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THE EVOLUTION OF THE MUSEVENI REGIME IN UGANDA (1986-2012)

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Résumé

Il y a 27 ans, à la tête du Mouvement national de la résistance (NRM), le Président Yoweri Museveni a pris le pouvoir en Ouganda, renversant le gouvernement Obote après un combat de cinq ans (1981-1986). Le premier gouvernement Obote avait pris fin suite au coup d'état militaire du Général Idi Amin Dada en 1971. En 1980, Obote était revenu au pouvoir au travers d'élections que Museveni et ses alliés considéraient comme frauduleuses. Dans ce contexte, le NRM est arrivé au pouvoir en promettant un nouveau commencement, un complet revirement par rapport à la politique de sectarisme et d'exclusion, à la fraude électorale et à la manipulation d'un public ignorant des manœuvres de politiciens servant leurs propres intérêts. Le choix d'une politique inclusive s'est manifesté dans la décision de suspendre les partis politiques responsables de divisions et d'introduire l'idée de « politique sans partis », en invitant les membres d'organisations politiques rivales à participer au gouvernement. Par ce biais, durant les dix premières années du gouvernement Museveni, ce dernier parvint à unifier la plupart des régions du pays sur la base d'un vaste programme socio-économique de reconstruction. Bien que les revendications concernant le retour au multipartisme débutèrent mi-1990 et s'intensifièrent à la fin de la décennie, il fallut 20 ans pour briser le monopole *de facto* et *de jure* du NRM, au moins sur le plan juridique, grâce à la combinaison de pressions internes et externes. La décision de réintroduire les partis politiques fut prise au même moment que des manœuvres furent entreprises pour rendre la durée du mandat présidentiel illimité afin de permettre au Président Museveni de continuer à se présenter aux élections.

L'aboutissement de ces 20 années de suspension du multipartisme fut d'affaiblir les partis. Ainsi, lorsque les restrictions sur leurs activités furent levées en 2005, ces derniers n'étaient pas en mesure de concourir à égalité avec le NRM qui, sans compétition, était devenu hégémonique. En conséquence, le pays est passé de l'ère de la « politique sans partis », à une ère politique dominée par un seul parti. A l'heure actuelle, la confusion permanente entre parti et État a permis à ce parti de dominer à la fois au plan national et local. Le patronage constitue l'un des moyens utilisés pour conserver la suprématie de ce parti : l'accès au pouvoir, aux postes et à l'argent sont clés pour la mobilisation politique, le recrutement et la rétention de membres et de supporters. En outre, l'armée, prenant la suite du National Resistance Army (NRA) qui avait servi au NRM dans la prise de pouvoir, rebaptisée Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF), joue un rôle pivot. Aujourd'hui, bien que la participation des militaires à la politique soit formellement interdite puisque l'armée est un organe de l'État, l'armée a conservé beaucoup de son influence au travers du rôle individuel d'officiers - à commencer par le Président Museveni lui-même - qui interviennent de manière informelle et souvent sous des prétextes douteux en politique. De plus, afin de réduire l'écart entre l'UPDF et d'autres agences de sécurité telles que la police, des efforts ont été réalisés pour y infiltrer des officiers de l'armée et ces derniers ont progressivement occupés les positions clés tant au niveau local que national.

Après son accession au pouvoir, abandonnant très vite sa fascination pour le dirigisme économique, le NRM a cherché à faire ses preuves dans une politique en faveur de l'entrepreneuriat, en adoptant les politiques libérales du FMI et des programmes d'ajustements structurels de la banque mondiale. L'ouverture aux investissements étrangers a suivi avec en particulier le rappel des hommes d'affaire d'origine asiatique expulsés par Idi Amin.

La combinaison de tous ces facteurs explique les taux de croissance élevés depuis vingt ans, bien que les transformations structurelles de l'économie demeurent illusoire. La récente découverte du pétrole et sa mise en exploitation prévue constituent un changement, mais il est peu probable que le gouvernement soit capable de se débarrasser de ses attributs néo-patrimoniaux et d'utiliser la richesse produite par le pétrole pour le bénéfice de l'ensemble de ses citoyens.

