

Democracy or Fallacy: Discourses Shaping Multi-Party Politics and Development in Uganda

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Abstract

This paper examines the discourses shaping the introduction of multi-party politics in Uganda and how it is linked to democracy and development. The paper shows that most Ugandans prefer multi-party politics because they link it to democracy and development. This is why when the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) captured power in 1986 and multi-party politics was abolished, there was pressure from the public to reinstate it through the 2005 referendum in which the people voted in favour of a multi-party system. The paper also examines the role played by Ugandan politicians and professional middle class such as writers and literary critics (local agency) in the return of multi-party politics in Uganda. It explores their contribution of in re-democratising the Ugandan state and argues that despite the common belief that multi-party politics aids democracy and development, it might not be the case in Uganda. Multi-party politics in Uganda has turned out not to necessarily mean democracy, and eventually development. The paper grapples with the question of what democracy is in Uganda and/ or to Ugandans, and the extent to which the Ugandan political arena can be considered democratic, and as a fertile ground for development. Did the return to multi-party politics in Uganda guarantee democracy or is it just a fallacy? What is the relationship between democracy and development in Uganda?

Keywords: Multi-party politics, democracy, Fallacy, Uganda

1. Introduction

After Uganda gained independence in 1962, the multi-party system was

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introduced with political parties such as Uganda People's Congress (UPC), Kabaka Yekka (KY), the Democratic Party (DP) and the Conservative Party (CP). Most African countries were governed under the multi-party political system just after independence in the 1960s, but this period of democracy did not last long as the leaders changed the constitution, giving way to one-party rule.¹ In Uganda, the multi-party political system collapsed and was replaced by a one-party system under Milton Obote in 1967, which obtained until Idi Amin captured power.² A military government under Idi Amin from 1971-79 then ruled Uganda. During this period, Ugandans lived in fear and they could not practically advocate their human rights, let alone the power to vote. This period was also characterised by economic regression. After the fall of Idi Amin, presidential elections were held in 1980 on a multi-party basis.

Unfortunately, when Milton Obote was declared victorious, Yoweri Museveni, the current president of Uganda, refuted the results. He started a rebel group against the government, which sparked off another wave of instability and civil strife, with six years of a guerrilla war being waged against Obote's UPC government.³ However, after the National Resistance Army (NRA) capturing power in 1986, multi-party politics was abolished and Uganda was ruled under a one-party system. The state claimed that there was 'participatory democracy' based on individual merit in elections.⁴ With the no-party system, the NRA claimed they were 'restoring democracy' and yet it was clear that they were blocking and suspending the growth and activities of other political parties in the country while NRA, on the other hand, was gaining and strengthening its political base and recognition.⁵

At this stage, internal pressures were building up as the people demanded multi-party politics, a platform on which they could express themselves, participate and evaluate the political growth of the country. But the state justified the no-party era by arguing that Uganda was not yet politically ready for such politics, especially given its violent political background. The emphasis was that the country needed a phase of no-party politics so as to heal.⁶ The president and his acolytes have repeatedly tried to associate multi-party competition with political violence and underdevelopment, always giving the example of the state-orchestrated repression and subsequent anarchy that prevailed under the Obote I and II administrations. They also argued that multi-party options would offer little for the political and economic growth of the country. President Museveni had always stressed that Uganda was not yet ready for a multi-party system because the traditional parties, UPC, DP and CP, exacerbated divisions among people, especially on the basis of ethnicity and religion, since these were the bases

on which parties were formed. He called it partisan politics.⁷ He also emphasised that multi-party politics was an offshoot of western culture and that Ugandans were not yet ready for it as witnessed from its consequences during the two Obote regimes – dictatorship, failed multi-party politics and protracted guerrilla rebellion.⁸ The president often tags failed multi-party politics to underdevelopment and poverty.

The state played on the minds of the citizens and the world at large through drawing their attention to the mistakes of the previous regimes and the over-exaggerated development achievements of the NRM whenever such demands were made. Yet, as Mwenda observes, the reconstruction process and the economic development are not rural-based; instead, development authorities are set up to reward the president's supporters. Also, there has been an increase in the privatisation of public institutions, which affects service delivery to the ordinary citizen.⁹ As such people seem to question the relationship between democracy and development that the NRM claim credit for in Uganda. As a result, people seemed to yearn for political parties quietly, especially in northern Uganda,¹⁰ which is UPC's stronghold. As reflected in a survey by Bratton and Lambright, people seemed to want the return of multi-party politics because they hoped that it might help to control the abuse of power, refresh the ranks of the political elite by recruiting younger leaders,¹¹ and improve on service delivery to the ordinary citizen.

