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**Uganda's Political Outlook Post the 2016 Elections: A Review of the Process and  
Implications for the Future of Multiparty Democracy**

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## List of Acronyms

ACFIM	Alliance for Election Campaign Finance Monitoring
CCEDU	Citizens' Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda
DP	Democratic Party
EC	Electoral Commission
EMB	Electoral Management Body
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change
IND	Independent
IPOD	Interparty Organisation for Dialogue
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
UCC	Uganda Communications Commission
UGX	Uganda Shilling
UPC	Uganda People's Congress
USD	United States Dollar

## 1. Introduction

The 2016 post-election environment in Uganda has been characterised by polarised perspectives regarding whether the country is progressing or retrogressing on the path to democratic development. While the political opposition has made an outright rejection of the election outcome, which handed victory to the National Resistance Movement (NRM), agents of the ruling party have tenaciously accused their competitors of being bad losers who lack the humility to accept defeat. Whatever the case may be, widely observed gaps in the electoral process<sup>1</sup> as well as the questionable conduct of diverse agents—Electoral Management Body (EMB), political parties, and candidates—before, during and after the polls cast a shadow on the development of systems, processes and culture of democratic practice. Such circumstances underpin the need to interrogate the state of multiparty democracy at the turn of Uganda’s third general election since the legal reintroduction of political pluralism in 2005, whilst reflecting on what can be promising approaches and policies to strengthening pluralistic democracy.

This paper examines key issues around Uganda’s third multiparty elections and the political environment following the polls. We explore the shaky foundation against which multiparty democracy was restored, which was underpinned by a dominant, state-cushioned NRM party competing against a weakened opposition. The paper furthermore assesses the context within which the 2016 general elections were conducted, which included the absence of a level playing field and the intermittent failure by opposition groups to achieve major political reforms proposed ahead of the polls. It finally debates alternative approaches to fostering democracy in a constrained environment, which is characteristic of the Ugandan political set-up.

To set the context, we argue that, promising approaches and practices to political reform in the Ugandan context will be those that take a two-pronged approach. First, we suggest the need to secure a buy-in of NRM protagonists—as a dominant group in the current political set-up. Our proposition builds on theoretical arguments that reforms occur when influential groups are persuaded to believe that change is in their interest (North, Wallis, & Weingast, 2009). It is also supported by previous examples in the Ugandan context where attempts to force reforms that lack NRM’s support have mostly been unsuccessful. In this regard, our projection for the next electoral cycle draws on statistics emerging from the recent elections, which show that the NRM has retained a comfortable control of parliament and local councils, yet it still enjoys a privileged association with state structures.

The second strand in our suggested approach relates to strengthening the organisational capacity of opposition political parties and civil society groups. Drawing further on North et al (2009), we consider organisations as important tools for coordinating collective goals as well as for seeking to dominate and coerce others towards group agendas. Reform agitators however, need to be cautious of the catastrophic tendency to view civil society narrowly as

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<sup>1</sup> We refer to reports by independent observers such as the EU, Commonwealth and CEON-U that challenges the integrity and credibility of the polls.

professional nongovernmental organisations and ignoring organic groups with specific interests in politics. Furthermore, we argue under this approach that civil society can only facilitate but not lead a process of political bargain, which should have political organisations with clear political agendas taking the front seat.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows: section two discusses the Ugandan multiparty context highlighting the shaky foundation against which political pluralism was reintroduced. Section three evaluates the 2016 elections with a focus on the implications for multiparty-ism and democratic practice. Section four evaluates the possibility of reform and suggests promising approaches while section five provides the conclusion.

## **2. Multiparty Democracy in Uganda 2005 – 2015**

Following its short-lived attempt upon independence, multiparty democracy was only reintroduced in Uganda by referendum in 2005. Even then, scientific analysis (e.g. Makara et al, 2009) suggests that the NRM managed the transition to multiparty democracy in such a way that it remained in control. Moreover, on the side of Yoweri Museveni—who was by then only months from his twentieth anniversary as President of Uganda, the licence to return political pluralism was traded with the removal of presidential term limits from the constitution, which allowed him to run for a third term as elected president. It was to follow that Museveni would contest and win subsequent elections in 2006, 2011 and most recently 2016—potentially extending his hold on power to 35 years. The fact that Uganda has not witnessed a peaceful transfer of leadership at the top casts widespread pessimism about the possibility of peaceful democratic transition in the East African state.

