

The Crossover: Exploring the Party Identification Paradox in Uganda's Multiparty Politics

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Abstract

Under Uganda's current nascent multiparty political framework, party identification and loyalty remain precarious. Crossing over from one political party to another is a common occurrence among both the political elites and the vast majority of citizens. The logic of party crossovers is that it strengthens the receiving side, while weakening the abandoned side. The party identification crisis in Uganda started shortly before independence and it continues to-date. What explains these crossovers? This paper explores the historical narratives and provides a comprehensive theoretical background of party identification in Uganda. It shows that even if the Michigan school of thought and the rational choice theory offer a clearer analytical perspective, it is still inadequate to explain Uganda's party identification crisis. The paper presents another theoretical framework which considers partisans as individuals in search of economic opportunities.

1. Introduction

In many developed countries, most citizens identify themselves with political parties which extol their individual virtues and support their interests in policy formulation, implementation and service delivery. It is, therefore, very common to find Americans subscribing to either

the Democratic or the Republican Party and the British who are proud enthusiasts of either the Labour or the Conservative Party. Needless to say, there has of course been an increase in independent citizens who belong to neither side of the political spectrum.¹²⁷

In many African countries, political party identification was a strong symbol of nationalism during the post-colonial struggle and shortly after independence. The political parties which led anti-colonial and liberation struggles, such as the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) in Uganda, Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) in Tanganyika, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, and the Convention People's Party (CPP) in Ghana, to mention but a few, automatically or easily won the loyalty and support of the majority of the citizenry. This thus enabled such political parties to easily evolve into giant political organisations because of the loyalty accorded to them for leading the liberation struggles. After independence, the rise of opposing political groups, militarism and coups d'état changed the political landscape and party identity in Africa.

In Uganda, the party identification crisis started shortly before the country's independence in 1962 when the Uganda National Congress (UNC) and Uganda Peoples' Union (UPU) merged to form the Uganda People's Congress (UPC). It continued during the Obote I government when there were massive crossovers to the UPC from the DP and *Kabaka Yekka* party. After the complete destruction of political participation from 1971-79, Amin's dictatorship was toppled,

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127 Wilson, Q., & Dilulio Jr, J. (1995). *How American Government Works*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

and the Obote II government created some democratic window of opportunity. As multipartism revived, party identification became more intricate as increasing numbers of Ugandans got confused about where to place their political loyalty. The resultant effect was increasing crossovers between parties. This was evidenced in the 1980 elections where new parties emerged to lure recruits while old parties merged to widen their political capital.

The political disorders and NRA guerrilla struggles between 1981 and 1985 stifled Uganda's democratic apparatus and this problem was further exacerbated in 1986 when President Museveni declared Uganda a one-party state. After running Uganda for ten years as a one-party state, the NRM government promulgated the 1995 constitution, which in part started 'sweeping the road' for the return of multiparty politics. In 2005, a national referendum ushered in a more robust space for multiparty political engagement. As a result, political elites and citizens have formed, joined and crisscrossed between different political parties in a purported quest for better democratic space and good governance.

This paper, thus, does not only explain the historical perspectives and context of party identity in Uganda but it also seeks to examine the role of rents in shaping the dynamics of elites' and citizens' loyalty to a given political party. Specifically, the paper attempts to highlight how and why political parties which are dominant, powerful, richer and/or ruling or are perceived to be so are able to attract greater allegiance and support from political elites and the citizens. The fundamental argument of the paper is that party identity in Uganda is to a very large extent determined by the need to survive and build/widen clientelistic networks. As

such, political agents are always in a continuous rents *shopping spree* from political parties.

The paper starts with an outline of historical narratives of party identity crisis in Uganda by explicitly analysing the dynamics of the four major political parties in Uganda, i.e. the Uganda People's Party (UPC), the Democratic Party (DP), the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC). Building on sociological and psychological attachment party identity theory by Campbell *et al.* (1960), and Converse (1969), the rational choice and issue-based theory by Harrop and Miller (1987), etc, we present and explain the logic the party identity crisis in Uganda. Building on the rational choice theory, we offer a theoretical framework to expound on the party identification question in Uganda using the political clientelism and rent-seeking school of thought. The paper concludes by providing relevant recommendations to key stakeholders involved in promoting democracy and good governance in Uganda in particular and in Africa at large.