Abstract

Twenty-seven years ago, President Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) seized power in Uganda after toppling the Obote government following a 5-year (1981-1986) insurgency. Obote's first government had fallen to a military *coup d'état* by General Idi Amin Dada in 1971. He had then returned to power in 1980 through elections that Museveni and his associates and Ugandans generally believed had been rigged. The NRM acceded to power promising a new beginning, a complete departure from the erstwhile politics of sectarianism and exclusion, ballot rigging, and manipulation of an ignorant population by unprincipled and scheming politicians. Its commitment to inclusive politics became evident in its decision to suspend the hitherto divisive multi-party politics and introduce no-party politics bringing on board members of would-be rival political organisations into government. It was therefore able, at least for the first ten years of Museveni's tenure, to unite much of the country behind the broad agenda of politico-socio-economic reconstruction. Although demands for a return to multi-partysm started in the mid-1990s and intensified as the decade wore on, altogether it took 20 years for the NRM's de facto and de jure political monopoly to be broken, at least in the formal sense, thanks to a combination of internal and external pressure. The decision to open up for competition was made alongside manoeuvres to introduce unlimited presidential terms to enable President Museveni to carry on contesting for power.

A key outcome of the 20-year suspension of multi-party politics was the enfeebling of parties so that after restrictions on their activities were lifted in 2005, they could not compete on equal footing with the NRM after two decades of growth without competition and consequent self-entrenchment. Consequently, from no-party politics, the country slid into a new era of dominant-party politics. Today its continued fusion with the state has allowed it to become overwhelmingly dominant at both the national and local levels. One avenue it has used to maintain its dominance is the politics of patronage whereby access to power, position, and money are key tools of political mobilisation, recruitment, and retention of members and supporters. In all this, the military, the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) has been pivotal. First, its predecessor, the National Resistance Army (NRA), was the instrument the NRM used to capture power. Thereafter, although formally prohibited from participation in politics as an organ of the state, it retained much influence, which it continues to exercise via individual officers, including President Museveni himself, who dabble, albeit informally and often under questionable pretexts¹, in politics². In addition, in order to narrow the distance between the NRM and other security agencies such as the police, efforts have been made to infiltrate them with loyal army officers who have gradually risen to occupy key positions at national and local levels.

Very early on, the NRM government established its pro-business and free-market credentials after it ditched its initial fascination with economic dirigisme and embraced the IMF- and World Bank-led structural adjustment programme. That was followed quickly by the opening up to foreign investment, including the recalling of Asians Idi Amin had expelled. A combination of all these factors explains Uganda's very high growth rates over the last two decades, although the attainment of structural transformation remains illusive. It is hoped that the recent discovery of oil and its prospective exploitation will change this, although doubts abound as to the capacity of the government to overcome its neo-patrimonial attributes and use the oil wealth for the benefit of its citizens.

¹ Such as military officers serving as presidential advisors making inflammatory or derogatory comments about opposition parties or politicians and claiming their positions place them above military discipline under which participation in partisan politics by military personnel is prohibited.

² For example, although President Museveni retired from the army, he still wears a military uniform, remains a member of the military High Command, and chairs the Army Council.

Introduction

It is nearly 27 years since the National Resistance Movement (NRM) under the leadership of the then little known Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, seized power in Uganda, after waging a five-year war on an elected government they accused of dictatorship, election rigging, and violation of human rights. Under Museveni, Uganda has experienced the longest continuous period of peace and stability since Independence. Multiple insurgencies have nevertheless rocked some parts of the country, the most vicious being that conducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and its predecessors in Acholiland in the North over a 20-year period.³ Since 2005, the entire country has been 'pacified', marking a new phase of regime consolidation.

The 27-year period has seen both President Museveni and the NRM evolve. From espousing the virtues of democracy, for which they claim to have fought the Obote regime, they have now become obstacles to attempts by opposition parties and activists to widen the space for competition. From condemning interference in politics by the military under Amin and Obote, they opened the way for the military to play partisan roles in the country's political life. They came to power condemning corruption and went on to preside over levels of corruption many observers agree are unprecedented in the country's history. Although the economy has grown tremendously, it has done so against the background of lack of structural transformation and within a neo-patrimonial context characterised by, among other phenomena, cronyism between politicians and key economic elites, local and foreign, and patronage-based politics. Characterising the regime in absolute terms as "neopatrimonial" is not quite as useful as looking at changes over time and degrees of patrimonialisation⁴, looking at the tension between institutional and personal forms of power and trying to locate institutions and strategies that counter balance patrimonial tendencies. The growth of patrimonialisation has led in the Ugandan case to the narrowing of democratic space. This paper is a brief elaboration of these developments, focusing on power stakes, strategies to remain in control of the country and its economy.

High and low politics

In 1986, after years of exclusionary politics, President Museveni and the NRM surprised and pleased many Ugandans when they set up an inclusive government into which potential rivals were invited. An intra-elite consensus was arrived at around the imperative to shun the politics of exclusion driven partly by putative political ideology⁵ and partly by religious and tribal divisions locally baptised 'sectarianism', which had hitherto characterised national politics and embrace inclusion⁶. A key feature of the compromise was the suspension of the activities of political parties and the confinement of all parties then in existence to their offices in the national capital, Kampala. The compromise led to the birth of "no-party politics" under which the country was governed for two decades. For some years the elite consensus served as the foundation

³ For details of insurgencies during Museveni's rule, see, for example, Golooba-Mutebi, 2008.