With the 2005 referendum and the subsequent enactment into law of the Political Parties and Organisations Act (2005), the movement government was removing the cap it had placed on multiparty competition: the National Resistance Army (NRA) had, upon victory in the five-year guerrilla war that brought it to power, banned political parties from having a presence beyond the capital. For the next two decades, political parties would not be allowed to organise any activities or sponsor candidates for elective office. The 1995 Constitution legally institutionalised this seal by introducing a so-called movement political system, which was confirmed by referendum in 2000.

Given two decades of inactivity, the organisational structures, mobilisation experience and support base of political parties gradually withered. This period was however, not without winners: the NRM, whose agents would, following the legal return of multiparty-ism, register it as a political party dubbed the National Resistance Movement Organisation (NRM-O) used the window to advance as a dominant group, later on, forming a dominant political party. Indeed the subsequent dominance of NRM was not only due to the abeyance of opposition political parties during the movement system period but can be equally explained by the subtle conversion of state built movement structures into the NRM political organisation. This conversion saw the country's political elite at national and local levels consolidate themselves as agents of the movement. Put differently, traditional political parties witnessed a haemorrhage of their elite class so much so that formerly high ranking figures

within political organisations like the Democratic Party (DP) and Uganda People's Congress (UPC) became firmly assimilated into the NRM—majority of them were not to return to their political parties in spite of the referendum outcome confirming the opening of political space.

Although the legal return to multiparty political competition was confirmed in the 2005 referendum, the process did not dismantle the strong fusion between party and state that had emerged during the movement period. Blended with high levels of political patronage and a political system hinged on presidentialism, this environment has engendered a context where numerous layers of public servants, for example, Resident District Commissioners (RDCs), Presidential Advisors, security personnel, members of Resistance Councils—that later on became Local Councils, among others, gradually morphed into what has come to be a nationwide perpetual support structure for the NRM.

However, there are also concerns that opposition political parties have been slow in taking advantage of the new legal regime to invest in building effective nationwide structures. Historically, the traditional political parties, notably DP and UPC, had built their support base mostly on ethnic pillars, explaining UPC's residual strength in Lango sub region in Northern Uganda and DP's in the Buganda region. Building trust particularly among the elite class beyond their regional concentrations remains a challenge for these parties. Moreover, Ugandan political parties have, overall, been observed to suffer challenges of weak internal democracy, dominance by a few influential personalities who use their power to circumvent institutional provisions to decision-making, and failure to mobilise domestic financing, to mention but only a few. Thus, the NRM is not only a dominant group, it also relishes in the advantage of competing against a weak and less than organised opposition. Therefore, how the opposition groups succeed in developing their organisational capacities as political players will determine the quality of multiparty competition.

Among the major debates surrounding Uganda's current multiparty terrain is the question of financing of political parties. The 2010 Political Parties and Organisations Amendment Act Provides for public financing of political parties. However, as Ssemogerere (2011) observes, there are challenges regarding the foundation of the system on which public party financing was provided for: this includes *inter alia* issues relating to fairness, equity and safeguards against potential manipulation. Moreover, the available laws are seen as being weak on the issue of accountability (ibid) and remain largely silent on crucial aspects such as private contributions to political parties.

In the absence of a domestic capitalist class, political parties, particularly those in the opposition, have to rely on external sources for funding. Recent analysis suggests that domestic capitalists are relevant in supporting opposition groups as political alternatives (Mugisha, Kiranda & Krueger, 2016). Uganda, however, lacks a domestic capitalist class as big businesses are mostly owned by foreign firms whose relation to politics only extends as far as their business interests are affected (ibid). On the side of political parties, reliance on foreign donors always carries with it numerous limitations including reluctance or legal limitations deterring external benefactors from financing campaign and election related activities of political parties.

