

MUSEVENI'S UGANDA: ETERNAL SUBSCRIPTION FOR POWER?

Peter Girke / Mathias Kamp

Parliamentary and presidential elections took place in Uganda on February 18, 2011 – the second elections under the relatively new democratic multi-party system that was introduced in 2005. Yoweri Museveni, who who has been in power uninterruptedly since 1986, was elected president for a further five years with a two-thirds majority, so his term of office can now extend to 30 years. Museveni's governing party, the NRM (National Resistance Movement), also enjoyed a comfortable victory with well over two-thirds of the vote.

With the exception of very few isolated protests disputes, the elections went off in a calm and peaceful fashion. However, election observers reported some significant problems and irregularities during the election as well as suggesting that there was not a level playing field for all parties involved. The opposition complained about vote buying, intimidation and manipulation of the vote count and refused to officially recognize the election results. Despite this there were no great protests in the weeks following the election.

Once again the NRM and Museveni were able to consolidate their power base and underline their dominant position in the country's politics. The opposition parties came out of the elections in a much weaker state and during the coming legislative period they will have to focus on trying to rebuild, as they will have little influence on general democratic institutions and processes. As far as the country's democratic development goes, the elections and ensuing results amount to little more than maintenance of



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the status quo. Uganda is still a long way from enjoying a balanced democratic pluralism based on fair competition.

ELECTION RESULTS

According to the official statistics released by the Ugandan Electoral Commission the incumbent president Museveni won 63.38 per cent of the more than eight million votes and was confirmed as the clear winner of the presidential elections. His strongest rival, Kizza Besigye, who stood for election on the opposition Inter-Party Cooperation (IPC) ticket, won a total of 26 per cent of the vote. Third place went to Norbert Mao (Democratic Party, DP), followed by Olara Otunnu (Uganda People's Congress, UPC). Both received less than two per cent of the vote, while a further four presidential candidates achieved less than one per cent each.

Table 1

Results of the Presidential Election

Candidate	Party	Votes	Share in %
Yoweri K. Museveni	National Resistance Movement (NRM)	5,428,369	68.38
Kizza Besigye	Inter-Party Cooperation (IPC) / Forum for Democratic Change (FDC)	2,064,963	26.01
Norbert Mao	Democratic Party (DP)	147,917	1.86
Olara Otunnu	Uganda People's Congress (UPC)	125,059	1.58
Beti Kamywa	Uganda Federal Alliance (UFA)	52,782	0.66
Abed Bwanika	People's Development Party (PDP)	51,108	0.65
Jaberi Bidandi Ssali	People's Progressive Party	34,688	0.44
Samuel Lubega	Independent	32,716	0.41

Source: Electoral Commission of Uganda, as at March 15, 2011.

Once again the NRM won an landslide majority in parliament with 167 seats for directly elected members of parliament from the constituencies and 83 seats for female representatives, who were also directly elected at district level. The Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) was only able to win 34 seats in total and as a result the independent candidates (43 seats), most of whom can be considered

close to the NRM, are actually a bigger faction than the strongest opposition party. The DP has twelve representatives in parliament, while the UPC has nine. The Conservative Party (CP) and the Justice Forum (JEEMA) each won one seat. In addition there are also 15 seats representing youth, workers and people with disabilities, who all belong to the NRM with the exception of two independents, and finally there are ten representatives from the military.

Table 2

Distribution of Seats in Parliament

	Directly elected MPs from the constituencies	Directly elected female representatives from the districts	Representatives of "Special Interest Groups"¹	Total
NRM	167	83	13	263
FDC	22	12	0	34
DP	11	1	0	12
UPC	7	3	0	10
CP	1	0	0	1
JEEMA	1	0	0	1
Indep.	29	12	2	43
Military	—	—	—	10
Total	238	111	15	374

Source: Electoral Commission of Uganda, as at March 18, 2011.²

THE CONDUCT OF THE ELECTIONS

In general the elections went off relatively smoothly and peacefully compared to previous elections in Uganda. Admittedly there were some reports of violent disputes at local level, though there was never any kind of widespread escalation.

- 1 | Representatives for "Special Interest Groups" are elected to support the interests of youth, workers and people with disabilities.
- 2 | Some seats have not been included in the statistics, so the overall totals could go up.