⁴ Bach and Gazibo, 2012.

⁵ For example, Democratic Party (supporting Catholics and the Catholic church) saw the Protestant-dominated Uganda People's Congress as 'communist', while they considered themselves to be 'capitalist' (interview with Professor Lwanga Lunyiigo, Ugandan historian and former Democratic Party advisor (2010). See, also, Gingyera-Pinychwa, 1978.

⁶ See, Lindeman, 2008 for the role of elite consensus in stabilizing politics.

on which political stability, which was necessary to facilitate post-war reconstruction, rested. It also served another purpose: it allowed both Museveni and the NRM to influence the direction the country would take without the disruptive arguments it might have had with an assertive opposition, and also to consolidate their dominant positions. In spite of the regime's shifting support, the NRM and the military have remained highly instrumental in the current context. Today, Uganda has embraced multipartyism and formal democracy, yet the regime relies on the underlying politics of patronage and a strong security apparatus to continue to dominate national politics.

From “No party politics” to dominant-party politics

Nine years after Museveni took over power, around 1995, the consensus about “no party politics” started unravelling. Members of the then ruling coalition who had joined from the parties whose activities had been suspended began to exit, arguing it was time to revert to multi-party politics. Indeed, the 1996 presidential elections saw political parties, then still under heavy restrictions, join hands as the “inter-party forces cooperation (IPFC)” and sponsor a joint candidate, Paulo Semogerere of the Democratic Party, to contest against President Museveni. Semogerere lost, but the idea of resurgent multipartism had been planted into the minds of the general public. For the NRM and its remaining allies, however, it was too early to open up. It did not take long, though, for another group to defect from the coalition.

The second exit took place in the lead up to the second post-war presidential elections in 2001. During campaigns for the first elections in 1996, President Museveni had promised that he would step down in 2001. After winning the elections decisively, he went on to preside over what some of his associates in the NRM came to regard as a political organisation that had abandoned its mission and principles. The fall-out from internal discussions eventually led to several members deciding to leave and join forces with elements of other political groupings. These developments led to the establishment of Reform Agenda, which fronted Colonel Kiiza Besigye, his former physician and also former national political commissar, as a rival candidate to Museveni during the 2001 presidential elections. Reform Agenda later became the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) and grew into today's largest opposition party in Uganda.

The third and last major exit occurred in 2004/05 amidst the debate and controversy surrounding President Museveni's refusal, yet again, to step down, but instead to orchestrate the lifting of presidential term limits from the constitution in order for him to contest for the presidency and stay in power. Some of his associates who had tolerated his about-turn in 2001 were unwilling to support what looked like a project designed to open the way for him to stay indefinitely. They, however, were unable to convince the majority of NRM members not to support him. After he won the battle to amend the constitution, some left voluntarily while others were forced out using direct and indirect means. After this episode, as if in exchange for amending the constitution, Museveni strongly advocated for opening up the field to multi-partism. The opening up also allowed members of the NRM who felt unhappy with the decision taken on the constitution to leave and join other political organisations or establish new ones and widen the field of competition⁷. The multi-partists had finally won the argument, supported by a donor community increasingly disenchanted by what they believed was becoming a one-party state. In 2005 the country returned to full-fledged multi-party

⁷ The exact vernacular (Luganda) phrase he used was “tubejjeko” (let us reject – or eject - them).

competition. That, however, did not necessarily make the NRM and President Museveni willing to accept the principle of competing on equal terms with their rivals. Rather, they proceeded to throw obstacles in their way⁸.

When President Museveni and the NRM decided to open up political space to multi-party politics in 2005 after 20 years of de facto one-party rule, the developments were hailed as a triumph for democracy. However, unknown to casual observers, 20 years of enforced political party inactivity, which had enabled the NRM to build, strengthen and entrench itself, had undermined parties, making it extremely difficult for them to play their rightful roles in society⁹. Experience since that time shows that for a multi-party political system to function properly, a lot more is required than simply numerous parties trying to out-compete each other for votes each time there is an election.

For keen observers, it has become clear that when the local context is not conducive to competitive adversarial politics, multi-party competition can remain simply a pipe dream for its advocates and enthusiasts. Where the freedom enjoyed by parties is only in the statute books, they cannot be expected to prepare themselves properly for competition and the exercise of power. Where they cannot freely recruit members, open branches, raise funds, and campaign freely for power and the values they subscribe to, competitive multi-party politics remains at the level of a farce.

