

# **Deepening Democracy Through Multipartyism: The Bumpy road to Uganda's 2011 elections**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The 2011 elections will be one of the several elections and the second multiparty election organized by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) since it captured power in 1986. Despite the regular elections since the 1990s, the quality and outcomes of these elections have remained a subject of debate. Democracy has remained elusive in Uganda inspite of elections being conducted at regular intervals. The question is: does electioneering necessarily produce democratic governance ? Or does it create conditions and norms necessary for institutionalization of democratic rule? In particular, does the existence multiparty politics translate into democratic governance?

## **Introduction**

Uganda's aspiration for democratic governance has been dogged by its post-colonial history. Forty seven years since the country gained independence from the British colonial masters, Ugandans have suffered civil strife, political instability and authoritarianism, resulting in political misrule, economic and social hardships. While the country's immediate post independence regime was a vibrant multiparty system, it soon collapsed into a one-party state under Apollo Milton Obote from 1967(Mazrui 1967, 1974, Satyarmurthy 1975, Mujaju 1976, Uzoigwe 1983). This was followed by Idi Amin's military coup in 1971. Amin's nine years of brutal dictatorship (1971-79) was sustained by military governors in almost all state positions. The order of the day was suppression of free political expression, brutal murder of suspected opponents and instilling fear amongst the population. The expulsion of Asian business people in 1972, led to economic collapse and international isolation of the regime (Southall 1986, Shaw 1973, Short 1971, Lofchie 1972). Amin's regime was forced out of power in 1979 by combined armed force of Uganda exiles with the backing of the Tanzanian Peoples Defence Forces. The overthrow of Idi Amin however was a beginning of unstable

regimes (Avigan & Honey 1982, Gertzel 1980, Mazrui 1980, Bwengye 1985). Between April 1979 and December 1980, three governments had come and gone.

The 1980 controversial elections, organized on the multiparty basis, failed to produce a clear winner, sparking off another wave of instability and civil strife. Between 1981 and 1986, the country suffered a guerilla war fought by a National Resistance Army (NRA), spearheaded by Yoweri Museveni. The guerilla war partly failed Obote's second Uganda People's Congress (UPC) government efforts to return the country to normalcy.

The capture of state power by the National Resistance Army / Movement (NRA/NRM) in 1986 ushered in the 'no party system' or Movement regime, which claimed in its *Ten Point Programme*, point No1 as "restoration of democracy". Emphasis however, was "participatory democracy" based on "individual merit" in elections and "non-partisan politics". In line with those principles, the NRM government suspended activities of political parties (Mamdani 1988). Indeed, elections held in 1989, 1996 and 2001 (Kasfir 1992, 1998, Makara et al, 1996, 2003, Apter 1995) under the Movement system were organized under the concept of "individual merit". The 1995 Constitution (Article 269) provided that candidates for all elections were prohibited from seeking sponsorship of a political party, opening branches, displaying party colours, or in any way, attempting to use the facilities and slogans of a political party. In other words, the legal framework under the NRM has tended to undermine the work and growth of political parties. The NRM on its part, used the suspension of activities of parties to entrench itself politically. Moreover, the Constitution required that the change of the political system had to go through a referendum (Barya 2000, Bratton & Laambright 2001, Onyango-Odongo 2000). Referenda on political systems took place in 2000 and 2005. The one of 2000 re-affirmed the Movement system while the one of the 2005 changed the system to multipartyism.

### **The Strategic re-introduction of Multiparty Politics**

The limitation to enjoyment of political pluralism in Uganda ended with the 2005 referendum. In that year, the Political Parties and Organizations Act (PPOA) effectively

legalized the existence of political parties and freed their activities. In effect, parties became free to organize their delegates conferences and party primaries, open branches, solicit funding and to come up with program and party manifestos.

The current party system is characterized by a number of notable factors:

- Some parties have a wide national coverage with branches across the country.
- Some parties are regional parties drawing support mainly from specific regions.
- Some parties contested the 2006 elections while others did not.
- Some parties that participated in the 2006 elections performed very well while others did poorly.

It is estimated that about 34 political parties have so far registered. All political parties have their headquarters in the capital city –Kampala. However, not all parties have branches beyond Kampala.