Initial reports by international observers such as Catherine Ashton³, High Representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy, were partly positive about the conduct of the elections which could be seen as helping to further consolidate democratic processes not only in Uganda but also in the region as a whole. The main points of note were that the elections had gone off peacefully and that the technical set-up was much better than it had been during the previous elections in 2006.

Various election observers pointed to logistical and organisational problems and some irregularities such as insufficient numbers of electoral staff and the use of unsealed ballot boxes.

However, an independent EU electoral observation mission concluded in their preliminary findings that, among other things, the incumbents had, to an extent, exploited the advantages of being in power and so the principle of a level playing field had been seriously compromised. Various election observers pointed to logistical and organisational problems and some irregularities including delays in delivering election materials, late opening of polling stations, inconsistent application of rules and procedures by the sometimes insufficient numbers of electoral staff and instances of some serious failures to adhere to international standards, such as the use of unsealed ballot boxes.⁴

A lot of the criticism was aimed at the way voters were registered and the way in which voters lists were compiled. The Ugandan electoral commission scrapped the requirement to use voter ID cards and announced that identification via electoral rolls was sufficient. The opposition were particularly critical of this move, arguing that it would make vote-rigging much easier, and indeed in some constituencies it was reported that some voter names were missing from the lists even though some of the people affected could produce voter ID cards.

What is also worth noting is how low the turnout was in comparison to the previous election when 70 per cent of registered voters cast their vote. This time the number dropped below 60 per cent. This surprised many observers, as a survey carried out in January by the *Afrobarometer* suggested that 85 per cent of those asked intended to vote.

3 | Cf. EU press release issued February 20, 2011.

4 | Cf. interim report of the EU Election Observation Mission, February 20, 2011.

Experts believe that several factors contributed to such a low turnout. Many voters may have been intimidated by the massive presence of the military and other security organisations and so stayed away from the election out of fear. Another reason may be the poor organisation of the elections. Many of those eligible to vote were ultimately unable to cast their vote because their names were not on the electoral rolls. New voters in particular seem to have been assigned to the many different polling stations in an inconsistent and arbitrary manner and as a result many of them turned up at the wrong polling station and were turned away.

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Others suggest that the problem lies in widespread apathy amongst the people and a loss of trust in democratic institutions. Disappointments with representatives elected in the past and experience with vote rigging in previous elections may have given many people the feeling that their vote would not really have any effect on the outcome of the elections or the political fortunes of their country. Clearly more than anybody it was disappointed opposition supporters who stayed away due to a lack of confidence in their candidates and their general belief that they were not going to see much success at the polls. This suggests that the opposition parties failed to convince or effectively mobilise their own supporters.

THE (NOT SO) SURPRISING STRENGTH OF MUSEVENI AND THE NRM

President Museveni and the NRM came out of the election stronger than ever. While in previous elections Museveni had constantly lost votes, this time he was able to actually gain additional support again and win a comfortable two-thirds majority. The NRM and President Museveni have now been in power without a break since 1986. The NRM was able to cement its power under what is known as the "Movement System", which, while including democratic elements, actually served to restrict democratic competition. In 2005 a return to a multi-party system was introduced following a national referendum.

The NRM's dominance was also seen in the parliamentary elections, where their candidates were elected in the overwhelming majority of constituencies, in some cases without any real opposition or indeed without any actual opposition candidates at all. In many constituencies internal competition amongst NRM politicians lead to NRM hopefuls who failed to win their party's nomination standing as independents. Of the losers amongst NRM candidates, 19 were ministers and state ministers from the previous cabinet who missed out on being directly re-elected to parliament, including the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Ministers for Agriculture, Education and Communication.

A few months before the election only the real optimists within the NRM would have dared to predict such a major victory at the polls. Indeed, many observers were expecting the trend towards ever smaller majorities for the NRM to continue. Between 1995 and 2006 Museveni's vote went down from 75 to 59 per cent. It was only when the election campaigns really got under way that his overwhelming dominance became evident. Reliable polls leading up to the election predicted that he would win a two-thirds majority.

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Voting behaviour at a regional level was also somewhat surprising. Museveni and the NRM were able to win a clear majority in nearly every single region for the first time, even in the northern districts that are considered to be opposition strongholds, as well as in the central region around Kampala (Kingdom of Buganda). Even the capital Kampala, whose more enlightened and critical inhabitants make the city a clear opposition stronghold, saw a dead heat between Museveni and the IPC candidate Besigye. Both got approximately 46 per cent of the vote.