2. What is party identification?

Party identification is a stance that people take towards political parties.¹²⁸ Simply put, it is the act of paying allegiance and loyalty to a political party that one identifies him/herself with. This identification is exercised through voting for the party during elections and/or offering physical, financial and moral support to the party's initiatives such as campaigns, community outreach, and businesses, among others. When political parties provide their followers with a stable and distinctive

128 Zuckerman, A.S. * & Brynin, M. (2001). *A decision heuristic for party identification: New British and German data and a new understanding for a classic concept.*

set of ideas and goals (symbols) that anchor their expectations about democracy, orient them in a general way towards policy options, and make them feel part of the process of collective choice, party loyalty and affiliation increase.¹²⁹

Party identification is thus shaped by a plethora of socio-cultural, geographical, economic and political variables. Generally, both objective factors that cut across a population and subjectively held sentiments determine the pattern of voting and the choices made in an electoral contest. The former may entail, among other things, the socio-economic status of the voters and their ideological persuasion while the latter may take on more sectarian considerations such as race, ethnicity, religion etc.¹³⁰ In Uganda, party identification is a subject of contentious debate as only a few political elites and citizens remain loyal while for the majority, crisscrossing from one party to the next is common.

This begs a fundamental question: Why do some people remain loyal to a specific political party, while for others, partisanship is precarious? The next section answers this question by providing the historical perspectives and the dynamics of party identification within the four major political parties in Uganda, i.e. the UPC, DP, NRM and FDC.

2.1 The rise and fall of the Uganda People's Congress (UPC)

On 9 March 1960, Dr Apollo Milton Obote and W.W. Rwetsiba announced the formation of the UPC after a merger of Uganda Peoples' Union (UPU) and the Uganda National

Congress (UNC). The party soon became a nationalistic movement and after independence in 1962 emerged as a formidable political organisation. Amidst pressure from the Buganda kingdom and other political establishments, such as *Kabaka Yekka*, the UPC offered assurances and hope and Uganda's socio-economic indicators improved. The government pursued a policy of *Ugandanisation* and a number of individuals began to receive good wage, which saw vast improvements in their standards of living.¹³¹ As a result, the UPC gained the loyalty and support of a considerable portion of Uganda's populace.

However, the 1966 Crisis undid many of those achievements. After the crisis, Uganda underwent a 'revolution' in which Obote, then prime minister, purged his own UPC of some of its top leaders, overthrew the president, who was also the king (*kabaka*) of Buganda, and rewrote the constitution to centralise power in his own hands.¹³² For the first time the structural bottlenecks to the UPC were weakened, albeit for a short time but to the detriment of the UPC's future. This was done, however, at the cost of: (i) alienating the Baganda, the largest and most economically and educationally advanced ethnic group; (ii) bringing the army into the political arena, in effect making it the arbiter of political power; and (iii) bringing into play various instruments of political coercion, including detention and emergency regulations, which militated against genuine political activity of any kind.¹³³ By 1967, most of the prominent opposition members of parliament from the DP and KY had either been imprisoned

129Schmitter (2001). Parties are not what they once were.

130 Bwana, C. (2009). Voting patterns in Uganda's elections: Could it be the end of the National Resistance Movement's (NRM) domination in Uganda's politics?

131 Kayizzi & Arne (1999). Is Uganda an emerging economy? *A report for the OECD project 'Emerging Africa'*.

132 Uzoigwe 1983.

133 Cohen, D. L. & Parson, J. (2008). *The Uganda People's Congress branch and constituency elections of 1970*

or bribed to cross the floor.¹³⁴ It is, therefore, not surprising that when the general elections were held in January 1970, the UPC's performance plummeted because of problems such as deep tribal divisions, low popular participation, and excessive dominance by a few powerful elites.¹³⁵