The actions of the NRM to re-introduce multiparty politics (Makara, Rakner & Svasand 2009) and to allow parties to operate constituted a strategic calculation by the ruling party to keep itself in power. First, the Movement took note that it had become apparent that the “no-party” system was unsustainable, both ideologically and in real politics. From 1995 the NRM had promoted an idea the Movement which it claimed was an alternative system to the multiparty and single party systems. However, intellectuals, media and politicians questioned its credentials and principles (Barya 2000). Secondly, there were disagreement amongst the bush war historicals as to whether the NRM was internally democratic and tolerant of criticisms. In particular, most critics argued that the Movement had become narrowly focused, intolerant of diverse views and preferred candidates loyal to Museveni as opposed to those with open minds. This tendency was in contradiction to the principles of the Movement as laid in the Constitution (Article 71). From 2001 it became apparent that the popularity of the Movement and its leader Yoweri Museveni was declining. He scored 76% in 1996, 69% in 2001 and 59% in 2006 elections. There was also domestic and international pressure (especially from the donors) demanding that the NRM initiates political reforms geared towards opening political space. Fourthly, within the NRM itself, there was an internal discussion pointing out the weaknesses of their political organization, for example it was realized

that the Movement system, which many critics perceived as a perverted version of one-partyism, was out of touch with the realities of the democratizing world (Makara, Rakner and Svasand 2009).

Strategically, the Movement officials and their supporter perceived the opening of political space as a strategic calculation that would give the NRM an advantage. For example, the calculation was that they would gain more legitimacy as champions of democratic initiatives. Indeed, strategic interests of the NRM drove the agenda for opening political space. The NRM leadership argued that this was an opportunity for them to get rid of internal critics, locally termed as *mubaleke bagende*. Museveni used the same opportunity to amend the Constitution to put to an end the articles that provided for term limits to the president (Makara, Rakner and Svasand (ibid). Amidst resistance from some legislators, the NRM MPs were bribed with UGX. 5 million each to vote in favour of the removal of term limits. Secret voting was scrapped to ensure that term limits for president were removed. It was not accidental therefore, that the opening of political space coincided with the termination of presidential two-term limits, which in effect gave Museveni's indefinite eligibility to stand for the presidency. However, the opening of political space should not be seen as an initiative of the NRM, it should be seen as a culmination of the struggles by the democratic forces within the civil society which voiced out the failures of the Movement. Election mal-practices, especially during the 2001 elections, discredited the Movement's claims of the so called "all inclusive, broad-based and participatory democracy." Several organized civil society groups, intellectuals, the media and even the parliament pointed out clearly that the idea of the "no party system" was nothing but a clique of individuals around Museveni, governing the country in whatever way they wanted (Onyango-Odongo 200, Kiiza, Makara and 2008).

The above concerns culminated into the enactment of laws that allowed the re-introduction of political parties in Uganda.

### **Trials and Tribulations of Political Parties in Uganda**

Under Museveni's rule, there was no party politics in the 19 years (1986-2005). The re-introduction of multi-party politics in 2005 resulted in registration of more than 30

political parties. However, having a large number of parties in a country on the one hand, and having democratic political practices is another. When the NRM took over power in 1986, Museveni castigated parties as divisive, sectarian and unprincipled organisations, only suitable for industrialised countries.

Political parties in Uganda have historically gone through tribulations. During the colonial period, political parties survived three threats to their existence: the Christian clergy and their establishments, colonial administrators and the Buganda ruling oligarchy. The first two groups imagined that parties were fronts for “communist propaganda” while the Buganda ruling elites were keen to protect their privileges, including the desire for a break away position from the rest of Uganda. During the first decade of independence, political parties suffered the intolerance of Obote’s political machinations, including threats and bribery to opposition elites. By 1967, most of the prominent opposition members of parliament of the Democratic Party (DP) and Kabaka Yekka (KY), had either been imprisoned or bribed to cross the floor (Uzoigwe 1983). By the time Obote was thrown out in a coup in 1971, only a handful of opposition MPs remained in parliament. During Amin’s period, parties were forced to close shop. In the 1980’s parties existed but their members were constantly harassed, in many cases accused to be alleged collaborators with the National Resistance Movement (NRA) that fought in the UPC government. Despite these extraordinary constraints, parties remained resilient in Uganda’s politics. This disapproves the claim by Museveni that parties are only good for industrial societies (Museveni 1992).

The freeing of political parties in 2005, demonstrated their efficacy in various ways. Parties have actively fought for respect for human rights, pressed for alternative policies as well as exposing weaknesses of government’s positions on several issues. They have also been seeking to mobilize voters, as evidenced by increasing the share of opposition vis-a-vis the decline of NRM voters. For example the NRM experienced decline as follows: 75% in 1996, 69% in 2001 and 59% in 2006. This reduction in the NRM’s share of votes is an indication of the growing strength for opposition tendencies and the population’s disaffection with the government policies.

## **Institutional Bottlenecks to Multiparty Democracy**

State institutions have shown a lot of bias against opposition parties. Opposition parties have withstood harassment and violence unleashed on their leaders and supporters by the state. In the run up to the 2006 elections, Besigye the leader of FDC, the main opposition party was charged of the offences of treason and rape, in both the civil and the military courts. His nomination as a candidate was delayed by the legal fiat besides losing time for campaign due to the requirements for him to appear in the two courts. Since 2006, the police has intensified a campaign of harassment targeting assemblies organized by the opposition parties. However, opposition activists have challenged this in courts of law, where the judges have ruled that the right to assemble is god-given not given by the state (Makara 2009). On the other hand, while opposition parties have been resilient, they still suffer from several institutional bottlenecks. These include.