Uganda is one such context. The context is extremely challenging for the NRM's rival parties to operate in. Perhaps the greatest problem they face is lack of financial resources and limited ability to fundraise. Opposition parties encounter difficulties sourcing funding partly because of the conduct of the NRM, and partly the anti-party bent of large numbers of ordinary Ugandans. Not many people or local organisations, including businesses, are prepared to face the risk of donating money openly to opposition parties. There are many claims, including by members of the business community, that those individuals and companies or organisations that make donations risk encountering obstacles when trying to transact business with the government. Competing for tenders to supply the government becomes more difficult, for example. Others attract investigation for offences such as tax evasion. Where the government can pin them down for wrongdoing, they suffer heavy punishment. Although made by members of the business community, these claims are difficult to verify or prove. They, however, may be an indication of what may be actually happening. Therefore, while the NRM can fundraise without fear and prepare in advance, opposition parties cannot match the amounts of money it has at its disposal.

There is also a phenomenon that merits further research, to which the NRM's rivals have fallen victim. Whereas organisations and the wealthy fear to give them money openly and while those that give do so secretly, ordinary members of the public expect to be given money by parties and politicians, not the other way round. And so politicians seeking office must find large amounts of money to buy gifts and also donate cash. Popular lore on the grapevine has it, for example, that the NRM spends several millions of dollars on these gifts, courtesy mainly of its free access to public funds. Financial demands on people vying for parliamentary seats have left many heavily indebted and open to bribery and influence by the executive after they join parliament. This is partly the explanation for parliament's tendency to retreat on matters where MPs first assert themselves and then quickly back down.

⁸ See, for example, Kobusingye, 2010.

⁹ See Carbone, 2008; Tripp, 2010 and Rubongoya, 2007.

The politics of patronage and control: power and popularity

Although multipartyism was re-introduced after nearly 20 years of exclusive NRM rule, the one party state syndrome still lingers on, mainly because of its overwhelming dominance of the political arena. To a large extent the source of the dominance is the capacity by its leadership in the person of President Museveni, courtesy of free access to state resources, to dispense patronage that financially constrained opposition parties are simply not able to match. Yet even with the patronage machine's ability to gather support, divisions within the party continue unabated, creating factionalism that has seen independent-minded MPs refuse to toe the party line and individuals dissatisfied with the conduct and management of internal elections declaring themselves independent and defeating party candidates in parliamentary elections.

There are also indications that important shifts have occurred over the years in the regional support the NRM enjoys. Some have interpreted this as amounting to the narrowing of the regime's power base, which might represent a threat to its popularity. Caution must be exercised in interpreting the general implications of these shifts, especially in the light of the inroads the NRM and President Museveni made in 2011 into regions in the North and East of the country that, during previous elections in 2001 and 2006, had voted massively for the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC).

Museveni's support originally stemmed from several regions of Uganda, particularly in the general South, regions that had previously suffered domination under Northerner-led regimes. In the central region, for instance, he gained popularity through his anti-Obote alliance with the Baganda and his decision in 1993 to reinstate the Buganda kingdom abolished by Obote in 1967. Obote's abolition of the Buganda monarchy was the reason why the Baganda were willing to help Museveni topple him. In recent years, however, President Museveni has been alienating some groups that, in the past, were loyal allies. This is costing the NRM some support. For example, his friendship with the Buganda monarchy and Baganda monarchists has soured on account of what is perceived to be his unreliability on matters to do with their demands for federalism, the return of the kingdom's properties expropriated by the Obote government during the 1960s, and the refusal by the government to pay money owed to the monarchy for properties it has occupied for decades without paying rent. Worse still, many Baganda see the government as deliberately engaged in mistreating and disrespecting their king by, for example, interfering with his freedom of movement, and hiving off parts of his kingdom and turning them into autonomous cultural areas with their own cultural leaders¹⁰. It was indeed over a confrontation between Buganda and the central government that riots exploded in Kampala in September 2009.

It is the regime's degraded relationship with former allies such as the Buganda monarchy and what some observers perceive as its increasing retreat into its westerner core, that have led some commentators to argue that Museveni's political base has shrunk. Indeed, in many ways it has. However, there is a tendency to exaggerate the degree to which it has been diminished. Close observation suggests that while the NRM has suffered significant elite defections, among ordinary folk, large numbers still support him.