The UPC's downfall became glaring in the 1971 coup led by Idi Amin Dada. When Obote was deposed, Uganda was thrown under Amin's tyranny and dictatorship, which completely withered the democratic space. The 1979 Uganda National Liberation Front's (UNFL) triumphal defeat of Amin's dictatorship and subsequent comeback of the UPC did not revive the party. In fact, the various attempts under the Obote II government to resuscitate the UPC hit a dead end as the *burning hunger* among national elites to have a slice of the political 'cake' increased. This was evident in the 1980 general elections where the UPC won but was accused of massive rigging and copious electoral malpractices. Overwhelmed by multiple political and guerrilla pressures, the UPC was further weakened, culminating in the 1985 coup d'état masterminded by General Tito Okello that drove the last nail in the coffin of Obote's second administration. The December 1985 Nairobi Peace Talks – otherwise also derided as the 'Nairobi Peace Jokes' – between the military government of Tito Okello and the National Resistance Army (NRA) gave the latter legroom to reorganise and emerge as a stronger political movement.¹³⁶ In January 1986, Yoweri Museveni took over power and banned political parties, injuring the UPC even more. The NRA/M kept growing and gaining more political support to the detriment of the UPC and other

political parties whose abilities to regenerate, organise and strategise were severely choked.

As an exile in Zambia, Obote continued to be critical of Museveni's government but succumbed to kidney failure in October 2005, just three months after the rebirth of multiparty politics in Uganda. The new referendum once again gave the UPC an opportunity to start active engagement in political organising. This time around, however, many complex challenges bedevilled the party. For example, the intermittent wrangles ensued over party leadership and property ownership. When Jimmy Akena (the late President Obote's son) competed with Olara Otunnu to replace Miria Obote (his mother and Obote's widow) as president of the party, there were accusations that the party had been turned into a family dynasty. This undoubtedly cost UPC her loyal partisans, including in the Lango sub-region where it had massive and sympathetic support. Otunnu won the party elections and there was a slim ray of hope that his presidency would restore the party's past glory, but alas, increasing wrangles between factions loyal to Jimmy Akena and Otunnu caused more schism within the party.¹³⁷ Otunnu's critics, however, blamed him for being one of the chief plotters of the 1985 coup that led to the UPC's downfall. In July 2015, Jimmy Akena won the disputed UPC presidential elections, but Otunnu refused to accept defeat, causing more divisions within the party.

In addition to internal organisational pitfalls, the UPC still remains a sentimentally Lango tribal party with very low national partisan appeal. With only 11 members of parliament, all of whom hail from the Lango sub-

¹³⁴Uzoigwe 1983.

¹³⁵Cohen, D. L. & Parson, J. (2008). The Uganda people's congress branch and constituency elections of 1970.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Kalyegvera, T. (2015). The end of old parties. *The Daily Monitor* newspaper article.

region, the party is deeply suffering from political identity syndrome and the likelihood of its recovery is rather unpredictable.

2.2 The struggles and stagnation of the Democratic Party (DP)

On 6 October 1954, the Democratic Party (DP) was founded by seven fervent Catholics/political activists and it today occupies a reputable position as Uganda's first and Africa's second oldest political party. The DP, under Ben Kiwanuka (RIP), led Uganda to internal self-government in 1961. This was, however, cut short in 1962 with the approval of the Independence Constitution in London and the Buganda kingdom's decision to front the *kabaka* as the president of Uganda. Earlier that year, Obote and Buganda had formed an alliance and the UPC won majority votes in parliament, making Obote the executive prime minister and *Kabaka* Edward Mutesa the ceremonial president. The DP struggles began when 19 out of 24 DP MPs decided to cross over to the UPC.¹³⁸

The 1966 Crisis and the 1971 coup d'état weakened the UPC and there was another great trek away from the once formidable party. The return of multipartyism after Amin's tyranny thus gave the DP another platform to reorganise and in December 1980, the party won the general elections with 75 seats out of 108. Unfortunately, the Electoral Commissioner, Paul Muwanga, under pressure from the Tanzanian government, awarded victory to Obote's UPC.¹³⁹ This disenfranchisement led many DP loyalists to support the NRA guerrilla warfare and when the rebels

captured power in 1986, thousands of DP elites and loyalists crossed over to the NRM/A since political parties had been banned. The former DP leader, Paul Ssemogerere, became a cabinet minister and several other party leaders became senior NRM government officials in various capacities. The Foundation for African Development (FAD) was founded by DP elites as a local NGO and used by the party as a channel of political communication with the grass roots.