- Failure by the opposition parties to rally behind a single candidate.
- The tendency by the main opposition party, FDC to devote most of its resources on the presidential elections, and neglecting the financing of its parliamentary candidates.
- The failure of the opposition parties to cooperate, unite and work together. For example while FDC, CP, JEEMA and UPC have agreed on an inter-party dialogue, but DP, which was among the founders has stayed out of it, and openly criticizes fellow opposition parties. DP's stronghold is in Buganda region where it exclusively won its nine parliamentary seats in the 2006 election. DP behaves as if it is a party for Baganda. Sometimes, it expresses animosity towards fellow opposition parties, when they slot candidates or win seats in Buganda.
- Opposition parties lack sufficient financial recourses to run their programs. While parties expected they would raise recourses locally from their supporters, this strategy is beset by three confounding factors:
  - (a) Parties have not been free to campaign freely in the whole country. Their rallies are constantly dispersed by police as “illegal gatherings” (Makara 2009).

- (b) Some of the supporters of the opposition political parties fear to come out openly to express their support for their preferred party, for fear that the government may harm their interests for example losing a government job or business (*The Monitor* January 29, 2006). Some supporters of the opposition parties also fear intimidation of security agencies. The structure of Internal Security Organisation (ISO) runs from the national to the sub-county level.
- (c) Most of the would-be local financiers of opposition parties play a *double game* giving some portion of support to the ruling party and another to the opposition party. At the end of the day, the ruling party has more much financial resources than the other parties. Moreover, the ruling party illegally uses some of the state resources for its campaigns (Kiiza 2008)

The NRM has used the state apparatus to frustrate the activities of the opposition political parties. Police in Uganda has gained notoriety of dispensing opposition party assemblies on the pretext that they have not secured police permission to assemble. The police and other security agencies have been staffed by mainly military personnel, who seem not to perceive themselves as servants of the state but as agents of the ruling party and its leadership. It is a clear fact that since 2000, the government has appointed the Inspector General of Police from within the top ranks of the army. Thus in dealing with the opposition parties, they sometimes exceed their official limits. A good example is when the paramilitary group called the *Black Mambas* blocked Besigye from being released on bail granted by a court, in the midst of the 2006 presidential election campaigns. Again, it happened when another paramilitary group allied to the Uganda police known as *Kiboko Squad* dispersed demonstrators during the Mabira protests, with brutal force. Both the army (UPDF) and the police are decidedly pro-NRM. The Army Commander has said that the UPDF will not allow bad people to take over from NRM (*The Monitor* September 1, 2005).

Equally, the Police in Uganda have earned the image of a repressive force. Using the colonial law of regulating assemblies, the police have been vigorously involved in violation of freedom of association and assembly. Opposition rallies have routinely been blocked and demonstrations violently dispersed. The increasingly common excuse for prohibiting lawful assemblies is that they disrupt business in the city centre of Kampala. This justification cannot withstand considering that pro-NRM assemblies are never dispersed. The police dispersed a Democratic Party rally at Mpigi on January 26, 2007, when there was no business to disrupt, since it was a public holiday. Disruptions always a result of police interference in otherwise, peaceful assemblies, indiscriminately using tear gas, water cannons, batons and even live bullets on unarmed civilians. Police powers have always been exercised whenever opposition parties stage rallies. For example, on November 18, 2006, police used tear gas to disperse Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) party leader Dr. Kiiza Besigye and his supporters, who had gathered at the Constitutional Square in Kampala where FDC was supposed to launch its party cards (Sunday Vision, November 19, 2006). Much more recently, there was the controversial arrest of Hon. Nabilah Naggayi the woman MP for Kampala District and member of the opposition FDC on a routine tour of her constituency. On June 10, 2008 the legislator was educating vendors in Owino Market on how to use a suggestion box as a means to get their views reach her so that she could articulate them in Parliament. The Police violently arrested her for holding an ‘illegal assembly’ (The New Vision, June 19, 2008).

### **Political parties in parliament**

The 2006 multiparty elections ended NRM’s monopoly of politics in parliament, where the Movement acted as if it was a political party through its Movement caucus. Multiparty politics has impacted on the performance of parliament in various ways. Hence its composition is important for democracy to grow.