The strength of the NRM's links with ordinary Ugandans, especially rural masses, is evident in the way Museveni manages power. His elevation to high office of carefully

¹⁰ Tripp, 2010.

selected regional elites who wield influence in their areas of origin ensures that their kin are made to believe they are ‘part of the government’, even if in reality they may not be that important. In the event that any of these regional barons falls out of favour, someone with similar influence from the same region will be found to replace them. This ensures that many groups are mobilised to support both Museveni and the NRM, as indeed many still do. The importance of these elites and the on-the-ground work they do became evident at the time of amending the constitution. The most vocal supporters of the amendment project were regional delegates who had been transported from rural areas after his agents had mobilised them over a period of time.

Also, Museveni has immense charisma and a common touch, which he puts to effective use, particularly on visits to rural areas where he conducts closed village-level meetings with local notables, telling them what plans he has for them, and handing out money in brown envelopes. People who have watched him do this emphasise its effectiveness at winning the loyalty of local elites such as teachers, elected local leaders, and other rural notables. People such as these are the footmen who mobilise support for him within villages during election campaigns. Those who aspire to elected office usually receive financial assistance. In addition, Museveni will put in a symbolic appearance at their campaign rallies in classic “scratch my back and I will scratch yours” style. Therefore, claims that his base has shrunk should be treated with caution. While occasionally there may be reports of the party being undermined by disgruntled supporters such as its mainly rural-based political mobilisers, the NRM has shown again and again its ability to regain the initiative through cash payments, promises, summons to face-to-face meetings with the highly persuasive Museveni at State House or any of his rural residences and, if need be, sheer intimidation.

Nothing here should be understood as implying that all is well within the NRM, or that Museveni’s support is drawn largely from opportunists among the regional political barons, that somehow they are all careerists, or even that such barons who come from outside his immediate and somewhat captive western constituency¹¹ are not powerful. Some certainly are. There are, also, regional elites who cannot lay claim to particular political constituencies but who, owing to their loyalty, perform functions that render them relatively powerful. Despite his limited popularity with rank-and-file NRM members and reported tensions with President Museveni and First Lady Janet¹², Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi, his immediate predecessor, Apollo Nsibambi, and less conspicuous personalities such as Gertrude Njuba and Colonel Olive Zizinga are examples. He has many trusted confidants who work behind the scenes at State House and the Office of the President.

For example, Mrs Njuba and Mrs Zizinga played important roles in efforts by the government to secure the support of ordinary Baganda, especially those living as tenants and squatters on land owned by especially members of the old Buganda elite, in its drive to popularise the Land Act 1998 and subsequently the Land Amendment Act 2007, two key pieces of legislation intended to tackle the related problems of landlessness and land concentration. Specifically, Gertrude Njuba mobilised squatters to

¹¹ It is captive in the sense that, with the exception of a few isolated islands of dissent, which tend to vote for the opposition, this region usually gives Museveni unambiguous endorsements via bloc voting. For many voters, it would seem that having so many ‘representatives’ in the government in addition to the President is a powerful motivating factor. In a sense it reflects the sentiments captured in the title of Michaela Wrong’s book on politics in Kenya, “It’s our time to eat”.

¹² Mutaizibwa, 2012.

form tenants' associations across the kingdom in order "to resist eviction", a role that has recently been assumed by newly-elevated but previously little known and still politically light-weight Minister of State for Lands, Aidah Nantaba.¹³ These efforts may not have been effective, but they demonstrate the importance of the personalities involved. Although some are relatively insignificant outside of their link to the President, this in no way diminishes the immense influence they wield.

Also, Museveni has a network of influential elites operating outside formal political structures that help him keep in touch with the grassroots and different organised groups in society. They include cultural and religious leaders, and prominent businessmen and women, people who derive their influence from socio-economic and other roles they play in their local communities. Members of the business community supporting the coalition are to be found across the manufacturing industrial, import and export trading, and farming sectors. The increasingly numerous traditional healers and fortune tellers as well as motorcycle taxi riders also get to meet the President from time to time and, when there are election campaigns to conduct, mobilise support for him.

Immediate family members also play a key mobilising function, as some of them link him directly to specific constituencies or groups of people. His son, Brigadier Muhoozi Kainerugaba who commands The Special Forces Group (SFG), links him to a large crop of young officers in the military, especially in this most important of the army's elite units; his brother, General Caleb Akandwanaho (Salim Saleh) is the mobiliser of different kinds of NRM volunteers, including army veterans, and members of the president's personal grassroots political network; his wife Janet Kataaha offers links with evangelical churches and women's groups. Lastly, the army and the security forces in general are generally supportive of the government. The support manifests itself in the very large margins he wins at elections wherever there is a military installation or barracks. Some argue that soldiers "are forced" to vote for him. This is difficult to verify in the absence of focused research.