### 3. The 2016 Elections

The third Ugandan multiparty general election was unprecedented in a number of aspects. First, in what seemed to be a case of ‘elite fracture’,<sup>2</sup> Amama Mbabazi, NRM’s founding member, long-term Secretary General and Prime Minister in the government moved to contest against his long-term friend, Yoweri Museveni, who was running as the endorsed party flag bearer for the fifth consecutive time—to potentially extend his hold on power to 35 years. Secondly, the leading opposition candidate, Kizza Besigye, Museveni’s former physician and ‘bush war’ colleague, joined the campaigns for a fourth time subsequent to a lively internal party process during which he had competed for the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) party ticket with another of Museveni’s earlier comrade and retired Army Commander, Mugisha Muntu. In a presidential race that seemed like a ‘colleagues-fall-apart’ spectacle, Maj. Gen. Benon Biraaro, another of Museveni’s guerrilla war comrades was one of the contestants in a race that pulled a total of eight candidates. It is our observations that so-called ‘Musevenism’ remains the main denominator in Ugandan politics so much that it makes other crucial factors such as political party ideology or position on development questions appear irrelevant. This reality portends major implications for the future of multiparty democracy and in particular peaceful change of leadership.

At the parliamentary level, a total of 1,749 candidates<sup>3</sup> competed for the 402<sup>4</sup> parliamentary seats. Opposition political parties, however, did not manage to field candidates in 91 of the constituencies. The election indeed presented nine constituencies where NRM candidates won unopposed and 82 others where NRM flag-bearers competed against NRM-leaning independent candidates<sup>5</sup>. This paper recommends further analysis to establish whether the inability of the opposition political parties to field candidates in several constituencies exemplifies a case of ‘elite capture’ by the NRM or if it is to be construed as evidence that opposition political parties are considerably weak in certain areas, so much so that office-seeking elites find it costly or fatal to contest on an opposition party ticket. Indeed some opposition figures have given knee-jerk explanations to this subtle reality, where they give contradicting factors ranging from their lack of party structures in certain areas, the increase in candidates’ nomination fees, lack of good-quality available candidates, intimidation and harassment of the opposition, to the personal belief by the candidates that they have higher chances to succeed as NRM or independents other than running on the opposition ticket.

The 2016 electoral campaigns, which saw the first ever all-candidates televised presidential debate, generally attracted deliberations on a number of policy issues. In spite of some observed petulance around the televised presidential debate, we construe it as progress

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<sup>2</sup> Larry Diamond (2008) uses the term elite fracture to explain a fall-apart of influential elite or leaders within a dominant political organization.

<sup>3</sup> 604 were fielded by various political parties and 709 were independents for the 290 direct seats. For women reserved seats, 206 were supported by 9 political parties and 200 were independent contestants for the 112 women seats

<sup>4</sup> Excludes 25 seats for interest groups, namely, youth, women, workers, persons with disabilities and the Army.

<sup>5</sup> A candidate who is nominated without party sponsorship

from the politics based on personalities that typically dominated previous Ugandan election campaigns. Indeed the campaign season, on the overall, attracted a degree of conversations on a range of issues: from emblematic conversations on peace and stability, to frustration over surging unemployment, to concerns over failing delivery of public goods and services particularly education, health and transport infrastructure. Ugandans this time round seemed to display a considerable focus on issues. However, the overall discourse remained largely constructed around the personalities of key candidates in the campaign: Yoweri Museveni (NRM), Kizza Besigye (FDC) and Amama Mbabazi (IND).

It should be noted that some of the key actors in the election, particularly the political opposition joined the 2016 competition with unsettled contestations over the nature and fairness of the terrain in which they would be competing. A failed attempt to push through a series of major electoral law reforms proposed prior to the election underpinned this dissatisfaction. Following nationwide consultative activities and parallel negotiations within the Interparty Organisation for Dialogue (IPOD)<sup>6</sup>, a number of suggestions for major reforms were unsuccessfully bided for by opposition political parties with the backing of prominent civil society actors and international donors.

Key among the suggested reforms was the proposal to restructure the way in which the election management body (EMB) - the Electoral Commission (EC) - was constituted with suggestions for a more inclusive process as opposed to the existing one where members of the commission are appointed by the president—who had been the appointing authority of the commission as well as candidate and victor in all four previous elections. This move was seen as necessary to engender independence and neutrality of the EMB. Other proposals related to, among others, restoration of the two-term limit for the presidential office and the effective removal of the army from politics and electioneering processes.