### **Members of Parliament by Party Affiliation**

<b>Affiliation of MP by organization</b>	<b>No. of MPs</b>
NRM	212
FDC	38



DP	10
UPC	10
Justice Forum (JEEMA)	1
Conservative Party (CP)	1
Independents	37
Army (UPDF)	10
Ex-official (Un elected Ministers in Parliament)	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>332</b>

As the table above indicates, the majority of members of parliament belong to the ruling NRM. The NRM was able not only to secure most of the directly elected members of parliament but also, the majority of reserved seats for the army, people with disabilities, the representatives of the workers, women and youth. For the reserved seats, the opposition parties have been unable to make any serious in-roads. These constituencies seem to have been grateful or they are reminded so, that it is the NRM which “gave them the privilege to be represented” in parliament, hence their support for NRM. It is also known that the NRM employs money, security and other resources to manipulate elections of special groups. There are also the controversial 10 seats reserved for the Uganda Peoples Defence Force (UPDF). The army MPs are supposedly non-partisan. However, they are not allowed to criticize the position of government. Reference is usually made to the famous Brigadier Tumukunde case, the former Director General of Internal Security Organisation (ISO), an army MP who spoke his mind on a radio show, and criticised the government. Tumukunde was removed from Parliament just for doing that. He challenged his removal in a Constitutional Petition 6/2005. The court however ruled against the petitioner, arguing that while the army personnel in parliament enjoyed the fundamental rights as enshrined in the Constitution, the army personnel can not expect legal protection if they criticize government even as MPs. The judges observed in this case that some questions are too political for the courts. Observers have therefore concluded that the ten seats of the army are under the “presidents control” (Gloppen, Kasimbazi and Kibandama 2008: 61). The reserved seats are generally in the political hands of NRM. This obviously gives the ruling party and edge over the other parties.

The Constitution also allows the President to nominate Ministers who are not members of parliament. By virtue of being ministers, they become ex-official Members of Parliament. There are currently 13 Ex-official MPs in parliament and by implication, NRM members.

### **Multipartyism and Accountability in Government**

In Uganda, historically, people rate ruling parties with corrupt tendencies. For example, there were gold allegations in 1966 under the first Obote government (Mujaju 1987). Under the NRM government, prominent personalities in the ruling party have been accused of corruption. Prominent cases include the alleged plundering of Congo's mineral resources, influence peddling in the privatization of handling services at Entebbe airport, the diversion of Global Fund monies meant for treatment of HIV/Aids victims, and the presidential directive to the Bank of Uganda to give unsecured loan of US \$ 11 million to a local businessman, who happens to be politically connected to Museveni's ruling party (Kiiza 2008). In 2008 the Secretary General of NRM was accused of selling land to National Social Security Fund corruptly at an inflated price of Shs. 11 billion (5.5 million US dollars). Some opposition parties also have an accountability problem. For example, the intermittent wrangles afflicting UPC are associated with the Obote family claiming remittances from the properties belonging to the Milton Obote Foundation, which is supposed to be a UPC foundation, not family property.

Some Parliamentary Committees are headed by members of the opposition including major ones such as the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) that scrutinises government spending and other accountabilities. The PAC is chaired by opposition and has been hailed for investigations of cases of corruption – the most prominent one being the cases of expenditures on CHOGM where Ministers are alleged to have diverted several billions of Uganda shillings. The presence of opposition MPs in parliament has contributed significantly to the tempo of the debate in the house, especially in the area of good governance and accountability. A good example is the recent National Social Security Fund (NSSF) land purchase saga in which it was alleged that Mr. Amama Mbabazi, the NRM Secretary General and others, corruptly sold land to a public body to the tune of

UGX 11billion (about 5.5 Million US dollars). On this, a good number of MPs, regardless of party affiliation were loud and clear; though the NRM members were soon called to order by President Museveni in support of Mbabazi and his group. Though the matter was silenced, the parliamentary record is there for future reference.

The NRM machinery has been working hard to weaken the opposition parliament. It is believed that the NRM has been funding some individuals to undermine their own parties. The biggest causality of such machination is the main opposition party FDC. In the course of 2008 and 2009, FDC “lost” the loyalty of three of its members in parliament – Alex Onzima (shadow minister for defence) and Betty Kamywa (shadow minister for agriculture) publicly denounced their party (FDC). Alfred Kajeke (FDC) announced his resignation from parliament giving no clear reasons.

Five parties: NRM, UPC, CP, DP and JEEMA were have representatives in parliament. This is partly explained by the fact that they have certain “traditional” constituencies. For example, UPC used to be very popular in Obote’s home area of Lango. In fact, most of the MPs it secured in 2006 hail from there. DP on its part also secured all its nine MPs in the central region (Buganda). FDC though new on the political stage, was able to spread its net more nationally in its first ever contest. For example, the FDC presidential candidate Dr Besigye, nationally scored 37.3 % distributed as follows: 34.7% central region, 41.2 % Eastern region, 62.9% Northern region, and 20 percent in Western Uganda. FDC scored best in the Northern and the Eastern Uganda, despite the fact that Besigye hails from Western Uganda. In contrast, Museveni’s biggest support was his home, Western region where he achieved 78.5 percent of his national vote. Museveni scored a miserable 29.6 percent in the whole Northern Uganda. On the whole, one can say that because old parties (DP and UPC) had been negatively castigated and decampaigned by the Movement leadership for a long time, by the time they resumed their active role, so much damage had been done to their credibility. The NRM also made it a point that to pouch leading members of the old parties by either placing them in government positions or dishing out business favours to them. Parties face serious challenges in opening grounds for recruitment of support. Such challenges include;

