military coups are perhaps less of an issue but both countries have a political leadership with weak democratic credentials and credibility. There are few signs that the existing political regimes in these two countries would give up power voluntarily to an opposition party, regardless of its popular support or election victories. This seems particularly clear in Ethiopia, where power transfers (except when occurring due to the natural death of the leader) have never taken place peacefully. A system of bureaucratic hindrances combined with intimidation and harassment has ensured that opposition parties are kept in check. In Uganda, the government's commitment to democracy is more

ambivalent, and many positive developments have taken place over the last ten to fifteen years, including the adoption of a new constitution in 1995. However, as Paul Omach in his country report writes, Uganda is at a crossroads, and the next few years will show whether it goes further down the path of democracy or lapses back into one-party, one-person, authoritarian rule. Whether President Yoweri Museveni decides to run for an unconstitutional third term or not will be a key indicator of which path Uganda will choose.

Generally, while there has been a process of democratisation in all four countries since the end of the Cold War, this process is not likely to progress further until all politically powerful actors (whether on-stage or in the wings) within Algeria, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Uganda begin to believe in the desirability of fully-fledged democracy for their countries.

The other group of four countries, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and South Africa, have come further in their democratisation. South Africa is a fully-fledged democracy, with the caveat that the sitting government has not yet been faced with a real challenge to its power. The test that remains for South Africa is whether, when some time in the (perhaps distant) future it loses an election, the ANC government will step down gracefully.

All four of the “group of hopefuls” have embarked on their democratisation push very recently. Apart from South Africa, where the great shift took place in 1994, the major gains have taken place in the last two to four years, when power was handed over to the opposition by long-serving leaders who had run their countries for decades. Considering this recent history, the prospects for democratic change and consolidation on the African continent are indeed hopeful even in countries with seemingly entrenched regimes. However, recent gains can easily be lost again. It will take a concerted and sustained effort from government and opposition parties, media and civil society groups, judges and lawyers, and not least, the military, for democracy to grow deep and strong roots in all eight countries that have been subject to this review.

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