For the Ugandan opposition the election results must be seen as a bitter defeat. Besigye, Museveni's strongest challenger, who has now stood for President three times against Museveni without success, won only 26 per cent of the vote, a long way behind the respectable 37 per cent he achieved in 2006. For the 2011 elections his party, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), joined forces with

three smaller parties to form an opposition alliance called the Inter-Party Cooperation, which selected Besigye as their joint candidate.

The performance of other traditional parties such as the Democratic Party and the Uganda People's Congress must also be considered disappointing. Both parties had prominent and promising candidates leading their campaigns. As part of the process of rejuvenation the DP chose the eloquent Norbert Mao as their candidate. He had won a lot of respect and popularity as a local politician in Gulu in the north of Uganda when he was responsible for the rebuilding of the area following many years of conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The UPC selected Olara Otunnu, an experienced diplomat and a former special envoy of the United Nations. However, neither of them was able to help their parties make any significant gains and, with each of them getting less than two per cent of the vote, their election results were little more than a disaster.

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REACTION: REFUSAL TO RECOGNISE THE RESULTS, BUT NO MASS PROTESTS

The initial reaction of the opposition parties was to blame the ruling party's manipulation of the voting for their poor showing. None of the opposition candidates, including Beti Kamywa of the Uganda Federal Alliance, were prepared to recognise the results.

In early statements to the press immediately following the elections and after the announcement of the results Besigye and the leadership of the IPC stated that they did not recognise the election results due to the "obvious attempts by Museveni's supporters to influence and manipulate the outcome". As apparent evidence of vote rigging, at a press conference Besigye produced a pile of voting slips marked with crosses for Museveni. These "pre-prepared voting slips for vote rigging" had been obtained by IPC election observers and represented only the "tip of the iceberg", Besigye said.⁵ However, they were not going to turn to the courts as in previous years as they did not consider the

5 | Cf. IPC press release issued February 19, 2011.

judiciary to be independent. During the election campaign Besigye had already suggested that in the case of vote rigging the “will of the people” would be enforced by “other means” and pointed to the protests in Tunisia and Egypt.

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As a result, the state of alert and presence of security forces remained high for some time after the elections. Museveni had already announced in the run-up to the election that no “illegal” protests would be tolerated and that trouble-makers would be immediately arrested. However, from the very beginning it never looked like significant numbers of people would be persuaded to protest. For one thing, Museveni had a great deal of support, and there was also too much fear of violence and instability within the country. There were a few calls for protests from the ranks of the opposition – though not from Besigye and Mao – but these largely fell on deaf ears.

In a joint statement the most prominent opposition representatives, including Besigye and Mao, called for a “long-term campaign of resistance and civil disobedience” rather than any concrete protests, but without specifying exactly what this should involve. However, just one month after the elections the voices of protest were already starting to die away. The opposition parties had started to look inwards and to analyse their bitter election defeats and the consequences for the opposition’s future work.

THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN – “PEACEFUL, BUT HARDLY FAIR”

The election campaigns, which officially started on October 18, 2010 for the presidential candidates and on December 16 for the parliamentary candidates, were fought in a very open way, and freedom of speech and the right of assembly were widely respected. All parties held election rallies throughout the country; radio, newspapers and TV were full of reports about the election; posters of the candidates were put up everywhere and trucks with loudspeakers boomed out the politicians’ messages. The political rhetoric was generally more balanced and less aggressive than in previous elections. The fact that the presidential candidates stuck to the schedule prepared by the electoral

commission contributed to the relatively smooth running of the election, along with the much-improved behaviour of the police. Nevertheless, there were once again instances of opposition politicians and NGO and party activists being arrested on dubious grounds.

During the campaign there was a slight tendency to focus more on important topics and less on trivial personal issues, something which the parties picked up on and the people clearly demanded. This development was not only down to the parties becoming more "demand-oriented" but is also a reflection of the work done by the electoral commission and (especially) by NGOs in the area of political education. Having said that, much of the content of the campaigns was largely superficial and consisted of a lot of unrealistic election promises without any calculation of the financial costs.

A lot of the discussions revolved around the different approaches of the parties and their candidates towards the main political issues of health, education and the economy. Other topics of national interest included the fight against corruption, the development of the agricultural sector, infrastructure improvements (especially roads) and peace and stability. In the end there was a whole raft of topics for discussion but all the parties and candidates displayed a certain arbitrariness and lack of clear profiles.

