

AFRICAN ELECTIONS UPDATE



Analyst: Shirley de Villiers
Email: info@leriba.com

Prospects for upcoming elections in Nigeria, Tanzania, Guinea and Sudan

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Fourteen elections are slated for sub-Saharan African states in 2015. In this client note we discuss four key ones: Nigeria, Sudan, Guinea and Tanzania. Nigeria, Guinea and Tanzania are set for competitive elections, while Sudan's will be a rubber stamp of Omar al-Bashir's 25-year hold on power.

Ballots have already been cast in Zambia and Lesotho, and voters will also be going to the polls in Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Niger and Togo.

Elections fall in March and April in oil-producing Nigeria and Sudan, and in October in mineral-rich Tanzania and Guinea.

Nigeria's ruling party has been shaken up by the rise of the All Progressives Congress. For the first time since the country's return to democracy in 1999, the ruling People's Democratic Party has a serious competitor in the presidential race. Similarly, in Tanzania and Guinea, opposition parties are likely to offer a more robust challenge to long-serving ruling parties.

Nigeria

Nigeria's presidential election is set to be the closest-run race in the country's history. The poll pits incumbent Goodluck Jonathan against All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate Muhammadu Buhari.

This is the first time since the restoration of democratic rule in 1999 that power may be wrested from Jonathan's People's Democratic Party (PDP): a recent Afrobarometer survey put Jonathan and Buhari's popular support at 42% each.

Nigeria snapshot

Date: 28 March 2015

Top contenders: Goodluck Jonathan (PDP), Muhammadu Buhari (APC)

Likely outcome: Too close to call

Buhari's growing support

In the 2011 elections, Buhari ran under the banner of the Congress for Progressive Change, garnering 32% of the vote. However, in 2013 the party merged with the Action Congress of Nigeria, All-Nigeria People's Party and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance to form the APC. Together, these parties attained roughly 40% of the vote in the 2011 presidential election against Jonathan's 59%. By uniting behind a single candidate, the parties have ensured a broader spread of support for Buhari: his traditionally northern backing – 97% of his support in the 2011 poll came from the North – now includes southern constituencies where the other parties that comprise the APC hold greater sway.

Buhari's challenge – and the APC campaign focus on insecurity and corruption – comes at a time when Jonathan is facing dwindling support due to his sluggish response to the Boko Haram crisis in the north-east of the country, high unemployment figures and government corruption scandals. His own election campaign is focused on a “transformation agenda” that aims to boost employment and diversify the economy.

Boko Haram and election challenges

The election has been beset by challenges, and was pushed back from its original 14 February date due to security concerns. The Boko Haram insurgency has displaced more than 1-million people, and the group had, by early this year, laid claim to swathes of the north-east of the country.

Multinational forces have since gained ground against the Islamist movement, launching ground and air offensives and retaking territory. However, the group has vowed to derail the elections, and recently proved its capacity to strike is relatively unhindered, claiming upward of 50 lives in five bomb attacks in the Borno state capital of Maiduguri.

Regional tensions exacerbated

The election has heightened tensions between North and South, where religious and regional identities overlap. Northerners feel that Jonathan violated a PDP gentleman's agreement to rotate the presidency between North and South every eight years after he ran for office in 2011 (he had assumed the presidency in 2010 after northerner Musa Yar'Adua died halfway through his first term in office). With a Southerner in office, they fear further socio-economic marginalisation of the region. Southerners, for their part, fear a return to Northern dominance of the political landscape.

With the bulk of Buhari's support coming from the North of the country, any obstruction to, or cancellation of the poll as a result of Boko Haram activity could call the credibility of the result into question and further foment conflict in the North, where 800 were killed in post-election violence in 2011. However, a Buhari win could precipitate violence in Jonathan's Niger Delta stronghold, where militants have threatened violence should he lose power.

A possible run-off election

A run-off election is a possible outcome: according to the constitution, a presidential candidate needs to win at least 50% of the national vote, and 25% of the vote in at least two-thirds of the country's states. With the North comprising two-thirds of the country, it is possible that neither candidate will secure the necessary margins for an outright victory.

Any further postponement of the election could push the poll into unconstitutional territory: elections need to be held at least 30 days before the incumbent government leaves office, in this case on May 29. A delay from the 28 March date would leave little room to remain within the constitutional margin.

Sudan

Sudanese voters will turn out on 13 April to cast their ballots in the second multiparty parliamentary and presidential elections since 2010. But with the main opposition parties boycotting both elections, it is highly unlikely that the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) will be unseated. And with 14 presidential hopefuls commanding little in the way of popular support, incumbent president Omar al-Bashir is set to extend his 25-year hold on power.