While the NRM through its agents had, within the frame of IPOD, signed up to the suggested electoral reforms, the party leadership backtracked once the suggestions were brought to public discourse and later on to parliament. Given its firm dominancy of parliament, the NRM easily blocked any major reforms to the electoral framework. It should be understood that the proposed reforms were largely viewed as a step that would engender a level playing field and consequently increase the possibility of the opposition to effectively challenge the NRM. It was therefore, without surprise, that the NRM became easily dissuaded with the proposed changes to the status quo. Moreover, at the height of the reform campaign, the opposition and civil society did not succeed in persuading the NRM to pass the reforms. This failure presents serious lessons for future strategies in seeking political reforms.

By and large, without the proposed reforms getting into force, the opposition remained sceptical regarding the possibility of a free and fair election given that the game was going to be played under the same old order, which was widely seen as favouring the NRM.

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<sup>6</sup> IPOD is a platform for informal dialogue among the parliamentary political parties in which they negotiate and build consensus on needed reforms that are considered good for Uganda's development.

Immediate post-election analysis<sup>7</sup> indicated that the electoral environment seriously favoured the NRM by tilting the political playing field in a number of ways. Independent local and international observers reported that the NRM profited from the blurred lines between party and state. Public servants such as RDCs and presidential advisors reportedly used their positions and official facilities like vehicles to campaign for NRM candidates for different positions in the elections. Indeed the NRM was observed to have unmatched access to financial resources and media coverage. Just one month to the elections, the campaign finance report by Alliance for Election Campaign Finance Monitoring (*ACFIM, 2016*) indicated that the incumbent president and flag bearer of the ruling NRM had spent Uganda shillings 27 billion (USD 7.7 million), which was twelve times bigger than the combined total of his two closest rivals. At the end of the 2015/2016 campaign process, ACFIM estimated that ‘at least UGX: 2.4 trillion (US \$ 716 million) was spent by all political parties and candidates on the elections campaigns’<sup>8</sup>.

On the other hand, security agencies acted in ways that thwarted the possibility of opposition candidates to freely and effectively hold campaign events: the leading opposition candidate was, for example, frequently arrested shortly before and after the polls and was, at the time of writing, making a month under confinement to his home. On Election Day and the period immediately after, the state moved ahead to block social media: the Uganda Communication Commission (UCC), government’s media watchdog, cited security reasons to order internet providers to turn off the Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp platforms. The media has been seen as a strong coordination good in the fostering of democracy. However, as Mesquita and Downs (2005), posit, regimes can prevent democracy by suppressing coordination goods thereby limiting the ability of potential opposition forces to win political power.

The vibrancy and enthusiasm exhibited by voters in the campaign period and subsequent determination to cast their ballots was evident by the unusually long queues at polling stations, and provided optimism of growing civic consciousness. However, the logistical failures by the EC to deliver voting materials at hundreds of polling centres in Kampala, Wakiso and Mukono districts, which are not only within reach of its head office but also viewed as opposition strongholds, cast doubt on its capacity or willingness to deliver a credible election. To some this was seen as a tacit way through which the EMB acted to the advantage of the NRM—considering that the affected areas were seen as opposition strongholds—to others it was simply evidence of incompetence on the side of the EC.

The EC within the stipulated 48 hours announced Museveni of the NRM winner of the elections with 60.75 percent of valid votes; FDC’s Kizza Besigye was the runner-up with 35.61 percent, while Amama Mbabazi in third position polled a dismal 1.65 percent. However, four of the eight presidential contenders<sup>9</sup> outrightly rejected Museveni’s victory

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. by independent observer groups

<sup>8</sup> ACFIM (2016) Final Report – Extended Study on Campaign Financing for Presidential and Members of Parliament. <http://acfimuganda.org/index.php/2016/05/31/acfim-final-report/>

<sup>9</sup> Those who outrightly rejected the presidential results are Mr. Besigye of the FDC, Mr. Amama Mbabazi, Mr. Mbirizi Joseph and Mr. Abed Bwanika

with the FDC indicating that the EC in its composition was a biased referee which acted in favour of the NRM, including by falsification of results. One of the election losers, Hon. Amama Mbabazi (IND) petitioned the Supreme Court in line with the provisions of the Constitution, the Presidential Elections Act and the Electoral Commission Act. The petitioner argued that Mr Yoweri Kaguta Museveni was not validly elected and sought an order to annul the elections. The petitioner asserted that the failure by the election management body to comply with the key provisions and principles of the electoral laws affected the results of the election in a substantial manner.