Indeed, when political parties had just been abolished at the beginning of Museveni's rule, Ugandans did not seem to mind because at the time, the state's policies were geared towards democracy, as well as political and economic stability. As Mwenda observes, both the internally and externally, the president was hailed for his achievements, especially following Uganda's history that was characterised by dictatorship and economic repression. Even when the state started to show signs of dictatorship, such as by banning normal political party activities in the 1995 constitution, Ugandans and the world at large saw a bright future, typified by political and economic stability and growth.¹² The people also believed that the president would rule and hand over power peacefully to another individual, but little did they know that the president intended to rule for life and even groom his own progeny for succession.

However, when it became clear that Uganda was 'sliding backward towards a system of one-man rule',¹³ the middle class – professionals, politicians and academics – intensified, in both writing and speech, criticism of no-party politics in the country that most of them argued was taking the country back to dictatorship and underdevelopment since the public had no

platform on which to express their views and dissatisfaction. The state was quick to open doors to multi-party politics as a cover-up for flaws within the system'.¹⁴ One instance was the proposal for constitutional changes, some of which were actually passed, such as the removal of two-term limit on the presidency so as to make it possible for the incumbent to stand for as long as he is alive.

2. Uganda Under No-Party System

Uganda has gone through a series of no-party administrations starting from 1967 when multi-party system collapsed during the Milton Obote I regime. Obote presided over a one-man regime until Idi Amin's coup d'état; Amin's regime, like Obote's, was also a one-man affair. Yoweri Museveni, on his part, ruled Uganda for 20 years under a one-party system commonly known as the 'Movement' until 2005 when a referendum was held and the country voted for a return to the multi-party political system.¹⁵ However, even with the return to a multi-party system, the state operates as though still in the era of no-party or one man's rule or what Bratton and Lambright prefer to call 'political monopoly'.¹⁶

Under no-party or one-man's rule that Uganda underwent, the country was plunged into political and economic repression, especially during Obote's and Amin's regimes. The situation was quite different in Museveni's regime because he started by restoring political and economic stability in the country so that by the time the country started to slowly slide back into repression, he had scored some achievements,¹⁷ and he also quickly returned to multi-party politics as a sign of democracy. Under Museveni's no-party rule, political parties were permitted to exist but they were forbidden from supporting and participating in electoral campaigns as stipulated in the 1995 constitution.¹⁸ This law enabled the movement system to entrench itself as a political giant in the country while suffocating the other political parties. The impact of such a law is still being felt even now, ten years later. The NRM is firmly entrenched and popular, with active branches and supporters in all regions, even in the remote rural areas of Uganda, as opposed to other parties.

A series of protests and criticisms followed the passing of the law that denied people the right and platform on which to fully participate in the politics of their country. Fortunately, the 1995 constitution required that a referendum be held before a change of political system from no-party to multi-party could be undertaken.¹⁹ In 2000, there was a referendum that re-affirmed the movement system and the NRM changed its name and operations to National Resistance Movement Organisation (NRM-O).

With NRM-O being a fully registered political party, there was another referendum held in 2005 that sought to change Uganda's political system from a no-party system to a multi-party one.

Although the 2005 referendum was beset by many controversies, Ugandans voted for a multi-party system to be reinstated. Many, especially the opposition that later boycotted the referendum, argued that it would not make any difference because either way, the movement system would have an upper hand in the politics of Uganda. It was actually speculated that the referendum could only give legitimacy to the incumbent regime no matter the outcome because of the question that that was formulated for voting on: 'Do you agree to open up the political space to allow those willing to join other political parties/organisations to do so to compete for political power?' People were then expected to vote either 'Yes' or 'No'. The incumbent president, Yoweri Museveni, campaigned for people to vote 'Yes', while the party's (NRM-O) spokesperson then, Kazooza Mutale, campaigned for people to vote 'No'.²⁰

The question then to ask is: If there was democracy and development under the one-party system, why did the ruling government (the Movement system) opt to go back to the multi-party system that they had once abolished claiming that it minimised democracy and development? The answer could lie in the unpopularity of the NRA government, whose unpopularity was exposed by writers and critics, within and outside Uganda. These internal and external forces could have precipitated and forced the re-introduction of multi-party politics in Uganda. However, this paper seeks to examine the role played by internal writers and critics in the return of multi-party politics, and their contribution to re-democratising Uganda, if at all multi-party politics means or brought democracy and development in the country.