The military

The military have played a historically important role which under Museveni has become more evident in the recent context of peace and multiparty politics. Before Museveni the army was an important political constituency, propping up bad governments after ordinary citizens had long tired of them. Throughout its post-colonial history, Uganda has never gone through a peaceful transfer of power from one president to another. This remains a jinx that many now believe Museveni may fall victim. The country has for the most part been governed by narrow elites whose priorities have included locking their rivals out of power permanently. Consequently, excluded groups have always sought to pursue power through violence.¹⁴ So far Museveni is the only leader who has endeavoured to overcome this bitter legacy through politics designed deliberately to be inclusive. That, however, did not stop groups with grievances to take to the bush, leading to a diversity of insurgencies that took years to defeat.

The government's victory has, at least for now taken the gun out of political competition, the exception being guns in the hands of state agents which from time to time become instruments of political self-assertion whenever the government feels

¹³ Asiimwe, 2012.

¹⁴ see Mutibwa, 1992 & Kasfir, 1976.

threatened, even by electoral competition. Whether the re-organisation of the army and police and efforts, albeit sporadic and not always consistent, to transform them into more professional organs of the state may end the history of violent politics remains uncertain.

Changes in the Uganda People's Defence Forces are particularly worthy of highlighting. Until about 5 years ago, the army was almost always in the news for the wrong reasons. They included perceived incompetence because of the time it took to defeat what many believed was a generally inferior Lords Resistance Army; corruption and financial mismanagement by senior officers; favouritism and sectarianism in recruitment, appointment and promotions; a distorted chain of command whereby sometimes junior officers often wielded more power and influence than officers at higher ranks. Today only sectarianism and favouritism are reported to still bedevil the UPDF¹⁵. There are indications that under the current leadership many past failures have been rectified. Reliable sources point to great emphasis on building cohesion, training, reorganisation, and improvement in welfare under a new crop of relatively young officers. Increasingly, also, President Museveni is reported to have further tightened his grip on the institution partly through bringing the most important units under the Special Forces Group¹⁶ now headed by his son, Brigadier Muhoozi Kainerugaba. Elsewhere, a young cadre of university-educated and highly trained officers, many recruited informally by Brigadier Kainerugaba in the 1990s, have taken over command positions at all levels.

A curious factor cited as responsible for driving the modernisation and general improvement is the experience of the UPDF in its clashes with the Rwanda Defence Forces in Congo during the 1990s. In those encounters, the more disciplined, motivated, and better managed but smaller RDF routed and humiliated the UPDF. Subsequent tensions which relations between the two countries for several years after those clashes forced a decision in Uganda to 'do something' about the UPDF and make sure that there is no repeat of "the Kisangani experience" in any future encounters.

There are questions about the loyalty of the military and whether a military coup is not possible. Sources suggest that Brigadier Kainerugaba's control over the most important units of the military and the appointment of his friends to command positions in different parts of the army is designed to minimise chances that coup plots could go on undetected. Also, the army's top leadership consists of loyal officers. Almost all of them once served in the presidential guard brigade. Not all of them are necessarily from President Museveni's ethnic group or the western region. Many owe their careers and positions directly to Museveni's patronage. A coup or sudden change would not be in their interest.

Further, modernisation, re-orientation and re-organisation of the military have extended to the police. Army officers now routinely cross over to the police to take up key positions, edging out career police officers. Reliable sources suggest the manoeuvres are intended to align the two security arms and enhance cooperation, especially in combatting crime levels that seem to be on the rise as the country develops. It is also intended to keep the political opposition in check, as post-election violence and the response to it by the government demonstrates. The army and the police worked very closely in suppressing the troubles, often shooting demonstrators dead in situations

¹⁵ see, for example, Butagira, T., 2012.

¹⁶ The units include the Presidential Guard Brigade and all motorized and mechanized units, those said to possess the greatest firepower.

where less force could have been used. Infiltrating the police with loyal officers from the military was also intended to cure the police of “ideological bankruptcy” and rid it of tendencies to lean towards the opposition. Sources say that this stemmed from the reputation the police had developed of not voting for President Museveni. On several occasions, the 2001 general elections being most emblematic, he failed to win elections in police barracks and thereafter vowed to ensure they would “vote wisely” in future¹⁷.

It is also the case that while in the past members of the police tended to vote for opposition candidates as evidenced by Museveni’s losses in areas where police barracks were located, at the same time both the police and the army have usually played key roles in getting him and NRM parliamentary candidates (re)elected. At crucial moments in opposition strongholds, police and army personnel flood the area and, in addition to intimidating opposition supporters into not coming out to vote, make it difficult for opposition candidates to conduct organised campaigns by, for example, disrupting their rallies and arresting them and their campaign agents on trumped-up charges, holding them, and releasing them without taking them to court. In the meantime NRM candidates are allowed to campaign and flout electoral laws without hindrance¹⁸. This in no way suggests that there is a formal relationship between the security forces, be it the army or the police, and the NRM.