After the promulgation of the new constitution in 1995 which in part promoted 'merit-based politics' or the so-called 'movement democracy', Paul Ssemogerere contested against President Museveni in the first ever democratic elections held under the NRM administration. Though Ssemogerere lost in the elections, they restored some hope among DP party loyalists, and after the 2005 referendum, the nationwide revival campaigns began and the party fronted presidential candidates in the subsequent national elections. However, just like in the 2006 general elections when the DP's John Sebaana Kizito lost in the presidential elections, Norbert Mao suffered the same fate in 2011. In 2015, the DP did not front a presidential candidate for the general elections in 2016 but, instead, a faction of the party headed by President Norbert Mao joined the Go Forward team of Amama Mbabazi, a former prime minister and secretary general of the NRM and now a presidential candidate.

Overall, the DP's strength is still concentrated in the Buganda sub-region where three-quarters of the DP 15 MPs originate from. The party's organisational capacity weaknesses, evident in the internal fights and factions, will continue limiting its ability to garner a nationwide party identity and support.

¹³⁸Karoli Ssemogerere (2014). Uganda is 52 Democratic Party is 60: Reflections from Mzee Byanyima. *The Independent Magazine*.

¹³⁹Kagwa Kavuma (2014). 60 years of the Democratic Party. *Independent Magazine*.

2.3 The rise of the National Resistance Movement (NRM)

In January 1986, Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) finally took power in Uganda and formally established what it claimed was a new type of democracy, which soon came to be known as 'movement' or 'no-party' democracy.¹⁴⁰ The foundation of Uganda's 'no-party democracy' is the principle of what is called 'individual-merit politics'. The latter was articulated by the NRM leadership as a reaction to a post-independence history of sectarian and ethnic conflict-prone political parties, the alleged cause of sequential patterns of ethnic exclusion, political violence and chronic instability. The 'individual-merit' reform aimed at transforming politics – and notably elections – into a game played by individuals only, rather than by political organisations.¹⁴¹ The NRM initially promised 'fundamental change', and during the first few years, the government gradually improved security, facilitated the adoption of a more democratic constitution in 1995, and oversaw increased if uneven economic growth.¹⁴²

It is indubitable that the NRM used the 'no-party' democracy period to consolidate its strength and garner nationwide support and loyalty. When multiparty politics returned in 2005, the playing field was, therefore, already skewed in favour of the NRM. Other political parties struggled to establish their party structures and either regain old loyalties or acquire new ones. Hence, what is happening in Uganda today is the consolidation of the dominant party system. While an NRM victory in the 2011 general elections and in previous elections

may have come as no surprise, the opposition's diminishing show in these elections and the NRM's stranglehold on the political future raises crucial concerns as to the direction of the country's multiparty democracy.¹⁴³

Unsurprisingly, there have been increasing crossovers from other political parties to the NRM over the past years. The intensity of these crossovers heightens as the electoral heat increases. During the 2016 electoral season, for instance, 600 residents of Kaberamaido town defected to the NRM at a single rally¹⁴⁴ and in November 2015, up to 5,000 residents of Lango are believed to have crossed over from the UPC to the NRM.¹⁴⁵ Overall, the NRM continues to use incumbency advantages as a fulcrum for reaping political support and loyalty – a trend likely to continue since opposition to the party yields more disenfranchisement.

2.4 The entry and promises of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC)

The FDC was founded in 2004 as a merger between opposition groups, including the Reform Agenda (RA), the Parliamentary Advocacy Forum (PAF) and the National Democratic Forum (NDF). The FDC's emergence on Uganda's political scene shook the incumbent NRM party and brought a ray of hope to millions of Ugandans who had been clamouring for change. In the 2006 elections, the FDC presidential candidate, Kiiza Besigye, won 37 per cent of the vote and FDC candidates won 37 seats in parliament out of a total

143Olum, Y. (2011). Multiparty politics in Uganda

144(2015). 600 opposition supporters cross to NRM. *New Vision* newspaper.

145Kazibwe, K. (2015). 500 defect to NRM in Apac. *Chimreports.com* article

140Carbone, M. (2001). No-party democracy? Political organisation under movement democracy in Uganda, 1994-2000.