Although it seems as though the Ugandan middle class has always opted for silence whenever pressed hard by the state's dictatorship and unfair policies, as observed by Mwenda, I argue that this might be true of the majority but the few vocal ones have endeavoured to sensitise citizens and criticise the state, sometimes yielding fruit, such as economic development. Mwenda further argues that, unlike in other states such as Malawi, Kenya and Zambia where the middle class and peasants have been very active in fighting for their own rights and against undemocratic leaders, the Ugandan middle class have been integrated into the country's patronage network. He also maintains that some leave the country and are then diverted from their country's democratisation process.²¹ I argue that the middle class may not have been seen to physically fight for democracy or against dictatorship and underdevelopment, but they sensitised the public to the above issues

and the impact is felt from the decisions taken by the state on politics and economic growth.

However, Mwenda also acknowledges that the fight for democracy involves politicians, the jobless, peasants, the youth, professionals and academics.²² My task here will be to examine the role played by the middle class, specifically professionals, writers and critics such as Mwenda (2007), Mahmood (1988), Asiimwe (2006), Chibita (2006), Makara (2010), Kituo cha Katiba (2005), Nabunya (2009), Magaju and Oloka-Oyango (2000), Kiza and Svasand (2005), among others, in the return of multi-party politics and democracy and, eventually, development. How did they do it? What were they saying and what was the impact of their involvement in the politics and economic growth of their country? Does democracy mean development?

3. The Return to Multi-Party Politics: A Drive for Democracy and Development?

In the 1990's there were debates on the need for the country to go back to the multi-party system. After many years of resistance by the government or refusal to open up the Ugandan political space, it finally held a referendum in 2000. The referendum, though, only reinstated the NRM ruling body as a one-party system commonly known as the 'Movement'.²³ However, the citizens were not satisfied with this arrangement or with the outcome of the 2000 referendum. Most people argued that the debate on political systems was distorted and that despite the 2000 referendum, the political question remained unresolved and the agitation for the expansion of political space continued to flare.²⁴ These views were debated and made known to the public by politicians, writers and critics.

The proponents of multi-party politics argued that the movement system was detrimental to democracy and development and urged the reinstatement of a fully-fledged multi-party political system. They criticised Article 269 of the 1995 Constitution that restricted political activities of other parties. Owing to pressure from many internal stakeholders – writers, critics and politicians – a Constitutional Review Commission was established. This resulted in Parliament enacting into law the Political Parties and Organisations Act. Under this law, political parties could hold delegates conferences to elect their leaders and they could also hold seminars at national level but not at the district. The move was welcomed but the middle class still criticised it on grounds that it did not grant full freedom of organisation as was accorded to the NRM.²⁵

People started to question whether the movement system was still a

role model for Africa and whether the 20 years was not too long for the so-called healing process. Some even argued that the movement system was showing signs of dictatorship, just as the previous regimes.²⁶ Whereas others thought that Africa and Uganda specifically was ready for democracy, some asserted that one-party rule would continue in Africa for as long as the structural prerequisites for democracy were lacking in the continent, such as advanced capitalism, high literacy rates and a civic culture. Many others argued that democracy needed the middle and working classes to step up and get involved in the democratisation process in Africa, as was the case with their counterparts in Asia. To this effect, the middle class in Uganda started to actively join politics and criticize old regimes, unlike in the previous regimes where leaders were illiterate.²⁷ The middle class did not only engage in political debates but also sensitised the public and actively participated in politics so as to contribute to the democratisation of the country. However, one wonders whether their political involvement has yielded fruit in the NRM government or whether they have been absorbed into the president's 'no change' camp.²⁸

The pressure put on the NRM government yielded fruit because there was a change and the political space in Uganda was opened up to other political parties after the 2005 referendum. Uganda's situation is not exclusive to Uganda. This was the trend in most African states that had all first abolished the multi-party system only to return to it after continuous internal and external pressures and demands from the middle class and workers.²⁹ In East Africa, for example, Tanzania was the first to open up its political space to other political parties in 1992, followed by Kenya in 1991 and Uganda in 2005. However, one dominant party usually rules most countries that are hailed for good governance or democracy under multi-party politics. This is evident in Benin, Botswana, Tanzania and South Africa. In Ghana, on the other hand, although the country practises multi-party politics, power oscillates only between two major political parties. The trend in Africa is changing though, with most rulers manipulating the constitution and removing presidential term limits. This has happened in Zimbabwe, Uganda and Rwanda. Removal of presidential term limits is one of the factors that are deterring democracy in Africa.