The key issue for both sides was the question of the need for change. The NRM and Museveni pointed to their previous achievements, promised a continuation of existing policies that had brought peace and stability to the country and warned that after 25 years in power the country was not yet ready for a change in government. "Prosperity for all" was their key message in this respect. The opposition parties and candidates on the other hand were promoting the need for "fundamental change" in all areas. They pointed to the "failure" of the government in different political areas, especially their failure to guarantee public services and to fight the problem of growing corruption.

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Some of the focus on key issues got a bit lost amongst the debates on how the election campaigns and the elections themselves were to be organised and run. Demands for electoral reforms as proposed by the opposition as well as foreign actors such as the EU and the USA were not met by the government. The opposition complained right at the beginning of the campaign that there was no guarantee of freedom or fairness. They also expressed their mistrust of the electoral commission, which had been appointed by Museveni and which had been accused of not being truly independent. So at the end of the day the elections were being organised by an electoral commission that did not enjoy the trust of all actors.

FAIRNESS OF THE ELECTION

Despite the guarantee of a generally peaceful political contest, the elections were characterised by the overwhelming dominance of the ruling NRM. All in all, the advantages of incumbency, the financial might of the NRM, the unbalanced nature of much of the reporting and the blurring of the edges between the state apparatus and the NRM as a party, which was criticised by many observers, made for a generally unfair contest. As a result the potential for success for the opposition parties was clearly reduced, particularly as this was part of a long-term trend and not just a one-off situation during the elections.

The NRM was able to exploit its strategic advantage as the ruling party very effectively. Museveni had all resources of the state apparatus available to him during his election campaign.

The opposition parties invested in expensive country-wide campaigns and were generally able to hold their election rallies without any significant problems from governmental bodies or the security forces. But despite this the NRM was able to exploit its strategic advantage as the ruling party very effectively. The incumbent president Museveni, for instance, had all the resources of the state apparatus available to him during his election campaign and – according to critics – he made excessive use of it. The NRM's financial superiority was also clear for all to see. The most serious accusation was that they had used the controversial supplementary budget, which was passed shortly before the elections, to pay for their expensive election campaign. According to the media, who based

their reports on statements from the Finance Ministry, this left the Ugandan state “on the brink of bankruptcy”.⁶

The election campaign was the most expensive in Uganda’s history. People started to say that this year’s election would be won “at any cost” in contrast to previous elections which had been won “by any means”. One of the main problems was a general lack of transparency when it came to how the election campaigns and the parties themselves were being financed. Critics, including election observers from the European Union and the Commonwealth, complained that even on election day itself “the ruling party in particular” was using bribes to gain votes. This was part of a clear trend towards the “commercialisation of politics” which culminated in some instances in votes obviously being bought.⁷ The EU Observation Mission also suggested that many NRM candidates had used government development programmes (e.g. for restructuring and agricultural development) to put pressure on voters. The candidates suggested that voters would only be able to benefit from project funds if they supported the NRM.

For a long time Museveni’s regime has been seen as a model of success within the African context, particularly as it has been able to bring about long-term stability and peace after years of war and chaos and has furthered economic development. However, over time there has been a growing sense of scepticism about the regime, especially due to what critics consider to be a more and more authoritarian leadership style and growing evidence of patronage and corruption within the country. During the elections it was also obvious that, even six years after the abolition of the Movement System and the introduction of a multi-party democracy, the separation between the state and the former “state party”, the NRM, had still not been fully achieved. The EU Observer Mission claimed that, even at local level, civil servants who had a duty to remain neutral had sided with the NRM and supported their election campaign, including powerful district leaders appointed by the president and security service personnel.

Over time there has been a growing sense of scepticism about Museveni’s regime, and growing evidence of patronage and corruption within the country.

6 | Cf. i.a. “Election Funding: Uganda is broke, says Bbumba as tough times loom,” in: *The East African*, February 14, 2011.

7 | Cf. interim reports of the EU Observation Mission and the Commonwealth Observer Group of February 20, 2011.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

There was a huge amount of coverage of the election campaign on radio and television as well as in print and in the electronic media. In contrast to previous elections the quality of the reporting was much higher. The media adopted a much more active role in that they did not just describe what was happening but actually analysed and even sometimes criticised party programmes or the whole election situation itself. While the media was, with the odd exception, able to report freely on what was happening, there was still a noticeable bias towards the ruling party, especially from within the state media. The NRM and President Museveni enjoyed much higher media coverage and were accorded many more column inches in reports.