141 Ibid

142 Freedom House (2010)

of 284 directly elected seats.¹⁴⁶ For a two-year old political party, this was a clear victory. In the 2011 elections, Besigye got 26.01 per cent of the vote and FDC won 34 seats in parliament.¹⁴⁷

Amidst numerous crossovers from the FDC to the NRM, the party still remains robust and its internal leadership remains organised and intact, evidenced by the fairness of party elections and cooperation among leaders. Though the FDC's prospects for climbing up the rungs of politics in Uganda are still slim, the party still remains a leading competitor and rival to the incumbent NRM party.

3. Conceptual analysis of party identification and implications for Uganda

To illuminate the party identification conceptualisation, this section will present the Michigan school of thought and the subsequent response by the rational choice theorists. After that, we integrate political clientelism and rent-seeking arguments into the analysis. In all analytical frameworks, we succinctly present their relevance to Uganda's politics.

3.1 Party identification and psychological attachment

The path-breaking research of the Michigan school, the group of political scientists and social psychologists at the University of Michigan who organised the first survey-based analyses of the American electorate, brought party identification to prominence.¹⁴⁸ In their classic theory,

Campbell *et al.* (1960) postulate that party identification is an enduring sense of psychological attachment to a political party and it is bonded by affection or emotion. The family and social constructs similarly play an essential role in the transmission of party loyalties.¹⁴⁹ Generally, party identification functions as a perceptual screen colouring how partisans interpret, store and retrieve political information.¹⁵⁰

Converse (1969) formalised the argument, proposing a model with four elements: 1) a *learning* process, the basic increments in partisan loyalties shown by the individuals over their life cycles as a direct function of their continuing experience with the party system; 2) a *resistance* phenomenon, representing the declining ease of learning as a function of the absolute age at which the individuals commence their experience within the system; 3) a *transmission* process, capturing whatever changes may surround the transfer of partisan feeling from one generation to the next; and 4) a *forgetting* process, handling the rate of decay in the retention of partisan loyalties subsequent to any suspension of the democratic process eliminating the mass relevance of traditional parties.¹⁵¹ The most important elements are the learning and transmission processes.¹⁵² As an example, in countries with established histories of democratic elections, age and electoral experience go together; where elections are new, age is not a surrogate for exposure to elections.

149 Harrop and Miller 1987.

150 Dancey & Goren (2010). Party identification, issue attitudes, and the dynamics of political debate. *American Journal of Political Science*.

151 See Converse (1996) in A.S. Zuckerman* and M. Brynin (2001), *A decision heuristic for party identification: new British and German data and a new understanding for a classic concept*.

152 Ibid.

146 African Elections Database (2009).

Elections in Uganda. <<http://africanelections.tripod.com/ug>

147 Ibid.

148 Zuckerman, A.S. * and Malcolm, B. (2001). A decision heuristic for party identification: New British and German data and a new understanding for a classic concept.

Also, 'there is evidence of a kind of "settling down" or habituation to a competitive party system, which occurs at a mass level as a secular trend over time.' In this perspective, party identification is a persistent loyalty to a political party.

Applied to the Ugandan party identification context, this theory provides a relevant but inadequate analysis. It can be assumed that the theory provides a more explicit framework for understanding party identification shortly before and immediately after independence in 1962. When the DP was founded in 1954 and became Uganda's first political party, thousands of Ugandans pledged allegiance and loyalty to the party. More particularly, the Baganda and Catholics had a stronger psychological attachment to the party since the party founding members originated from such social backgrounds. In fact, the attachment was so strong that elders in the family started inculcating party doctrines from birth. A classic example is given by a DP elder who recalls that those days 'Catholic parents would get a DP membership card for their children immediately after baptising them. That was intended to mean that the child grows knowing that his/her political party is the Democratic Party.'¹⁵³ This supports the theory that partisan attachments are products of early life socialisation experiences which, once acquired, tend to strengthen over time as a result of attitudinal and behavioural reinforcement processes.¹⁵⁴

It is also argued that the UPC's existence is partly attributed to psychological attachment. When it was founded, a wide majority of the 1960s generation joined the UPC wagon. Many, especially in

the Lango sub-region, continued to be loyal to the party even during the impossible years of Idi Amin and the no-party era of President Museveni. In the Lango sub-region, the psychological attachment to the UPC is so strong that it even attracts sympathy. It is, for instance, alleged that Jimmy Akena, the current UPC president and MP of Lira Municipality, is politically successful partly as a result of sympathy votes from the Lango people who had a psychological attachment to Obote (Akena's father) as their own son.¹⁵⁵