The return to multi-party politics in Uganda was sudden and most people doubted whether it was genuine. This is because the NRM government had refused to open up Uganda's political space, and when they did in 2000, it was insufficient as it was bound up with constitutional changes. Then suddenly in 2005, the return to multi-party politics occurred. People doubted President Museveni's commitment to it and there was also speculation as

to his motives. This is because the playing field was not levelled among the various political parties, an act which was seen to weaken the democratic process.³⁰ Furthermore, the timing was also 'inappropriate' because the referendum was held just one year before presidential elections. How were other political parties supposed to organise themselves and compete favourably with a party that had been in operation for 20 years?

The middle class is commendable for devising various ways of struggling for democracy in Uganda: through sensitising the public, protests, demonstrations, talk shows, advocacy, appeals and writing criticisms. The media has played a big role in the struggle for democracy. Newspapers and magazines, such as the *Daily Monitor*, the *Independent*, *Red Pepper* and the *Observer*; have given critics a platform on which to express their views and sensitise the public. Television and radio stations have also provided airtime for the middle class to debate and discuss political issues that affect their country. In Uganda, there are newspapers, television and radio stations that suit all categories of citizens from the professionals to the illiterates. The middle class has used these as a medium for sensitising the public and for voicing their views on democracy, multi-party politics and the political and economic situation in the country.

Radio and television talk shows that characterise the Uganda media system are the daily and the weekly shows. The weekly talk shows that are instrumental in the multi-party transition included Spectrum on Radio One, Andrew Mwenda Live on Monitor FM, Capital Gang on Capital FM and 'Ekimeza' on CBS, Issues at Hand on WBS, Hotspot on NTV and the Morning Breeze on NBS. Whereas the other shows targeted literates, 'Ekimeza', literally translated as 'round-table discussion', targeted semi-literates and illiterates. It involved broadcasting from public places such as restaurants and bars, and ordinary people could gather together and participate in political discussions and debates. In the process, people are educated, sensitised and told about the political situation in their country, what they can do and the consequences of their actions or their silence.³¹ Such talk shows have been instrumental in putting the country's political situation into context so that the public is not easily fooled that there is much more political freedom and development in this regime than in the previous regimes.

Other than the media, the middle class has also used demonstrations and riots to draw the public's and the state's attention to the plight of the people and the need for democracy. For example, after the Ugandan Parliament had passed the POMB, the middle class, mostly from the opposition, mobilised a demonstration against the bill. Also when the tax levied on fuel was thought

to be too high for the ordinary Ugandan to afford transport fares, Dr Kizza Besigye of the opposition party FDC, mobilised a demonstration branded 'Walk to Work' in protest against the high taxes. Similarly, when the *katikiro* (prime minister) of the Buganda kingdom was blocked by the government from visiting Kayunga, one of the districts under the kingdom, the middle class Baganda politicians, regardless of their political affiliations, organised the public to demonstrate against such abuse of the kingdom's rights. It is unfortunate that peaceful demonstrations in Uganda always turn into riots because the state mishandles the whole situation by deploying the police and the army to block demonstrators who later turn violent.

4. What is Democracy?

According to Mattlosa, Khadigala and Shale (2010), democracy is when there is a regular, free, transparent and fair election. What takes place in Uganda before, during and after elections does not qualify the country to be called democratic. As Makara observes, democracy in Uganda has remained elusive because of incumbency advantages, manipulation and unconstitutional use of the state resources and apparatus, and the removal of term limits, among other factors.³² It has proved very difficult for opposition parties to win elections not only in Uganda but in Africa as a whole because of lack of transparency. For instance, election results in Uganda are usually refuted, with the opposition citing rigging of votes and unfairness in the handling of the whole process.

First, in 1980, when Milton Obote was declared winner, Yoweri Museveni refuted the results and formed a guerrilla rebel group to fight against the ruling party. Secondly, when Uganda's political space was opened up to multi-party politics, political parties joined the race for the 2006 and 2011 presidential elections. On both occasions, when the incumbent was declared victorious, the first runner-up, Dr Kizza Besigye, refuted the results and petitioned the electoral commission. And on both occasions, the courts accepted that there were irregularities witnessed during the elections and recommendations were made. However, the incumbent was still sworn in as president. The recommendations made by the courts of law in 2006 were ignored as the same electoral commission team was appointed by the president to run the 2011 election,³³ and now the 2016 election.