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According to EU observers the state media, especially state-owned radio stations and the public broadcaster UBC (Uganda Broadcasting Corporation), which is the only one with the capability to broadcast to all parts of the country, did not live up to its legal duty to treat all candidates equally. For instance UBC TV dedicated 14 hours to reporting on Museveni and the NRM and less than one hour to reporting on his main challenger Besigye and the four parties that were backing him. Also, as electionday approached, the tone of the reporting in relation to the opposition parties had become predominantly negative.⁸

Even the Media Council, which is responsible for monitoring the media and is not considered to be anti-government, cautioned both private and public media companies against not allowing equal access to the different candidates and reminded radio stations that their broadcasts were "public goods".

What is of more worrying, especially at local level, is what critics saw as a trend towards a kind of self-censorship where individual journalists or media companies tried to avoid coming into conflict with government politicians.

8 | Cf. Preliminary report of the EU Election Observation Mission, February 20, 2011; cf. also "How Media Tilted the Election for Museveni," in: *The Independent*, March 3, 2011.

During the election campaign this meant that there was rarely more than very cautious criticism of the government's performance.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE SECURITY SERVICES

In the run up to the elections political and voter education played a key role and was considered to be very important, unlike during the 2006 elections. This was only possible because elements of civil society became actively involved. In this case it was non-governmental and grass roots organisations who grasped the nettle, together with some government institutions, mainly the Electoral Commission, although the latter did not really have adequate funding. The Electoral Commission authorised more than 70 organisations to help educate voters and set up nearly 40 local election observer missions that planned to have over 10,000 observers in place. This civic education wasn't just about short-term voter education but also addressed some critical issues. The NGO Forum for instance published what was known as the "Citizen's Manifesto" which addressed "citizen's issues". Similar initiatives were carried out by other interest groups such as youth and women's organisations. While these types of initiatives definitely helped to ensure that politicians adopted positions on issues such as freedom from violence and vote-rigging, it is unclear whether these activities within civil society had any real impact at the end of the day in terms of reducing voter intimidation or vote buying.

The Electoral Commission authorised more than 70 organisations to help educate voters and set up nearly 40 local election observer missions.

One of the main criticisms by election observers was the significant presence of security forces on election day and in the immediate run-up to the election. Even during the election campaign itself new policemen were being recruited and rapidly trained. Amongst the additional new security forces were the "crime preventers" – citizens who were recruited in villages to support the police during the elections. According to the EU Mission the presence of these "troops" was also an attempt to intimidate opposition supporters and to win over young people to the ruling party. On election day and immediately beforehand, huge numbers of police and military were to be seen patrolling

throughout the whole country and were even present at the polling stations. Even during the election campaign police vehicles and equipment were deployed to best media effect. While supporters welcomed these measures as a way of ensuring that the elections went off peacefully and that riots were avoided, critics saw them as a means of intimidating and influencing voters in such a way that their ability to exercise a free vote was compromised.

A CHANGE OF STRATEGY? – MUSEVENI'S FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

Less vote-rigging, less intimidation, but instead more money for intensive campaigning and bribing voters – this is how many observers summed up Museveni's "change of strategy". In contrast to the elections in 2006 there were far fewer attempts to intimidate the opposition. Aside from unequal access to the media and occasional disputes with over-zealous civil servants at local level, opposition candidates were able to fight their elections campaigns unhindered this time around.

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Alongside the "commercialisation" of the election campaign mentioned above, it was felt that the NRM also used the creation of new districts as a means of gaining political support. The granting of district status to smaller and smaller areas is very popular amongst local populations as the additional financial funding helps to create jobs and political positions. The election results would seem to confirm this, as in the 52 districts that were created in the last ten years there was only an opposition majority in two of them, while Museveni had a clear majority in the others.

Observers also point to Museveni's own appearances and rhetoric during the elections as being key factors for success. He came across as being close to the people and a real father-figure, spending more time on local concerns than on the kind of national issues that opposition politicians were focusing on. During countless local election rallies he took the time to listen to local people's concerns and in most cases offered "quick and pragmatic solutions". When faced with criticism about corruption and poor governmental

performance he tended to blame “technocrats” and local politicians. By referring to Uganda’s conflict-ridden past he warned against regime change which would lead to chaos and war.