Although the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces evolved from the National Resistance Army (NRA), the insurgent armed wing of the NRM, which brought it to power, the two were formally separated by legislation, including the constitution which bars army personnel from engaging directly in partisan politics. While this in itself never severed the links many senior officers and veterans of the civil war have with the NRM, it helps keep them out of active politics, although not always successfully, as from time to time they act contrary to the law by making public statements criticising the opposition or praising and pledging allegiance to the NRM and President Museveni¹⁹.

Of critical importance in all this is that rarely are such officers brought to book, the exception usually being those who dare to criticise the government or President Museveni. These could be prosecuted or forced into redundancy by not being deployed for long periods of time²⁰. Therefore, although there are historical links between the NRM and the military, they have been reduced to the level of informality by the law, which in no way means they are insignificant, even in political terms. Aware of these links and informed by the long history of the links between politics and the military, Ugandans tend to hold the view that only people with military background can govern the country successfully, as they are ‘the only ones’ capable of keeping the army in check and ensuring peace and political stability²¹.

The police have, on the other hand, been something of a ‘bête-noire’ for the NRM government and President Museveni for many years. The problematic relationship between the government and the police started immediately the NRM came to power, when they sought to disband it and create a new force on the grounds that it had been an accessory to human rights abuses during the Obote regime. Having been prevented from taking such a step by practical difficulties, the new government, especially President

¹⁷ Interview with a senior journalist specializing in political matters, 29.02.2012.

¹⁸ See, for example, Tumwebaze, et al., 2012. Also, Tumwebaze & Ssali, 2012.

¹⁹ Golooba-Mutebi, 2007.

²⁰ Buwembo, 2012.

²¹ Mpagi, 2012.

Museveni, took to demonising the force, thereby alienating them. At one point so disgusted was President Museveni with the police which he accused of corruption that he suspended the activities of the traffic department. It was against this background that for years police personnel became de facto opponents of the government and President Museveni, to the extent of voting for opposition candidates each time there was a general election. In recent years, however, the government has made efforts to reform the force by infusing it with loyal military personnel, starting with the appointment of army General, Edward Katumba Wamala as the Inspector-General of Police and his replacement in 2005 by another military officer, current IGP, Lieutenant-General Kale Kayihura²². Even recruitment of new officers is now handled carefully, with candidates sometimes vetted for qualities that go beyond the conventional²³, including their ideological leanings²⁴.

Politics and emergent capitalism: The role and place of large capitalists

In its ambitions to embark on the reconstruction of the economy after years of political instability, guaranteeing private property, promoting capitalism and outside investments became the priority of the regime, as shown especially by the early encouragement of the Asian community that Idi Amin had expelled, to return. There are questions about how important this policy has been for the rural majority and the urban poor.

In 1987 the then still new NRM government launched its economic recovery programme²⁵. It identified the private sector as “the engine of economic growth”²⁶. The Museveni government has won itself praise for championing the free market, investment, and its respect for private property ownership. Not long after it came to power, it embarked on efforts to court Asians Idi Amin had expelled and dispossessed in the 1970s to return and invest in the country. A decision was made to return their properties and has been credited with contributing to attracting investment and to the rehabilitation and growth of the private sector, which had been largely destroyed by years of political violence and upheaval under Idi Amin and Milton Obote. The restitution of the Asians’ assets established the government’s credentials for respecting property rights and the rule of law.

That reputation served it well. In the popular imagination it became a prime destination for investment, domestic and foreign, leading to enhanced investment flows. The introduction of liberal investment laws boosted its pro-business/investment credentials further, as investors could bring in capital and repatriate profits without restriction. Other measures followed, such as the passing by parliament of the 1991 Investment Code setting up the Uganda Investment Authority as an independent agency with responsibility for promoting private investment, a one-stop shop for issuing investment licences and approving applications for investment incentives. Between then and 2003, it licensed 2000 projects.

To these measures the government added the pursuit of macroeconomic stability, leading to a reduction in inflation and the beefing up of foreign exchange reserves. The

²² See, Bagala, 2012.

²³ Kakaire, 2011.

²⁴ Mugerwa, 2012.

²⁵ For details see Hansen & Twaddle, 1991.