In Uganda, the concept of democracy seems to vary from generation to generation and to also be determined by people's level of education. For instance, in rural areas and among the elderly, people do not seem to mind if the NRM under Museveni ruled the country forever as long they have political stability (peace). In the urban areas, the youth and the middle class

(professionals and workers), on the contrary, prefer multi-party politics and are against the removal of presidential term limits. They are pro 'change' and are opposed to the 'no-change' slogan.

4.1 Does Multi-Party Politics in Uganda Guarantee Democracy and Development?

Multi-party politics operates under or with active political parties. This system provides an outlet through which people can participate in the politics of their government and address the issues at hand. Parties provide a structured organised frame through which people can express political views besides permitting more points of view to be represented in government. Political parties mobilise voters on behalf of a common set of interests, norms and goals. In that way they play a crucial role in the democratic process as they formulate political and policy agendas, select candidates and conduct elections, among others. They also link citizens and the government by providing a means by which people can have a voice in their government.³⁴ It is also argued that multi-party political systems often provide stable and enduring systems of government as opposed to a one-party system.³⁵ Therefore, a government such as the NRM, that bans political parties and multi-party politics, can be regarded as one heading towards dictatorship and oppression and hence underdevelopment.

Multi-party politics in Uganda does not necessarily guarantee democracy not only because of the shortcomings that characterise it during election periods but also other factors, as discussed below. First, multi-party politics in Uganda coincided with the removal of presidential term limits, which was brazenly done through bribery and manipulation of parliamentarians into voting in favour of it. And yet, as Makara observes, having term limits is one way of facilitating the growth of democracy in Africa, because it checks on presidents who would want to rule for life.³⁶

However, with its removal, there is a threat to democracy as it is always difficult for the opposition to effectively challenge the incumbent for national leadership. Also, in African countries where term limits have been removed, the incumbent always stands for presidency and uses state resources and apparatuses to maintain their position as president. This can be seen in the case of Uganda under President Museveni, in Malawi under President Kamuzu Banda and in Libya under President Muammer Gadhafi. One then wonders if multi-party politics in Uganda means democracy with the absence of presidential term limits, which enables the president to stand for as long as he is alive.

Opposition leaders are always harassed and it is more severe during

election periods. For instance, in the run-up to the 2006 election Dr Kizza Besigye of FDC, the main opposition party, was charged with treason in both civil and military courts and also with rape in civil court. His nomination as a presidential candidate was delayed; and all these charges were meant to slow and block his political activities and career.³⁷ Such harsh treatment of the opposition leaders and their supporters is meant to instil fear and to frustrate their political activities so that all those who were planning to oppose the government would think twice. It is a form of punishment by the state for disrespect, so to speak. As Foucault puts it, punishment was designed to work on others, to impress the minds of others. It is no longer needed to impact heavily on the body of the criminal as they could see the effect of torture and suffering from others.³⁸ If the state were in support of multi-party politics, the opposition would then not face such harassment.

In Uganda, just as in any other dictatorial state in Africa, the state uses the police and the military as if the president or his party personally owned them. For instance, it is appalling how Ugandan forces harass opposition supporters, especially during arrests and dispersing or blocking of their so-called illegal rallies or meetings. The police and the military are always in support of government actions and against the opposition regardless of what the law says. Makara observes that the Ugandan police force have been militarised because the force's leaders are outsourced from the army.³⁹ For instance, the former Inspector General of Police (IGP), General Wamala, and the current one, Kale Kaihura, were all appointed from the army. How then can a country such as Uganda claim to be democratic?

In Uganda, the incumbent under the NRM party won the 2006 and 2011 elections amidst complaints of foul play by the opposition. However, even if the opposition were to accept defeat, there is already unfairness in the ways in which the incumbent solicits votes. There has been an unfair distribution of parliamentary seats in the Ugandan Parliament that can be attributed to the NRM's domination of Parliament, and eventual winning of elections each time they are held. Apart from the NRM securing the majority of seats in Parliament, there are also seats that are reserved for the army, people with disability, and representatives of women, youth and workers that are dominated by the NRM. It has been made impossible for these seats to be won by the opposition as the people are always reminded that it is the president who has made their representation possible.⁴⁰ With these extra seats, the NRM always has an upper hand in Parliament, especially when it comes to passing bills that favour the party. Examples include the removal of the presidential term limits, passing of supplementary budgets and approving corrupt individuals as ministers, among others. In most cases,

therefore, the ordinary citizens' interests are not fully represented by a body that is supposed to do so.