- The difficulties involved in penetrating the Local Council (LC) structure, which is largely tilted in favour of the NRM. The government has increased districts from 56 in 2005 to 106 at present. LCs are noted as a key vehicle for NRM's mobilization strategy.
- The military establishment that is almost exclusively loyal to Museveni as a person.
- The police force that is decidedly pro-NRM and anti-parties,
- A large percentage of the population that is poor and illiterate, hence politically manipulable, especially by the government agents, who apart from employing intimidation tactics also, use money to induce support for the NRM.
- And a hostile anti-party political atmosphere created by the government that makes the population suspicious of the motives of political parties.

### **Citizens' engagement in politics and Public Debate**

Since 1986, there have been various events of citizens, engagement and debate in public politics. These have included active participation of ordinary people in local elections at various levels from LCI to LC5 and in the national elections. All in all, today there are 945,351 contested seats in the country at all levels. There are over 100 FM radio stations, seven television stations, several newspapers and newsletters, five telephone networks and several internet providers. These avenues, especially the radio talks have increased the tempo of engagement of the citizens in public debate on almost all subjects of public concern. The state however, has at times, unleashed its intolerance in arresting and charging journalists (Human Rights Watch 2006). The state has also been sponsoring callers to constantly rebut the opinions expressed by opposition personalities on the on radio and TV talk shows.

Besides, the NRM as a party enjoys unlimited usage of the state media, (which is supposed to be politically impartial) to advance its view points. The state owns the New Vision paper, as well as its sister newspapers *Lupiny*, *Etop*, *Bukedde* and *Orumuri* that are used to propagate NRM ideology. More recently, the New Vision Group established two radio stations namely Vision Radio, Bukedde Radio and has acquired Radio West,

(previously a private radio). It also established a Northern-based radio known as Mega FM. On these radios, much of the discussion is tilted to favour the NRM policies and ideology. It appears that they are created to counter the more liberal and critical views expressed on private radios such as the Buganda kingdom owned Central Broadcasting Corporation (CBS). Recently in September 2009 CBS was closed at the orders of President Museveni. There is however, a relatively free atmosphere for debate in the country. There are those incidents when opposition politicians are denied to campaign on private radios (Human Rights Watch 2006) even when they had paid for the air time. This is partly explained by the fact that most of the FM radio stations are owned by the NRM big wigs in Kampala as well as up country towns. In some cases, local government officials direct radio owners not to allow opposition politicians to use their radios to reach out to the people.

### **Political Relations between parties and civil society in the Democratisation Process**

Citizen Political engagements mainly are through civil society organizations (CSOs) and community based organizations (CBOs). It is estimated that there are over four thousand registered NGOs and several thousands of community based organizations (CBOs). These engage the government at several levels and on various issues. In recent years, the state came up with the idea of “Prosperity for All” *bonna bagagawale* programme through which the state is funding local savings and credit organizations (SACOs). These operate on the basis of rotating small credit amongst their membership at the local level. Although the programme is supposed to be non-partisan, the funding by the state ties them to the NRM party. The NRM cadres politicize the state funding to the societies to the extent that some individuals subscribing to other parties are coerced to denounce their party affiliation in order to “benefit”. Hence, through SACOs, “*Bonna bagagawale*” (prosperity for all) project, the NRM has intensified its penetration of the lives of ordinary people and their communities using state resources. In addition, most civil society organizations have to tread carefully when dealing with the state in Uganda because there is always the need for them to renew their registration annually, which the state may deny, for “security” or other reasons. Most CSOs shun opposition parties claiming they are non-partisan (Dicklich C. Lwanga 2003).

The current multiparty regime has made some positive changes. There are 60 MPs elected on opposition party ticket, 37 MPs elected as independents, 10 “non-partisan” UPDF (army) MPs. Slightly over 222 MPs are NRM members. The NRM has also signed protocols of cooperation with some independent MPs, either to support the NRM positions in parliament or not to oppose them. Some independents have been offered ministerial positions in government while others are believed to have been paid to support the government. It is also believed that some MPs elected on opposition party ticket have been paid off by the NRM either to cause trouble in their parties or to support the government positions in parliament. There seems to be the some “political prostitution” amongst the independents. As Muriaas points out “informal practices and people’s notions of representation prevent opposition parties from establishing a foothold at the local level” (Muriaas 2009: 91).