REASONS FOR THE WEAKNESS OF THE OPPOSITION

The dominance of the NRM is not the only reason why the opposition parties performed so badly. Clearly the parties and their presidential candidates failed to present themselves as realistic alternatives to lead the country. The IPC candidate Besigye was not able to shake off his “loser” image after two previous failed attempts. One of the biggest weaknesses of the opposition was their lack of roots at local level together with their generally poor organisational structures. They lacked local mechanisms to mobilise support across the country and to cement the voters’ longer-term support for their parties.

Their policy programmes were as weak as ever. In this respect the NRM, with its constant reference to previous achievements and government programmes, had a distinct advantage. The main focus of opposition programmes and rhetoric was a negative attempt to differentiate themselves from the NRM government rather than a positive attempt to sell an alternative political approach. A particular setback for Besigye came in the form of an accusation of plagiarism, that was much discussed in the media. Apparently whole passages of the FDC manifesto had been lifted from the election programme of the British Conservative Party under David Cameron.

Andrew Mwenda, one of the most prominent critical journalists in the country, felt that there were serious weaknesses in the opposition’s rhetoric and mobilisation strategies, especially those of IPC candidate Besigye. For one thing he was not able to convince opposition supporters that change was possible in spite of the difficult circumstances. Secondly, Mwenda believes that, even assuming that there would be a groundswell of support for change, the opposition still failed to convince people that such a change was really necessary.⁹

9 | Andrew Mwenda, “Why Museveni won and Besigye lost and what can be done for the future,” *The Independent*, February 24, 2011.

More unity amongst the opposition might have increased their chances of enjoying electoral success. However, attempts to form a united opposition bloc around the IPC failed due to the fact that the traditional DP and UPC parties either would not cooperate or pulled out because of concerns about the FDC becoming the dominant party.

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR THE OPPOSITION

Following their crushing defeat, the opposition parties are now in disarray and appear to be largely in a state of shock. There have been no protest actions, which would have been rather pointless anyway. It remains to be seen whether they have sufficient professionalism and energy to analyse the elections and to develop a strategy for strengthening party structures. At the moment there is little to suggest that after these elections the opposition is likely to work any harder at (re-)building than they did in the five years after the elections in 2006. The question will also arise as to whether Besigye will continue to be the top man within the FDC or indeed whether he wants this position. The two traditional parties, the DP and the UPC, have probably forfeited a lot of their national credibility. Norbert Mao of the DP in particular, who entered the election as the young, charismatic hope of the party, will find it difficult to rebuild the DP with this kind of mandate or to fill the potential vacuum in the opposition ranks if Besigye decides to step down.

The other question is which role the weakened opposition can or wants to play in the affairs of government during the coming legislative period. In terms of parliamentary voting their influence and ability to provide checks and balances will be very limited, bearing in mind the NRM's overwhelming majority and the high number of independent MPs who are close to the NRM. It is therefore all the more important that they take advantage of non-parliamentary protests and other opportunities to exercise influence on the people, including effective networking within civil society. Some observers see a boycott of parliament as a logical consequence of their non-recognition of the election results. However, it is unlikely that those candidates who were successful will willingly give up their hard-fought parliamentary seats and all the privileges that go with them.

Even if the individual opposition parties spend a lot of time navel-gazing, the question of building a unified opposition front will raise its head sooner or later. On the one hand this would be strategically important in order to develop a stronger opposition to the ruling party but, at the same time, thoughts of cooperation should not deflect the parties from the pressing need to strengthen their own individual institutions.

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR THE (NEW) GOVERNMENT

The Museveni government will once again be able to rule with a comfortable majority and should not expect to meet any major obstacles en route to achieving their political goals. However, one challenge remains: to ensure that the country stays unified by promoting constructive dialogue with opposition and civil society alike.

If they are unable to tackle serious social problems such as poverty and unemployment with effective policies or to provide better public services they may find their support dwindling rapidly. Even if the people's frustration about the high levels of corruption and poor levels of public services has so far not manifested itself in rejection of the government, the potential for future conflicts and protests is not to be underestimated.

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Many critics see a growing trend towards patronage and cronyism in Museveni's approach to policy making and retention of power. This is reflected in a strategy based on the selective and personalised allocation of state funds to specific individuals or groups in order to "buy" political support. As a result the state is losing its ability to effectively carry out its own duty to provide public services in an impartial way. Many see this opportunistic and short-term gain-oriented strategy as putting the state's ability to fulfil its political and economic functions at risk and are concerned that there will be a breakdown of public services in many areas for the underprivileged majority of the Ugandan people.