A brief analytical outlook, therefore, reveals the existence of a very thick line between ethnicity and psychological attachment to political parties. The fact that ethnic identities become systematically more important to people at the time competitive elections are being held suggests that ethnicity plays a role in the struggle for political power.¹⁵⁶ This is because politicians find it advantageous to 'play the ethnic card' as a means of mobilising supporters to acquire or retain political power.¹⁵⁷ The voters and partisans also 'dance to the ethnic tune' because they see it as an opportunity to attract rents and other favours from their 'own'. The Kakwa and Lugbara in West Nile, for instance, offered overwhelming support to the dictatorial regime of Idi Amin because of the promises of favours from state house. Indeed, citizens sometimes offer political loyalty based on the belief that jobs, favours, and public goods will be channelled disproportionately to co-ethnics of the person who is in a position to allocate them.¹⁵⁸

155 Ongeng, D. & Amoru, P. (2010). Akena to 'be his own man' in Lira. *Daily Monitor* newspaper article, Friday, 2 July 2010.

156 Elischer, S. (2014). *Political parties in Africa: Ethnicity and party formation*

157 Ibid.

158 Van de Walle (2007).

153 Kagwa Kavuma (2014). 60 years of the Democratic Party. *Independent Magazine*

154 Campbell *et al.* 1960.

3.2 Party identification as a rational political choice

According to this school of thought, party loyalty comes as a result of informed thought and a reasoned decision-making process that influences choice. This means that party identification is a choice to prefer one party selected from a set of alternative political parties.¹⁵⁹ To be able to make a more reasoned decision, citizens monitor party promises and past performances over time, and encapsulate their observations by being loyal to that party.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, citizens also consider the likely prospective benefits of identifying with a particular party during the decision-making process.¹⁶¹

The rational choice theory offers a comprehensive set of alternatives to partisan identification. Like the Michigan school theorists, rational choice theorists also expect a relatively stable partisan attachment since the citizens' decisions were arrived at after a series of reasoned decision-making processes. However, this does not mean absolute loyalty and unquestioned allegiance. In fact, when individuals alter their views for the benefit of the relationship between their policy preferences and the political parties, they change their partisan preferences.¹⁶² Therefore, when a political party seeks to maintain expectations and sticks to and/or improves the policies that attracted citizens to the party, their loyalty and identification stabilise, and vice versa.

Making the correct rational choice is thus enabled by the ability to

159 Zuckerman, A.S. * & Brynin, M. (2001). *A decision heuristic for party identification: New British and German data and a new understanding for a classic concept.*

160 Fiorina (1981).

161 Achen (1992).

162 Fiorina (1984).

understand and know the 'issues' of all alternative parties. When citizens know how the parties differ on an issue but do not consider the matter to be personally important, they modify their issue stance to conform to their party.¹⁶³ However, when citizens are aware of party differences and view the issue as personally important, they simultaneously update their party ties and policy preferences.¹⁶⁴

A more recent framework by Dancey and Goren (2010)¹⁶⁵ augments the rational choice theory by suggesting that media coverage of elite political debates and campaigns function as the key situational cue. Such cues are present when political debate among partisan elites on some issue becomes subject to close scrutiny by the news media.¹⁶⁶ When partisan leaders vigorously debate some matter, such as a proposed policy change, the appropriate response to a domestic or foreign policy crisis, a salient Supreme Court decision, or some other relevant controversy, news organisations take notice and provide ongoing coverage.¹⁶⁷ The relevance of this theory is that making an informed decision is operationalised by access to relevant information and that the media plays an instrumental role in this process.

Just like the Michigan school conceptualisation, the rational choice theory is inadequate to explain party identification dynamics in Uganda. This is attributed to a number of factors such as illiteracy, poor infrastructures and low access to timely and relevant information. At the advent of multiparty politics in Uganda in the 1950s and 1960s, access to timely and relevant information was almost impossible

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid.

165 Dancey & Goren (2010). Party identification, issue attitudes, and the dynamics of political debate. *American Journal of Political Science*

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.

to a vast majority of the country's population. Apart from postal and word-of-mouth mediums, other communication channels did not exist. This meant that making decisions depended on distorted and untimely information from the few political elites of that time. As a result, the reasoned decision-making process was ultimately affected, limiting the rational choice. One could, of course, argue that access to information in the 21st century has considerably improved with the advent of internet and mobile phones. However, a huge proportion of the population in rural Africa are still out of sync with the tech word.