Also during election periods, the government tends to create new districts.⁴¹ The reasons for this can be said to be twofold. The first one is to increase the number of the incumbent's supporters as the people in these districts feel that they should thank the president by voting him and the people representing his party into power. The second reason is that it increases the number of legislators who would later support the NRM and the passing of unfair policies that suppress not only the citizens but also the opposition parties, such as the controversial Public Order Management Act (POMA).⁴² Naturally, increasing the number of districts would be to pave way for easy access to resources and development but in Uganda it's the contrary.

The local council structure also seems to be largely in favour of the NRM as they are often used as a key vehicle for building NRM's organisational structures and mobilisation strategy. This can also be seen during the campaigns leading to the 2000 and 2005 referendums, where local councils were given funds to mobilise people to vote for and support the referendum cause.⁴³ Also, the position of mayor and other district positions in the country have been created for the same purpose. For example, in Kampala city, there is a mayor, a Kampala City Council Authority (KCCA) Executive Officer and a Minister for Kampala. One wonders about the role of all these city officials. Could it be that because the mayor, Erias Lugwago, is from an opposition party, the president had to appoint people from his own league to work within the city? In fact, it seems as though the mayor has been stripped of all authority and responsibilities pertaining to his office. The president also appoints District Resident Commissioners (RDCs) and their deputies whose roles are not only controversial but also redundant. One may argue that this is another way in which the president rewards his supporters at the district level while depleting state resources.

On the surface, there seems to be media freedom but a critical analysis reveals that media outlets, such as the press and radio and television stations, are harassed if they rightfully criticise and expose the government's flaws. This is done on the pretext that the press is posing a 'security threat' to the state and to the citizens. For example, Central Broadcasting Service (CBS), which is owned by the Buganda Kingdom, was turned off air for two years and it was only reopened when the Buganda region threatened not to vote the incumbent president, Museveni, back into power.⁴⁴ The Red Pepper, Monitor Publications and Nation Television (NTV) have also been shut down for publishing and airing criticisms of the government or NRM

state officials. Journalists have also faced harassment and arrests for their criticisms. For example Andrew Mwenda, a journalist and political analyst, while hosting a political talk show on the then Monitor FM, now KFM, was in 2005 put in jail on charges of ‘sedition and promoting sectarianism’. The media in Uganda are treated as though they are the opposition, especially if they are privately owned.

The Electoral Commission (EC) in Uganda is not an independent body as is the case with other African states, such as Ghana. The president elects the EC chairperson and this makes it hard for the team to act honestly, especially when presiding over elections. Even amidst complaints from the opposition and the courts of law about the irregularities of the EC such as rigging of votes, electoral unfairness and violence, the president always appoints the same team to preside over elections. One then wonders what message the state is sending out to the citizens and the world. Is there democracy? Much as opposition parties always present presidential candidates, what guarantee is there that the embattled EC will not rig votes in favour of the incumbent, particularly since all electoral reforms have been rejected.

The way the state operates in a multi-party system is as though it is still operating under a no-party system; state resources and apparatuses are used to run NRM party activities; the EC is partisan and non-independent from the state. One can thus conclude that internal and external pressures may have forced the NRM government to re-introduce multi-party politics in Uganda, but has since failed to allow the proper functioning of a competitive multi-party system.⁴⁵In Uganda, no individual or party has ever handed over the presidency or power to another; power is always captured through military force. The state of democracy in Uganda leaves a lot to be desired. Regardless of whatever system the state seems to adopt, democracy is always lacking, especially in the way the elections are organised and conducted.

4.2 Why Does Democracy Seem Unsuccessful in Uganda?

Andrew Mwenda, a political journalist and analyst in Uganda asserts that ‘[t]he worst obstacle to democratic development in Uganda has been the personalisation of the state’.⁴⁶ He argues that the state uses the army to suppress the opposition, and money to recruit support, reward loyalty and buy off actual and potential opponents. The state uses the army and also because it has access to taxpayers’ money, it chooses to do whatever it wants with it without being accountable. A lot of revenue goes to the military budget only to aid such ventures and unplanned-for external wars such as the Congo war (1998) and the Sudan war (1997 and 2015). Moreover, the decision to use state money and involve the army is made by the president

and his cohorts as if the state is their personal property.