This danger is increased by the fact that the overall costs of the public sector are rising significantly due to over-blown administrative structures. A good example would be the creation of ever more districts, which are not only costly in terms of the funds that need to be allocated to them, but also because each new district brings with it a corresponding expansion of administrative structures at

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local through to national levels. As a result parliament and possibly also the cabinet are likely to grow to a record size. Even in the last legislative period there were 72 people in the cabinet (despite the number being limited to 42 in the constitution). As a result of the NRM's successes in regions such as North Uganda and as a way of rewarding political loyalty it is possible that even more positions may be created. In 2009 Uganda already had the highest number of decentralised administrative bodies in Africa. This creation of more and more bodies and positions is putting a significant strain on an already over-stretched national budget.

THE ECONOMIC SITUATION AND THE FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF THESE EXPENSIVE ELECTIONS

In the aftermath of the elections the general financial and economic situation in Uganda faces a number of challenges. As a result of the supplementary budget the state coffers are basically empty. The rate of inflation is going up and there is a growing sense of concern and frustration amongst the people over rising food and petrol prices. The finance ministry and the government as a whole seem to be somewhat out of ideas and strategies to deal with problems that they have caused themselves and economists are predicting hard economic times ahead. Bearing in mind the state of the budget it seems unlikely that they will be able to get through this financial year without either further raising inflation through the use of new money, borrowing massively or damaging the economy as a whole through radical cuts in government expenditure (the state is by far the biggest investor in Uganda) and cutting public services even more.

While the NRM government can look forward to significant future income from oil, any hopes they may have that this

income will be of immediate help in overcoming the budget crisis and other pressing economic problems may well be dashed. Oil production is unlikely to start before next year and the government's own oil production strategy, which is not yet fully developed, may result in further delays. And it is still not clear whether the "oil blessing" may not turn out to be a curse. There is huge potential for economic growth and development with sensible management of oil reserves and income from the oil business, but there are also significant risks if the business is mismanaged, as has been the case in other African countries. The big question is whether the income will be used sensibly for the benefit of the population as a whole or whether in fact it will be used to strengthen and maintain the growing system of corruption and patronage noted by many critics.

There is huge potential for economic growth with sensible management of oil reserves, but there are also significant risks if the business is mismanaged.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS AND THE ROLE OF THE COUNTRY'S YOUTH

In international terms the Ugandan population is very young and is growing rapidly. Statistics from 2010 show that young people under the age of 20 make up 60 per cent of the population and this trend is growing. According to a World Bank report in 2008 Uganda not only had the youngest population in the world but also the highest level of young people out of work. Unemployment amongst young people between 15 and 24 stood at 83 per cent. Since then the situation has got worse rather than better. Every year Uganda produces 400,000 graduates from tertiary education but only approximately one quarter of these find a job. This means that there is a whole generation of well-educated young people who have few if any prospects. In many other countries, such as those Arab nations that are currently going through a period of turmoil, this is one of the key factors underlying the protests and the movements for regime change.

In Uganda this has so far not been an issue and the likelihood of protest movements springing up is still considered to be small. Museveni was able to win the votes of young people during the election in spite of the lack of jobs and prospects. According to observers, one of the

main reasons for this were all the “presents” for young people in the form of t-shirts, cash, etc., that were used to encourage them to vote for Museveni. It would also appear that the concepts of peace, stability and Museveni’s oft-cited “continuity” strike a chord amongst young people too, although none of those under 25 have ever experienced any other regime and cannot draw any comparisons with the country’s conflict-ridden past.

On the other hand there are also many young people who have totally lost faith in politics and who did not take part in the elections. These silent, apolitical or even apathetic masses have so far not mobilised themselves into any form of protest movement. However, if the situation in the country were to get worse, as many fear, then this may change in the not-too-distant future.

DEVELOPMENT AID AND THE PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY

The international community can also learn important lessons from these elections. Donor countries who are involved in development programmes with Uganda are likely to see these latest political developments in a negative light.

Despite a slight reduction in development aid in the current budget, Uganda still receives significant development aid funds which are not directly linked to specific projects, but which flow directly into state coffers. The passing of the supplementary budget at a record 260 million dollars and the accusation (as yet unproven) that it was used to help fund the election campaign made even western donor countries sit up and take notice, especially as this unprecedented lack of fiscal discipline in handling debt and inflation could have a significant impact on the economic situation as a whole.