Similarly, in a society with high levels of ignorance and low levels of formal education, the rational choice process is affected because of citizens' inability to read, write, comprehend, internalise and disseminate complex party policies. As a result, the majority of citizens become followers of the educated local political elites and their parties. They do this in the belief that the elites will perhaps offer back favours in the form of jobs and community projects, and not as a result of objective decisions. According to the cognitive mobilisation theory conceived by Dalton (1984) and later developed by Berglund *et al.* 2005, ignorance of the citizenry is actually good for party politics because they cannot be politically engaged without political party support. However, with high cognitive ability, citizens possess the skills and resources necessary to become politically engaged with little dependence on external cues.¹⁶⁸ This, therefore, posits a fundamental question: What is the future of partisan identification in the face of citizens' increasing cognitive mobilisation?

168 Berglund, F., Holmberg, S., Schmitt, H., & Thomassen, J. (2005). *Party identification and party choice* (pp. 106-24). na.

3.3 Party identification as a growth and survival strategy

According to Marcus, Neumann and Mackuen (2000), partisan identification is a habit or a standing decision which responds to economic worries. This in part is a continuation of the rational choice theory which contends that individuals/partisans will align themselves to political parties which offer them the best prospective benefits. Indeed, political agents/elites oftentimes do not pay loyalty to parties because of deep ideological orientation but rather because they give them more and better access to economic opportunities. According to this view, political elites and business leaders offer support to a political party (mostly the ruling party and/or those with the potential to acquire political power) because they expect to secure lucrative business deals and other privileges from the party.¹⁶⁹ Harvard scholar, Dani Rodrik (2010), for instance, provides an explicit and detailed account of how companies and elites in the Asian Tigers closely worked with political elites and ruling parties in a reciprocal relationship to produce the economic miracles.¹⁷⁰

This conceptualisation is buttressed by Mushtaq Khan's (2005) political settlement theory which criticises the conventional wisdom's excessive focus on the damaging effects of clientelism and rent-seeking. Political settlements are the expression of a common understanding, usually forged between elites, about how power is organised and exercised. They include formal institutions for managing political and economic relations, such as electoral processes, peace agreements, parliaments, constitutions and

169 Kelsall, T. (2012). Neo-Patrimonialism, Rent-Seeking and Development: Going with the Grain?. *New Political Economy*, 17(5), 677-682.

170 Rodrik, D. (2004). Industrial policy for the twenty-first century. Paper prepared for UNIDO (Cambridge, MA: Mimeo)

market regulations. But they also include informal, often unarticulated, agreements that underpin a political system, such as deals between elites on the division of spoils.¹⁷¹ Political settlements involve ongoing 'two-level games' which are not only horizontal negotiations and deals between elites, but also vertical relations between elites or leaders and the followers whose support they may need.¹⁷²

An important characteristic of political settlements is political clientelism, which Kelsall (2012) argues is an inevitable feature of all developing countries, and rent-seeking, which exists wherever there are imperfect markets. Therefore, focus should not be so much on the prevalence of clientelism and rent-seeking, but rather, on whether they are geared towards the creation of productive rents, and the capture of unproductive rents. In the traditional sense of the word, clientelism is a way of describing the pattern of unequal, hierarchical exchange characteristic of feudal society, in which patrons and clients were tied to durable relationships by a powerful sense of obligation and duty.

This 'old clientelism' has now been replaced by organised political parties with relatively bureaucratised structures with patrons.¹⁷³ Clients, enjoying higher living standards and less instinctively deferential, demand more immediate material benefits in exchange for their votes. In this new, 'mass party' clientelism, patrons have to 'buy' votes by distributing concrete excludable benefits and favours to individual voters or groups

of voters.¹⁷⁴ This was termed as a 'vote of exchange'¹⁷⁵ in the Italian context. Its relevance lies in the fact that, in Africa, the citizenry are quite often swayed to pay loyalty to a political party because of the handouts offered by the patron rather than because of programmatic public goods. Citizens are, therefore, often on a continuous 'shopping spree' for parties that offer the best deal, and may even switch parties if the flow of benefits dries up. This form of loyalty and party identification, Kelsall (2010) argues, introduces extremely strong incentives to focus on short-term distributive politics rather than longer-term economic accumulation.