Sudan snapshot

Date: 13 April 2015

Top contenders: Omar al-Bashir (NCP)

Likely outcome: Bashir and the NCP

Opposition boycott

Opposition groups have pulled out of the polls as well as a Bashir-led national dialogue process in protest at the centralisation of power in the NCP. It is also claimed that the dialogue process is merely a front to bring rapprochement among the country's Muslim groups.

The political opposition, under the umbrella of the National Consensus Forces, rebel movements and civil society organisations signed the Sudan Call in December last year. The declaration calls for an interim government to oversee a transitional phase that would open political space in the country and culminate in democratic elections.

Consolidation of presidential power

Bashir, however, seems intent on shutting down avenues for political opposition. The regime has detained signatories to the Sudan Call, clamped down on the press and, last year, opened fire on a protest against austerity measures.

Bashir has consolidated power further in the presidential office, giving the executive authority to appoint state governors instead of leaving the positions open to popular election. While pledging to bring peace to war-torn Darfur as part of his election campaign, he has stepped up offensives against rebels in the country.

The effect of civil war

The government is embroiled in conflict on two fronts: against rebels in Darfur and against the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) in the southern states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Both conflicts revolve around issues of political access, socio-economic marginalisation and equitable access to the country's oil wealth.

The government has yet to meet the various rebel groups together in an inclusive negotiation process, despite the Darfuri and southern rebels banding together under the banner of the Sudan Revolutionary Front.

Separate negotiations with Darfuri and southern rebels fell apart late last year. Within days, the government stepped up its campaign against the rebels – particularly in the oil-producing region of South Kordofan – vowing to crush the SPLM-N in the second phase of operation “Decisive Summer”.

With rebel groups excluded from the political process unless they accede to a peace deal, and a non-existent electoral opposition, the dominance of the NCP will go unchallenged, and violence in the state's peripheries is set to continue.

GUINEA

After decades of dictatorial rule, Africa's top bauxilite producer held its first presidential election in 2010. On 11 October voters will cast their ballots in the second democratic presidential election in Guinea's history.

Political tensions

In a country in which elections are often delayed – the 2013 parliamentary poll was postponed for three years – opposition leaders called foul at suggestions the election be pushed back from an anticipated mid-year poll as a result of the

Guinea snapshot

Date: 11 October 2015

Top contenders: Alpha Condé (RPG), Cellou Diallo (UFDG), Sidya Touré (UFR)

Likely outcome: Close, but likely Condé

Ebola epidemic. They have accused the government of trying to hold onto power in a bid to buy time to rig the elections.

Such tensions between opposition and the ruling party are indicative of political relations in the country. Each election has been beset by violence, with the opposition claiming electoral fraud.

The disputed 2013 parliamentary poll saw the Rally for the People of Guinea (RPG) Rainbow take 46% of the 114 legislative seats – 53% with alliance partners included – while the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) took 32%. The Union of the Republican Forces (URF) won 10% and the Party of Hope for National Development (PEDN) won 3%.

Mediation efforts and a generally good showing led the opposition to accept the results, but with power consolidated in the presidential office, it is unlikely that opposition parties will accept a contested outcome this year, according to the conflict-tracking think-tank, International Crisis Group (ICG).

Opposition alliance could offer stiff competition

In the 2010 presidential elections current incumbent Alpha Condé received just 18% of the vote against rival Celou Diallo of the UFDG's 43%. In run-off elections, with allied political parties supporting one or the other candidate and mobilising ethnic support – Condé is largely supported by the Malinké group, while Diallo draws support from the Fulani, the other major ethnic group in the country – Condé won 53% of the final vote against Diallo's 47%. The URF's Sidya Touré won 13% of the first-round votes and PEDN's Lansana Kouyaté won 7%.

Given the spread of seats in parliament and the previous presidential poll results, a close-run election is likely if the major opposition parties band together, as they did for the parliamentary elections. Together, the UFDG, URC and PEDN attained 64% of the votes cast for the presidency in the first-round vote in 2010; and they hold 45% of parliament. But this is less likely in this year's poll, where a single office is up for grabs, according to the ICG. More probable is the backing of a single candidate in the eventuality of a run-off vote.

Though no candidate has been officially put forward for the 2015 election, top contenders include Condé, opposition leader Diallo, and the URF's Touré. Condé, who will run for his second and final term, is thought to be the favourite.

The ruling party's advantage

The RPG has the advantage going into the polls. The neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission is questionable, and the party holds the power of incumbency and has access to state resources that could be used for electioneering purposes and to buy support.