Mwenda also observes that Museveni seems to invest more resources in building security agencies, as seen from the special units that have been formed from the army. Examples include the Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI), the Internal Security Organisation (ISO), the External Security Organisation (ESO), the Criminal Investigations and Intelligence Directorate (CIID), the Special Forces Command (SFC, formerly the Presidential Guard Brigade (PGB)), the Joint Anti-Terrorism Taskforce (JATT) and the Violent Crime Crack Unit (VCCU). Some units performed impressively; a case in point is the VCCU that was instrumental in cracking down on crimes in 2001 and 2002.⁴⁷ On the whole, however, all these units are not really necessary, as some seem to duplicate roles. Their diversity can, therefore, be tied to the president's zeal to create jobs for his supporters and also to strengthen the security around him so as to weaken the opposition. Museveni has used soldiers, the police and security agents to frustrate the opposition and have his way inside and outside Uganda, especially in the Great Lakes region. Instead, the resources expended on these units could have been used to build institutions that facilitate the growth of democracy.

Uganda has also slowly drifted off the road to democracy because of the state's undermining of formal institutions such as Parliament, the security forces and the judiciary. The state does this through weakening the crucial decision making bodies in the country. For instance, the constitution is always changed to suit or favour the ruling party. The Parliament of Uganda that should make decisions and represent the people's voice is frequently bribed, brutalised and manipulated into siding with the ruling party. For example, as Mwenda observes, in October 2004, soldiers arrested and brutally beat four northern Uganda Members of Parliament (MP) for trying to hold a political rally in their constituencies.⁴⁸ The rally could have been meant to sensitise the people regarding land ownership and sale because that was the contentious issue in the north at the time. But because most parts of the north were UPC strongholds, these MP's actions could have been taken as a threat to the NRM. Also, Museveni has been chipping away Parliament's power by not only increasing the number of MPs who can support him but also by appointing ministers from among the legislators. This implies that nearly one-quarter of all MPs belong to the president's camp.⁴⁹ It is then not a surprise that constitutional changes and unfair policies are easily passed in Parliament regardless of their effects on national development.

The judiciary is forced to rule in favour of the ruling party through threats and intimidation. For instance in 2001, when the opposition brought before the Court of Appeal a suit challenging the constitutionality of the June 2000

referendum that endorsed the president's 'no-party system' and the court confirmed that the state had violated the constitution, the NRM organised a mob to attack the court, forcing the judges to flee their chambers in fear.⁵⁰ Since then, this hand of the state has been in favour of the NRM party and its policies regardless of how far they violate the constitution and the people's rights.

The failure to democratise can also be attributed to the identification of political parties, in Uganda just as in other African states that tend to be organised along ethno-regional lines, with ethnic kinship; and political parties always compete to be able to bring benefits to their constituents.⁵¹ Also, people tend to vote for people from their ethnic groups regardless of their ability to perform in Parliament or as presidents. The ethnicisation of politics, as Brown and Kaiser observe, is often reinforced by politicians themselves, and promotes competition for access to resources rather than institutionalised compromise that theoretically characterises a democracy.⁵² This kind of politics has encouraged corruption, tribalism and favouritism in public institutions that have, in turn, undermined democracy and national development.

Furthermore, despite the existence of all the necessary legislation to guide the working of a multi-party political system in Uganda, there are still misgivings about the behaviour of political parties when it comes to political tolerance and respect. This is one of the obstacles to multi-party politics.⁵³ For instance the NRM government is found of howling insults to the opposition leaders and their slogans as a way of undermining their presidency and capability to win votes and rule the country. This sometimes turn violent often times creating fights amongst supporters. This lack of tolerance and respect for one another's views is the reason why the opposition and the state cannot have fruitful round table discussions for the good of their country.

