Of recent, state-civil society relations in Africa have been transformed both by demands for democracy and by economic liberalisation and state reform, often with the stated aim to create "good governance". Uganda has frequently been promoted as a prominent "governance success story" with reference to economic growth and political stabilisation. This study examines state-civil society relations in contemporary Uganda, from 1986 to the present, in order to analyse the scope for and capacity of different social forces to democratise the state. The theoretical problem is analysed through an empirical study of state-civil society relations in the health sector at both national and local levels.

The study argues that conditions that support or block democratisation are best explained by relations of domination between different political coalitions in society, within the state and among external political forces. The study confirms that dominant political forces have prevented democratisation. The ruling political coalition, including main donors, has supported a policy of economic growth, institutional reform and political monopoly – a model which is referred to in the study as technocratic governance. Throughout, however, technocratic governance has interplayed with militarism in shaping the state, not least in war-torn northern Uganda. This more openly repressive form of authoritarian rule has recently become more accentuated as the government has come under pressure to democratise and has responded with force.

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