While the opposition parties and their members have struggled in parliament to make a contribution to good governance, the structure of the government in Uganda is built on patronage politics (Tangri & Mwenda 2001, 2006). The NRM has a cabinet of 72 ministers, over 100 paid presidential advisers, over 80 Resident District Administrators and their assistants, and over 80 District Chairpersons. The expansion of districts from 56 in 2006 to 96 has increased patron-client politics that bolsters the NRM. In effect the state pays the bills for the “campaigners” of NRM. It has been proposed that all LC officials be paid some honorarium by government (The *Independent* 14 July 2009). The LC structure and its officials are already skewed to the NRM in most parts of the country. The proposed pay would just be the last step in using state resources to turn the elected local officials into NRM party functionaries.

### ***Party Legislation***

The law under which parties operate is the Political Parties and the organization Act (PPOA) 2005. The Act requires every group wishing to operate as a political party to register with the Electoral Commission. Registration requires political groups to fulfill simple conditions to register. These include the need for a political group to have a

constitution, a formal organization, an application to register signed by 50 registered voters, supporters from two thirds of the districts of Uganda, a list of party officials, party programme and a party symbol. The PPOA requires parties to be internally democratic. The law also provides that the state funds political parties, although the Bill to effect this provision is still before the parliament. Parties are supposed to disclose their sources of finances and submit their financial accounts to the Electoral Commission within six months of registration. The disclosure provisions have been flouted by most of the parties, including the ruling NRM. In the aftermath of the 2006 elections, the NRM officials argued that they would not disclose their sponsors because they are supposed to remain synonymous, so did the other parties. This is partly due to the entrenched poor culture of lack of transparency in most public organizations in the country.

### **Internal Democracy in Political Parties**

Within the major political parties themselves a culture of internal democracy has been growing. Since 2006, FDC, NRM, DP UPC, PPP have successfully held delegates conferences. They have successfully elected their top party office bearers. FDC is noted for holding a very successful delegates conference to elect its top leadership. There was healthy competition for the party presidency. Nevertheless, there are internal wrangles that have threatened internal coherence of parties. In FDC the former envoy for presidential affairs, Betty Kamyá resigned her post claiming she was barred from standing as a party chairperson to replace the late Dr. Badru Kigundu. Kamyá argued that the position of party chairperson should be reserved for her ethnic group - the Baganda. Although she went ahead to found her own party the Federal Alliance, she did not resign from FDC party. This is in addition to her refusal to turn up for her party disciplinary committee. The Constitution provides that a person who resigns a party platform upon which he/she was elected; he/she must seek a fresh voters' mandate on a new party platform. Ms. Kamyá has up to this day, not registered her new party because that would imply her resignation from parliament. In the Democratic Party, squabbles have threatened its internal unity. The party today is divided between three groups – the old members loyal to the party president Nobert Mao and another group led by Kampala Central MP Elias Lukwago. These squabbles between Buganda-based DP leaders are

increasingly making it difficult for Mr. Nobert Mao, the Northern-based Gulu District Chairman (now DP President) to realise his dream of revamping DP as a key player on Uganda's political scene .

In UPC, conflicts have been rife over accusations that party president Miria Obote (wife to late president Obote) has been manipulating the members in order to bring her son, Akena (Lira Municipality MP) into the limelight for leadership succession. This has caused some party faithfuls to abandon the party. However, the recent election of seasoned diplomat Mr. Olara Otunu as party President will hopefully take UPC to another level.

### **The electoral system**

The performance of a multiparty system of governance is enhanced by a belief amongst stake-holders that there are fair electoral laws and institutions that can ensure free and fair elections. In Uganda, parties have been revived amidst existence of an intransigent Electoral Commission (EC) which has been accused by the opposition groups as skewed in favour of the NRM. Such a view is given credence by the Supreme Court in the aftermath of the 2001 and 2006 elections when it ruled on both occasions that the Electoral Commission failed to administer free and fair elections. In May 2009, opposition parties presented a list of political and electoral reforms that they believed would strengthen democratic governance. However president Museveni categorically stated he would not effect any reforms. In August 2009, President Museveni re-appointed the same Electoral Commission team presided over by Badru Kigundu amidst protests by opposition supporters. On his part, the Secretary General of the NRM, Mr. Mbabazi praised the re-appointed EC saying that in the past it had done an "excellent job". On the other side, the president of FDC Dr. Kiiza Besigye has countered by saying that the current EC has no legitimacy to preside over any election in the country (New Vision Wednesday, August 26, 2009:5). He has asserted that every election the EC has presided over has been marred with rigging, violence and other irregularities (ibid New Vision). Amidst the reluctance of the government to correct the errors pointed out by courts of law, and going ahead to appoint a discredited EC means that the parties will face a



difficult task of preparing for the next elections in 2011. The NRM government has also sent a wrong message to the voters and to the world to the extent that even if the EC was to perform to its best; there will always be an accusation that they were not impartial and credible.