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Observers have noticed a growing self-confidence on the part of the Ugandan government when it comes to dealing with western donor countries, even to the point of making an ostentatious show of indifference to their criticism. This is a relatively new development and many experts believe that this new-found self-confidence is linked to the

knowledge that they will soon have significant oil revenues, even if production is unlikely to start for one or two more years.

Alongside their methods of providing development aid, the donor countries may also need to think about how the funds are being used. One key aim should be positive steps towards the promotion of democracy. This would include measures to fight corruption, the strengthening of democratic institutions and the promotion of important democratic reforms. Once again there are likely to be calls for reforms on electoral law and party financing and these should be very much on the agenda.

Reforms on electoral law and party financing should be on the agenda. There is also a need for support in the area of political education and in promoting a free and professional media.

There is also a pressing need for support in the area of political education to help create a democratic culture and in promoting a free and professional media. There is great potential within Ugandan civil society, which was much more strongly represented during the 2011 elections than ever before, to help with the further development of democracy within the country.

OUTLOOK: MUSEVENI FOR EVER?

An assessment of the 2011 elections in Uganda throws up a conflicting picture. On the one hand it is very encouraging that in the main the elections went off peacefully. On the other hand, the problems and irregularities which came to the fore during the elections serve to emphasise the work that still needs to be done to strengthen democratic electoral procedures. The dominant position of the ruling party and the hurdles that the opposition still faces in many areas show that there is still a significant gap between the creation of formal democratic elements and the practice of real democracy with open contests on a level playing field.

The elections just confirm the basic status quo which exists in Uganda, not only as regards the Museveni government's grip on power but with a view to the general state of democracy. If anything, the weakening of the opposition parties represents a step backwards for the democratic multi-party system. Instead of an increase in pluralism, the trend is towards the institutionalisation of a system

with one dominant party, with the ruling NRM keeping the upper hand for many years to come.

The effectiveness of checks and balances between the institutions and democratic parties is greatly limited because of the weakened opposition. At the moment there is still the possibility of a mass protest movement outside of the democratic institutions. The clear majority of the NRM in parliament and the dominance of the executive around Museveni will lead to power being concentrated, undermining the chances of stabilising and consolidating real democracy.

It will be interesting to see the degree of mutual dependence between the dominant NRM and Museveni's personal power. Many observers believe the question of Museveni's successor is coming increasingly to the fore,

Museveni has already announced that he wants to stand again in 2016. A transfer of power or removal from office is not on the horizon.

with all the attendant potential for conflict within the NRM. Museveni himself has already announced that he wants to stand again in 2016. At the moment a transfer of power or removal from office is not on the horizon. In the aftermath of the elections the NRM began discussing various legislative proposals to extend the presidential term to seven years, removing or raising the age limit for presidential candidates and changing the absolute majority required in the presidential elections to a simple majority. All these proposals can be seen as attempts to lay the foundations for the president to remain in power. But the NRM has young members who are not necessarily happy with Museveni's unchallenged dominance. By the second half of his term these voices could become more significant if they call for the party to be modernised. This could really test the solidarity and internal equilibrium of the NRM.

It remains to be seen whether in the long term democracy will gain ground or whether, as seems to be the trend, the increasingly authoritarian and clientelistic style of leadership will continue. The fact that Uganda will soon be an oil exporter should not be underestimated in this respect.

In light of its clear majority and the anticipated oil income, the government has an opportunity to drive through (reform) policies to promote the country's development. But first it needs to deal with the current budget crisis and ensure there is fiscal discipline and sensible management of the economy. The most pressing issues are still the fight against poverty and the improvement of public services, particularly health care and education. And if it fails to do something about the country's growing youth unemployment problems the country's much-vaunted stability will soon be a thing of the past.

For the opposition it is just a question of political survival. The next legislative term must be used to strengthen party structures and policies and to develop sensible strategies to gain political influence and to expand its supporter base. The opposition basically has to prove its political relevance. It will only have any hope of gaining power if it keeps up the pressure on the government to introduce democratic and institutional reforms and prove to the people that it presents a credible and competent alternative. If they fail in this, the opposition parties will in the long run be ridiculed for acting as mere decoration for Uganda's democracy.