After a 30 days inquiry into the petition, the Supreme Court ruled that Mr Yoweri Kaguta Museveni was validly elected as President in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the Presidential Elections Act. The petition was thus dismissed with no costs to either party. Despite the ruling, the Supreme Court did take note of several legal and process inconsistencies that bogged the country's third multiparty elections such as the incumbent's use of state resources at the detriment of the competitors. The Supreme Court further disparaged the Executive's failure to implement crucial recommendations with regard to electoral law reforms as adduced in the previous two presidential elections. Indeed, it is not just the Supreme Court that raised eyebrows regarding the integrity and credibility of the 2016 Uganda polls. Anecdotal conversations severally suggested that the sombre mood which engulfed the country upon declaration of Museveni's victory and the conspicuous absence of NRM celebrations was an indication that the winner could have lacked the necessary jauntiness in their pronounced success. Moreover, independent local and international observers<sup>10</sup> not only made a resounding questioning of the EMB preparedness, competence and independence, some also clearly ruled that the polls had not been free and fair. This revelation resonated with many election observer reports with the Citizens' Election Observer Network<sup>11</sup> concluding that;

*“Uganda’s legal framework limits the foundation for conducting credible elections. These limitations prompted civil society to produce the Citizens’ Compact on Free and Fair Elections, which includes recommendations for legal reform: overhauling the Electoral Commission to ensure independence and impartiality; reforming the demarcation of electoral boundaries; ensuring recruitment of Polling officials is done in a transparently, competitively and based on merit; and the establishment of an independent judiciary to adjudicate on electoral disputes impartially. These recommendations were not taken up for the 2016 elections”.*

However, the tendency within the general discourse to place election flaws squarely on the NRM's style of engagement can be subjective and needs to be carefully considered. Electoral malpractices have also been claimed in areas with opposition dominance and where the opposition actually won seats for the parliamentary or local council positions. Moreover,

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<sup>10</sup> Including the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM), the Commonwealth Observer Group, and the indigenous Citizen's Election Observation Network (CEON-U)

<sup>11</sup> The Citizens' Election Observer Network was a conglomeration of 8 Ugandan nongovernmental organisations set up to observe the process and integrity of the 2016 general elections

in certain parts of the country, the weakness or outright absence of opposition candidates has been fronted as evidence to suggest that the opposition is simply too weak to defeat the NRM.

In a context where political organisations were seen as weak to foster all-round political bargains, civil society actors played a crucial role in the campaign process and election process. They conducted wide-reaching civic education and election observation programmes—thanks to their international donors. The Citizens’ Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda (CCEDU) launched a mass media-based civic education campaign dubbed *Topowa*, in which they encouraged citizens to participate in the elections and called upon voters to shape their decision on the basis of issues that affect them such as infrastructure, education and health service delivery. We view the promotion of issue-based politics among voters as a crucial input, as the demand for policy positions by voters is the needed incentive for office-seeking politicians to address such concerns.

However, in spite of their praiseworthy contribution, the civil society environment in Uganda has remained elite dominated and is not socially rooted. Indeed theoretical literature (e.g. Kaldor, 2003) recognises the role of professional organisations like non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) in fostering economic and political bargains. Nevertheless, we stress the need to view civil society more holistically as the public arena in which “different values, ideas, and political visions are debated, contended and struggled over” (Howell & Lind, 2010). In the Ugandan context, this arena would have to allow groups that support the NRM as well as pro-change agents to freely contest their ideas.

The observed dynamics of donor-funded civil society requires organisations to gain the professional capacity to prepare sophisticated funding proposals and deal with complex project management tools: log frames, GANTT charts, monitoring and evaluation tools, to mention but a few. This requirement however has the direct implication of leaving out organic groups such as those of peasant farmers, business associations including informal sectors workers, church and mosque groups, who may have an interest in political processes but lack the sophistication to access available support. In many instances, these groups, in a bid to access funding have been sold out to the hegemony of qualified professionals who have the capacity to deal with donor complex requirements.