### **The legal system**

Political parties in Uganda have significant confidence in the judicial system. The courts of law helped political parties in their struggles for opening of political space through judicious rulings on party petitions over repressive laws. FDC President Dr. Kiiza Besigye has taken his electoral grievances to court twice (2001 and 2006). There are however, allegations that in recent past, Museveni has increasingly appointed NRM cadres to all courts of law. It is believed that Museveni is preparing for favourable court rulings in future. The courts of law have been pro-active in governance matters such as anti-corruption rulings, settlement of commercial disputes and others. It is the political cases that seem to have proved rather elusive for courts of law. For example in Brig. Tumukunde Vs AG and the Electoral Commission, in a constitutional petition 6/2005 argued that he was unfairly removed from parliament and that his human rights had been violated. The bench ruling in favour of the defendants, argued that "...even when there is a justifiable claim and constitutional rights are at stake, some questions are too political for the courts" (Gloppen and Kasimbazi 2008: 61). The judges concluded that rights and freedoms under article 20, 21 and 29 of the Constitution can only be enjoyed within the confines of the law, and are not absolute. This indeed, is a contentious position if not a dilution of the people's rights.

### **How the government uses incumbency to weaken the opposition**

Apart from the legal and institutional framework, there are a number of other factors that impact directly on the performance of political parties. These include.

(i) **Political Education:** The Electoral Commission in the two past elections failed to carry out an effective voter education, resulting in several voters failing to exercise their democratic voting rights. On its part, the NRM conducts compulsory ideological politicization courses for civil servants, civic leaders, and ordinary citizens at

Kyankwanzi Institute of Political Education. Though the aim is to spread the NRM ideology, the school is funded by public money. Political parties have complained about it to no avail.

(ii) **Ethnicity** – this is a persistent problem in Uganda’s politics. The Buganda kingdom has consistently demanded for a “federo” (federal status). Both the government and opposition parties have been canvassing Buganda government over this issue without a concrete position. In a bid to manipulate the ethnic factor to its advantage, the NRM government has created ethnic – based districts throughout the country from 39 in 1992 to 106 in 2009. This is likely to favour NRM in future elections. Opposition parties see it as early *jerrymandering* (*curving constituencies in favour of a particular party*).

(iii) **Persistent poverty** – this is a problem for all political parties. The category of people living below one United States dollar per day (absolute poverty) stands at 31 percent of the population. The NRM claims credit for poverty reduction from 52 percent in 1986 to 31 percent at present. There is excessive inequality between the super – rich and the poor of the poor. The irony of wealth accumulation is that most of the wealthy people have benefited from political patronage with the regime in power, by holding big jobs or securing government contracts. Such people are reluctant to associate with the opposition parties, lest they lose their state privileges. State patronage has undermined the formal channels of wealth making and doing clear business. This partly explains the low levels of investment in long term sectors such as heavy industries, hence lack of opportunities in the formal employment sector for college graduates. Desperate job seekers are easily manipulated by the state agencies, just as they do to the peasants.

(iv) **Urban - Rural Divide:** Uganda is largely a rural country. The rate of urbanization in recent years has been as 6 percent, to the extent that the urban population doubles almost every ten years. For example Uganda’s urban population more than tripled between 1980 and 2002, from 940000 to 3,028,809 people. This is politically important because whereas the NRM believes that it has most its support amongst the peasants in the rural areas, the opposition parties have their strongest support in urban areas. Hence, as the education opportunities continue to expand, and more young people live in urban areas, there is a likelihood of increased opportunities for political parties to gain support. Moreover, most of the major parties have also gained foot-hold in the rural areas as

evidenced by the 2006 elections. Thus, whereas the state may not be interested in encouraging democratic pluralism, democratic struggles in various political groups are likely force a wave of change, when the population structure changes over time.

### **Advantages of Inter-Party Co-operation (IPC)**

IPC partners have successfully worked on the following areas.

- (a) IPC came up with a detailed programme of reform including electoral reforms, which are needed to deepen democracy in the country. This was presented to parliament in May 2009. To some extent, the EC agrees with some of the reforms demanded by the opposition parties, but it is the government that is not keen on reforms.
- (b) Ideologically, IPC partners share common values of good governance, for example, they are uncomfortable with the heavy financial burden of the cost of public administration, especially arising from the establishment of unviable districts. They are also critical of lavish and extravagant expenditure by State House (president's official home). IPC is also committed to zero tolerance to corruption.
- (c) IPC is also committed to peaceful resolution of conflicts. The government has historically preferred a military solution to conflicts especially in Northern Uganda.
- (d) IPC is working closely with some human rights organisations to promote the rule of law, democratization and equity in Uganda.
- (e) IPC as a joint political force has potential to pose a formidable challenge to the ruling party once some of the artificial differences between the opposition leaders are buried. Moreover, they have garnered support from multiple constituencies; cross-ethnic support, youth, women, old party faithfuls, business people and donors.
- (f) IPC as a joint force has been able to put up alternative policies for good governance and development of the country.