Tensions are rising ahead of the election. Protests have taken place in opposition strongholds over civil servant appointments, there are disputes between government and opposition over electoral reform, and the opposition claims that the government will hinder international observation of the polls. UFDG figure Amadou Oury Diallo was murdered in September in what was claimed to be a politically motivated attack. Likely mobilisation of ethnic groups come election time will also reinforce social cleavages. Whatever the final result, post-election violence is an almost-certain outcome.

TANZANIA

Tanzania's ruling Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) is likely to face a robust challenge in the country's fifth presidential and parliamentary elections since the introduction of multiparty politics in 1992. The party has been in power since 1977, when independence leader Julius Nyerere's Tanganyika African National Union merged with the Zanzibari Afro-Shirazi Party.

Opposition parties made a decent showing in the 2010 elections and are likely to increase their support in the October poll, though are unlikely to topple the CCM.

Tanzania snapshot

Date: October (Still to be finalised)

Possible contenders: Edward Lowassa or Mizengo Pinda (CCM), Wilbrod Slaa or Freeman Mbowe (Chadema), Ibrahim Lipumba (CUF) (parties have yet to announce official contenders)

Likely outcome: CCM candidate (likely Lowassa)

The opposition

The conservative Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendelo (Chadema) fared relatively poorly in the 2005 elections, gaining just 8% of the vote in the parliamentary poll and 6% of the presidential vote. However, it increased its margins substantially in the 2010 election, winning 24% of the parliamentary vote to the CCM's 60%; 27% of the presidential vote went to Chadema candidate Wilbrod Slaa against incumbent Jakaya Kikwete's 63%.

The only other opposition party of consequence, the Civic United Front (CUF) won 12% and 14% of the parliamentary vote in 2005 and 2010, and 14% and 11% of the presidential vote in the same years.

Chadema, the CUF, the NCCR-Mageuzi and the National League for Democracy have teamed up for the elections under the banner of the Ukawa Alliance. They plan to align their policies and have committed to fielding single candidates in both elections in an attempt to break the CCM's hold on power. The fractious nature of opposition politics and party infighting may obstruct their attempts to unite behind a single presidential candidate, but with a combined 38% of the presidential vote in 2010, they could offer the CCM nominee competition if they are able to hold their alliance together.

Though the opposition candidate is only likely to be announced in May, early contenders include Chadema secretary-general Wilbrod Slaa, CUF leader Ibrahim Lipumba and Chadema leader Freeman Mbowe.

The ruling party

With Kikwete ineligible to run for a third term, the CCM has yet to announce its candidate for the presidential election. Edward Lowassa, a former prime minister who resigned amid corruption claims in 2008, is said to be the front-runner. Also in the running is current prime minister Mizengo Pinda, who was also recently linked to a graft scandal. If the party decides to take on Chadema in courting the youth vote, it may field current deputy minister of communication, science and technology, January Makawa.

A September 2014 survey of 1,445 households by East African monitoring and evaluation NGO Twaweza¹ put support for a CCM presidential candidate at 47%, versus about 33% for Ukawa. Swing voters who decide to vote on candidate strength rather than party may play a significant role, but with party affiliation for the CCM sitting at 53% it is unlikely that the opposition will break the ruling party's hold on executive power.

However, a close-run race could see a government of national unity form, as in Zanzibar, where the 2010 elections delivered a 50% to 47% split in parliamentary seats to the CCM and CUF, and a 50% to 49% split in the presidential vote.

Constitutional referendum

Before going to the polls, voters need to cast ballots in an April constitutional referendum. Opposition parties boycotted the final vote on the draft being put out for approval, arguing that the dominant party had bulldozed its proposals into the draft at the expense of opposition input. Of importance is the issue of the structure of government: opposition parties are seeking a move to federation, with a government each for the overarching union, the mainland, and Zanzibar. Opposition parties have called for a boycott of the referendum.

Multiparty elections in Tanzania have to date been mostly free and fair, and opposition parties have largely accepted their outcomes. But the real test for democracy lies in a ruling party that is willing to admit defeat and hand power over to new political masters, and a runner-up that is happy to accept second-place. While this is the likely outcome in the election, a close margin between the CCM and Ukawa may force greater accountability on the part of government and legislators over the next five years.

¹ Twaweze. 2014. Tanzania towards 2015: Citizen preferences and views on political leadership. Policy brief 18. November 2014. twaweza.org/uploads/files/PoliticalPoll-FINAL-EN.pdf. Accessed: 16 March 2015.