#### **4. Outlook for the Next Legislature Period and the Possibility of Reform**

##### ***(a) Set-Up of the Legislature***

Uganda’s next legislature period will be characterised by an NRM dominated parliament with a clear 2/3 majority. As table 1 shows; the NRM has a comfortable control of parliament with the needed majority to pass any laws without requiring support from another group in the legislature. Additionally, majority of the independents, who constitute the second largest group in the tenth parliament are largely NRM leaning. This constellation is no different at

the local government levels: besides Kampala and selected urban municipalities, the NRM retained a decisive control of district and sub county local governments.

**Table 1: Distribution of Parliamentary Seats**

<b>Political Parties/Independents</b>	<b>Direct Seats</b>	<b>Women Representatives</b>	<b>Special Interest</b>	<b>Total</b>
National Resistance Movement	199	84	10	293
Forum for Democratic Change	29	7	-	36
Democratic Party	13	2	-	15
Uganda People’s Congress	4	2	-	6
Independents	44	17	6	67
UPDF Representatives			10	10
				<b>427</b>

*Source: Authors’ compilation based on the list of gazetted Members of Parliament available at <http://www.ec.or.ug/sites/default/files/docs/Gazette%20List%20Elected%20MPs%202016.pdf>*

The results of the parliamentary elections also indicate that the tenth parliament will have representation from only four political parties as opposed to the six that constituted the ninth parliament. This reality thus opens up interest in assessing the strength of the country’s multiparty political competition where a total of 29 political parties are registered, only 13 fielded candidates at parliamentary level, only 4 fielded candidates at the presidential level, and only four secured seats in parliament.

The composition of the tenth parliament, with a two-thirds majority being NRM, complemented with the re-election of President Museveni suggests the balance of power between NRM and opposition will be business as usual. We base on the existing facts to argue that NRM’s dominance will remain strong on the basis that it is solidly grounded by the party’s overwhelming majority in parliament and local governments countrywide. Not even the opposition’s control of Kampala and other urban municipalities presents a credible threat to NRM especially given that Kampala was recentralised with executive powers being vested in the hands of the Executive Director, who is a presidential appointee.

***(b) Implications for the Possibility of Political Reforms***

The above realities present significant implications on the nature of political discourse over the next five years. Given its retention of the presidential office and a resounding control of parliament and local governments, the NRM is most likely going to be persuaded to maintain the status quo that is soundly in its favour. Political reforms would, for that matter, cost rather than benefit the party’s inherent desire to retain political power and for its office

seeking agents to retain their positions in the next electoral cycle. Moreover, powerful rent-seeking individuals and groups that have emerged over NRM's three decades rule and strongly infused with the state are thus most-likely going to see themselves as potential losers in case of serious political reforms that portend to change the status quo. This suggests that the NRM is going to be less inclined towards reforms unless change agitators find persuasive ways of engaging the party's protagonists.

Pursuing a political reform agenda within the above described context can be complicated. As North, Wallis, and Weingast (2009) argue, reforms succeed when influential or dominant groups are persuaded about the need for change. Yet, it is understood that political agents are mostly persuaded by the continuous desire to gain and retain political power as a means to controlling the allocation of scarce resources. Thus, in view of realities within the Uganda political arrangements, the leading question that framers of political reform programmes will be confronted with is how to persuade protagonists within the NRM to embrace reform, when it is clear that doing so predicts an increase in the strength of their challengers.

#### ***(c) An Incremental Strategy towards Reform and Enlisting NRM Buy-In***

A review of previous efforts towards political reform reveals that agitators mostly targeted the big points: restoration of presidential term limits, changing composition and appointment process of the EC, removal of the army from politics, to mention but only a few. While such high end targets are legitimately the ultimate aspiration of a democratic development campaign, their attainment in early stages can be a tall order. In view of such veracity it might be worth identifying small but significant aspects on which political consensus can be generated to gradually enable weaker groups gain a cut into the political settlements. Indeed, classical literature from the institutional economists (e.g. Rodrik, 2008) suggests that gradual approaches promise better chances of success as opposed to big bang reforms. Given its dominancy of decision-making organs, a buy-in by the NRM remains crucially relevant for the success of reform packages.