5. Conclusion

The success of multi-party politics has been a challenge in Uganda because, much as the people were happy with the opening up of the country's political space as they envisaged that it would improve governance, and aid democracy and development, it seems to all be a fallacy. As Mwenda observes, Museveni's regime has never had any intentions to build democracy, as seen from their refusal to repeal repressive laws, which hamper the freedom of organisation, expression, assembly and publication.⁵⁴ All these are indications of a country that has wavered off the road to democracy and development. Thus, the NRM system has gradually reverted to one-

man rule and it remains a fallacy for Uganda to even think that they are operating under a democracy, let alone multi-party politics. This is because, as Mwenda further observes, by 2005, the president had subdued all internal opposition to his efforts to create a one-man authoritarian government.⁵⁵ Much as the political space was opened up for multi-party politics, the playing field was not levelled among the various political parties, an act which was seen to weaken the democratic process in Uganda.⁵⁶

The return to multi-party politics in Uganda can be greatly attributed to the efforts of the middle class workers, politicians, writers and professionals much as President Museveni does not acknowledge their efforts. The middle class has not only actively participated in the country's politics by vying for political posts but they have also engaged in underground and open campaigns to ensure that the public gets sensitised regarding the political situation of their country and act accordingly to achieve some degree of democracy and development, which the country now enjoys.

The media has been an important tool for the middle class to reach the public and also to link the public to the state. Through the media, the middle class has been able to organise talk shows both on radio and television. These shows have been able to cater for all categories of people, from the illiterates to the politicians to the professionals. The middle class has also been active in writing criticism and for sensitising the public. They have engaged in protests and demonstrations against unfair policies that undermine democracy and developments like the passing of the Public Order Management Bill (POMB).

This paper has shown that although the NRM government finally succumbed to the demand for multi-party politics like its counterparts in East Africa and the rest of Africa, the state still operates as though it is still in a one-party or no-party era. Multi-party politics in Uganda does not necessarily indicate democracy and development. This is both because of the unlevelled field for political participation and because the state seems not to be committed to the growth of multi-party politics in Uganda, which would aid democracy and eventually development. This state of affairs persists despite the fact that the NRM has always attributed its longevity to democracy and development

Notes

1. Nabunya (2009:2), a master's degree thesis.
2. See Makara (2010), Mazrui (1967).
3. Makara (2010:82).
4. See Mamdani (1988)
5. Makara (2010:82)
6. Mwenda (2007:27)

7. Bratton & Lambright (2001:430)
8. Doornbos (2009:109)
9. Mwenda (2007:29)
10. Bratton & Lambright (2001:432)
11. Ibid., 446.
12. Mwenda (2007:23).
13. Mwenda (2007:23).
14. Ibid., 24.
15. Nabunya (2009:3), a master's degree thesis.
16. Bratton & Lambright (2001:430).
17. Ofwono Opondo, the NRM spokesperson, is reported to have said that they are not afraid of the opposition alliance because their achievements can speak for them. The New Vision website, Kampala **10/6, (2015)**
18. The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995), Article 269. Government Printer, Kampala.
19. See Barya (2000).
20. See report by Chr. Mischelsen Institute and Makerere University, *The Legal and Institutional Context of the 2006 Elections*, Research Report. (2005).
21. Mwenda (2007:34).
22. Ibid, 35.
23. Nabunya (2009:30), a master's degree thesis.
24. Kitua cha Katiba (2000).
25. Nabunya (2009:31).
26. Ibid., 6.
27. Nabunya (2009:14), also see Mwenda (2007).
28. 'No change' was and is still a slogan that the movement government has always chanted, especially during elections, to indicate that Uganda is not yet ready to change the president or system.
29. See Nabunya (2009:13-17)
30. Ibid., 3.
31. See Nabunya 2009:4-5
32. Makara (2010: 81)
33. Ibid.
34. Nabunya (2009:8), a master's degree thesis.
35. Ibid., 9.
36. Makara (2010:83).
37. Makara (2010: 83), also see Mwenda (2007:26).
38. Foucault, M. (1995:101)
39. Makara (2010:84).
40. See Makara (2010).
41. Mwenda asserts that the reason for this is to create jobs for local council officials and Museveni's supporters (2007:31-32).
42. The Public Order Management Act (POMA) prohibits more than 25 people from holding a meeting without permission from the Inspector General of Police (Makara, 2010:84); also see Uganda Citizens' Compact on Free and Fair Elections (2014:8).
- 43 See Makara (2010), Mwenda (2007:28) and Bratton and Lambright (2001).
44. Makara (2010:87).

45. Makara (2010:91).
46. Mwenda (2007:28).
47. Mwenda (2007:33)
48. Mwenda (2007:24)
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., 25.
51. Nabunya 2009:15
52. Brown and Kaiser 2007: 1143
53. Msekwa (2004:21-22).
54. Ibid., 28.
55. Ibid., 25.
56. Nabunya (2009:3), a master's degree thesis.

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