This theory offers an important analytical perspective to contextualise the party identification paradox in Uganda. A classic example is the sudden payment of loyalty and membership subscription to the NRM party by the people of the Lango sub-region who have traditionally been resistant to the party's agendas. Until recently, the Lango sub-region was first and foremost a UPC stronghold and then later an FDC source of votes. This was partly due to psychological attachments since the founder of the UPC had come from Lango and due to the fact that the sub-region and its people were the biggest beneficiaries of the Obote I and II governments. On both occasions when the party lost power (as already explained above) it was weakened and rents stopped flowing to both elites and the citizens. Fewer UPC and Lango political elites crossed over to the ruling NRM, with the majority still continuing to identify with the UPC. As a result, NRM candidates, including the president, scored lowest in most elections. The flop of the NRM in the 2006 general elections offers an

171 DFID (2010). Building peaceful states and societies. *A DFID practice paper*, p. 22. London: DFID.

172 Ibid.

173 Hopkin, J. (2006, August). Conceptualizing political clientelism: Political exchange and democratic theory. In *APSA annual meeting, Philadelphia* (Vol. 31, pp. 46-18).

174 Ibid.

175 Parisi & Pasquino 1979.

excellent example. In that election, President Museveni got only 7 per cent of the votes and his contender, Kiiza Besigye from the FDC party, garnered a mammoth 85 per cent of the votes in the Lango sub-region.¹⁷⁶

After this stark realisation, the NRM embarked on a massive 'Lango appeasement programme' targeting both the elites and the ordinary citizens. To the elites, political favours in the form of jobs and contracts were offered, while for the ordinary citizens, community projects were initiated. This paid off when in the 2011 presidential elections the NRM attained a landslide victory in the region to the disadvantage of the UPC and even the FDC. The massive crossovers from the UPC to the NRM since the 2011 elections are thus unsurprising. In fact, as the rent flow increases, more crossovers are expected. In an interesting twist, Jimmy Akena openly professed support for President Yoweri Museveni in a November 2015 campaign rally in Lira town. This did not come as a surprise as Otunnu had earlier on accused Akena of receiving bribes from Museveni,¹⁷⁷ and Museveni had initially openly financed Akena's second marriage.¹⁷⁸

4. Conclusion

To the extent that party identification remains a central theme in understanding political dynamics globally, it is more important in Africa where multiparty politics is still at an embryonic stage. This paper has provided a comprehensive historical and analytical framework for the elusive concept of party identification in Uganda by looking at the experiences of four major political parties in the country, i.e.

the UPC, DP, NRM and FDC. Since the inception of party politics in 1954, when Uganda's first political party was founded, party identification has become more precarious. This precariousness was evident in the 1961 elections where UPU and the UNC merged to birth UPC. The UPC emerged as a strong political party and many DP partisans crossed over to the party. After the overthrow of Amin's dictatorship, party crossovers still remain a major characteristic of Uganda's politics. It is, in fact, argued that it has intensified with the return of multiparty politics in 2005.

Using the conceptualisations of the Michigan school and the rational choice theorists, the paper has shown that even if psychological attachment and rational choices do affect partisan identification, it still fails to capture a fundamental factor: why people pay allegiance to political parties – i.e. search for economic opportunities. From this perspective, partisans are always in a continuous search for what makes their lives better. If they arrive at that point, their loyalty increases and the reverse is true if their interests are not met. It is also important to note that explicit findings on party identification in Uganda keep changing over time and that this is influenced by educational attainment and increase in knowledge and cognitive ability. This was discovered after Dalton's (1981) cognitive mobilisation conceptualisation that the more educated and cognitive an individual is, the less partisan they be since they can still engage in political processes without necessarily being partisan.

All in all, party identification in Uganda is poised to remain more precarious as political agents shop for parties which offer the best

¹⁷⁶ IPOD (2010). *Uganda. Africa Elections Data Base.*

¹⁷⁷ See More defections to NRM expected, *The Observer* newspaper, 23 November 2015.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

incentives. After all, political parties today are not what they once were.¹⁷⁹

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