#### ***(d) Strengthening Opposition Groups and Civil Society***

Opposition political groups in Uganda remain largely weak. The two-pronged approach proposed in this paper, therefore, emphasises the need to build credible opposition political parties and civil society groups. In making this suggestion, we do not discount the possibility of a powerful regime failing the emergency of a strong opposition through penetration and elite capture neither are we unconscious of the fact that organisation development in Uganda remains encumbered by limited social capital. Instead, we point out that these are some of the daunting challenges that will have to be overcome to build effective political organisations that have clear agendas and whose agents have the will and capacity to work together to pursue common goals. With regard to civil society, we emphasise the need to go beyond professional elite-controlled groups and enlist indigenous actors with deeper social rootedness and more grounding in local politics.

***(e) Implications of a Large Youth Segment***

Motivated by the Arab Spring as well as the most recent developments in Burkina Faso, considerable discourse on current African political processes have paid much attention to the continent's youth. Their demographic significance and high unemployment rates are seen as factors that have augmented youth political activism. In the 2016 elections in Uganda, population statistics and the national voters' register showed that youth made up a significant proportion of registered voters: around 42 per cent of the 15.2 million.

Counterfactually speaking, if Ugandan youth had significantly turned out and cast their vote as a united bloc, they could have had the ability to swing the vote to determine the eventual election outcome. However, the absence of youth-specific issues, possession of multiple identities as well as high unemployment and poverty levels made co-ordination of the youth vote a tall order. As such, young people's demographic significance and their high numbers on the voters' register turned out to count less. Youth face challenges of multiple identities: within the pluralistic system, they identify with diverse political parties. They are also divided along lines of ethnicity, religion, nature of economic engagement, level of education and income, rural or urban livelihoods, to mention but only a few. What is going to be crucial in the next legislature period is how young people manage to build credible organisations to engage effectively in political bargains at different levels.

### ***(f) Key Policy Questions***

**The following policy issues and questions are essential to furthering the debate on Uganda's political outlook and in particular the centrality of political and electoral law reforms for genuine multiparty democracy:**

- (i) Given its comfortable control of key state and government institutions, what is the likelihood that, and how can, the NRM get persuaded to embrace political reforms?
- (ii) As top level approaches to push for political change remain largely unsuccessful, is this the time to consider evolutionary (as opposed to revolutionary) reform?
- (iii) To what extent can demographically significant groups like youth be nurtured to become engineers of democratic development?
- (iv) How, in the absence of a domestic capitalist class, can political parties increase their funding bases and reduce dependency on external sources?
- (v) Who are the influential actors within existing political settlements? What are their interests and how can these be addressed or cushioned in a reform package?

### **5. Conclusion**

Analysis of Uganda's political landscape reveals major gaps within the political system, significant floors in the process, and a weak culture of democratic practice. This context is highly problematic and undesirable to change-lovers; however, it underpins NRM's continued political success. Considering that the NRM is a dominant group where the majority of the country's political elite are entrenched, political reforms can be viewed as having the potential to produce more losers. This explains why NRM agents have been reluctant or presented outright rejection towards any proposed changes to the status quo.

Available evidence and lessons from theoretical arguments suggest that the path to reform stands higher prospects of success if the dominant group is involved. For this reason, dialogue with the view of persuading NRM protagonists to embrace change is going to be a crucial determinant of the future of Uganda's democratic development. Thus, reform agitators have to prudently evaluate who the influential actors in the dominant group are and to map out their deeper interests. This will be a key premise for designing interest-compatible and incentive-based reform strategies that portend to enlist buy-in of the NRM.

Additionally, if the political opposition and civil society are to be relied on for fostering democratic transition, these actors will need to reorganise to build a wider support base to become credible competitors to the NRM. In particular, they would need to improve on their social rootedness to emerge as formidable challengers and contributors to the ongoing process of political formation. Only a strong opposition can provide a credible threat to the NRM's political success, which can be another incentive for motivating NRM agents towards embracing popular reforms.

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