While the IPC stands to pose a formidable challenge to the NRM in elections, it however, has to overcome some obstacles. These include:

#### *Infiltration by State Agents*

The first main problem is that IPC is highly infiltrated by government security agents. They find it difficult to keep secrets. The NRM uses such information to disorganize the

opposition. Unfortunately, the members of the IPC tend to accuse one another for “leakage” of the “top secrets” which undermines the building of trust amongst the members.

*Financial Constraints:*

Another major problem emanates from financial constraints. IPC members have very little money at their disposal to do party work. Most of the leaders of the opposition parties have to “dig deep” in their personal pockets to finance themselves to do party work. This has constrained most of the party leaders to travel long distances upcountry to establish branches, campaign and mobilize support. Parties have serious difficulties of paying their office rental and party staff, as well as facilitating volunteers. FDC for example was initially housed by a businessman known as Mr. Garuga Musinguzi. However, he has since “retired” from politics. Some people suspect he was “bought” off by the NRM. Several such patrons of the opposition parties tend to “retire” early, leaving their parties in dire need.

*Women’s constituency:* most opposition parties have had difficulties of retaining support of the women, especially in the rural areas because NRM persistently reminds them that they are “NRM women” – claiming that it is the NRM which “liberated women in Uganda. However, younger women are a good recruitment constituency for parties.

*Donors are intransigent (non-committal);* In Uganda, the donors have been more “diplomatic” on the issue of political freedom and democratisation than they have done in many other African countries. The donors who support 40 percent of Uganda’s development budget inevitably have a stake in the governance of the country. However, they tend to praise the Uganda government for effective use of aid and “proper accountability” of aid funds. They pay attention to strengthening of state institutions, for example strengthening the judicial system. While institutions are necessary for democracy, there is need to balance the aid to the state and other stake-holders in the democratization process.

*Disagreement over joint candidates:* The biggest to the IPC is the likely failure to sponsor joint candidates in the 2011 elections. As noted earlier, this has been the main un-doing of opposition parties at most by-elections. When they agreed on one candidate in

Bugweri by-election, Abdu Katuntu of FDC was able to trounce NRM stalwart Kirunda Kivejinja (Minister of internal affairs).

Guarding success: There is need to retain party support. FDC and other opposition parties have suffered declining support, with some of their members of parliament playing a lukewarm part in party activities or for FDC, Wilfred Kajeke (resigned), Betty Kamywa (has dissented). This is likely to impact negatively on the voter support for FDC and other parties in the opposition constituencies.

### ***International cooperation***

This is an area where opposition parties need to do more. Most of the donor support to IPC comes from Swedish organizations especially the Christian Democratic International Centre (KIC). It has supported IPC since its founding. It extended financial support to IPC, enabling most of the opposition parties to hold separate delegates' conferences, inter-party conferences and retreats. As a result of KIC's support, the IPC has been able to set its clear agenda that includes joint demand for constitutional and electoral reforms, a draft joint campaign platform and working protocol of cooperation.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has surveyed the key issues for consideration in promotion of a democratic multiparty system in Uganda. On the one hand, it has looked at the nature of the state in Uganda and its reluctance to promote and deepen multiparty democracy, even after opening political space in 2005. State institutions, especially its coercive arm are skewed to the wishes of the ruling party and sometimes act as if they are an extension of the ruling party. Other institutions of the state particularly the judiciary have been fair to all. However, there are indications that such institutions are being "tamed and trimmed" by the ruling elite to compromise their independence. In this category, the Electoral Commission (EC) is in the limelight as a partial organisation. The question has been consistently raised by the opposition parties is: how can a partial electoral commission produce impartial results?

This paper has argued that whereas the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) after its 20- year no-party rule, reluctantly agreed to re-introduce multiparty politics, it has not been willing to allow the proper functioning of a competitive party system. While multiparty elections were held in 2006, they were controversial, and were challenged on grounds that proper institutional arrangements, fair play and political tolerance were not in place to guarantee free and fair competition for public offices. Violence was rampant, electoral rules were violated, state resources were misused and opposition leaders were harassed.

While the courts of law ruled that such anomalies ought to be corrected, little has been done to this effect. Electoral reforms proposed by the opposition parties have been pushed aside. Police has intensified its harassment of opposition supporters. Thus, the anticipated gains of multiparty elections such as durable peace and stability, peaceful change of government, alternative policy articulation, respect for human rights and democratic accountability may not be realized as the country heads to the second multiparty election. It remains to be seen whether or not, those elections will lead to deepening of democracy or will end up into yet another “fallacy of electoralism”.

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