²⁶ Nyilinkindi & Opagi, 2010.

shilling became fully convertible²⁷. Privatisation of state-owned enterprises boosted private sector growth through the promotion of competition and encouragement of foreign direct investment²⁸. In all this, President Museveni's political support was crucial. It helped that then as now, he wielded great authority, so much so that his word pretty much carried the weight of the law and was therefore taken seriously by all concerned.

Nonetheless, the privatisation of state-owned enterprises was not a roaring success. Many companies were sold to people in high places, including ministers and even military officers, or their relatives and cronies, some without any background in business. One outcome of these developments was the emergence of close relationships among high-level political decision makers and members of the business community who had benefitted from the ability by the former to manipulate the privatisation process. It led to the development of complex and murky webs of financial and business ties, from which given politicians source money to bankroll their political activities²⁹. Also, these links enabled large entrepreneurs to seek the president's support and leverage their influence in pursuit of pecuniary interests.

There is a sense in which relationships of this kind can be important for purposes of promoting business, and they can be found in almost every country in some form or other. For example, they can serve as a useful avenue for policy makers to learn quickly about challenges facing business in ways that can help adjust and re-adjust policy quickly. Nonetheless, politicians embedding themselves in business in this kind of way can also have a severely corrupting influence. For example, there are indications that some productive investments enjoy political protection while powerful interests block others. The capture or monopolisation by political entrepreneurs and rent-seeking state elites without business experience of economic resources and opportunities might not lead to much-sought-after development and social change. Also, it can cause divisions among regime businessmen and women who receive preferential treatment and outsiders who do not.

It would not augur well for efforts to create synergies in pursuit of collective goals and interests, as those who receive preferential treatment have no incentive to engage in collective action intended to influence the conduct of the state. In Uganda it has made it possible for President Museveni to support his favourite members of the business community in return for financial support for his political activities, and also loyalty. However, its long-term impact on the business community as well as on the growth of the private sector remains unclear.

Growth without structural transformation

While under Museveni's leadership Uganda has experienced tremendous growth, observers contend that growth has inspired only limited structural transformation. Levels of urbanisation remain highly modest and, while the share of agriculture in overall output decreased from 57 to 30 per cent by 2008, the reduction was not accompanied by workers moving into higher-value activities within, or even outside the sector. Over 70 per cent of the workforce is still in agriculture³⁰.

²⁷ Collier & Reinikka, 2001; Kuteesa et al., 2010.

²⁸ Whitworth & Williamson, 2010.

²⁹ Nogara, 2009; Mwenda & Tangri, 2005.

³⁰ World Bank, 2010.

Nonetheless, for the entire period President Museveni has been in power, Uganda has been a success story as far as economic growth is concerned, and this is unlikely to change for a while yet. Indeed, medium-term predictions point to strong performance. Expected oil revenues are forecast to add 12-13 additional percentage points to current annual GDP growth when the oil starts flowing somewhere around 2018 according to estimates³¹. Observers have voiced concern, however, that the high growth rates have not benefitted the poor or even generated employment opportunities for the country's multitudes of unemployed people, especially the youth. Nor has it, observers contend, catalysed structural transformation. There are doubts as to whether the windfalls expected from the oil sector will help change this picture, especially if the government continues with its current under-investment in agriculture and failure to address problems in the education and human development sector. The implications of this in political, social, economic and environmental terms are immense.

As of March 2012, the IMF predicted just below 5.5 per cent growth for 2012/13, which would return gradually to 6-7 per cent over the medium term³². This is less than the 6.4 per cent in 2011 and is significantly lower than the rates predicted for this period before the 2011 elections when in his 2010/2011 Budget Speech, President Museveni predicted growth rates of 6 per cent. Recent years have also seen relatively subdued growth compared to the average of over 8 per cent from 2000 to 2007/8 and 7 per cent during the 1990s period.

A key factor behind the decline is a mixture of exogenous shocks during 2010/11. They include drought and associated food shortages that are also linked to high-levels of demand from South Sudan, and high inflation in a number of key trading export partners and domestic political and structural problems. Politically, the period of the 2011 presidential election campaigns witnessed a lack of fiscal discipline, with supplementary budgets passed to cover exorbitantly high and unscheduled expenditure to facilitate the President's re-election and on the purchase of fighter jets for the military. Following the elections, the Central Bank and IMF expressed optimism about the capacity of the measures introduced to bring inflation down to reduce it to single digits by the end of 2012. Given the huge expenditure on the 2011 election campaigns, however, in 2016 when Museveni might run for re-election may wreak more havoc on macroeconomic stability courtesy of the high costs of maintaining the patronage machine³³.

Despite these trends, however, for most of the 1990s the poor, especially those practicing smallholder agriculture, benefitted from the growth. However, by the late 1990s and early 2000s the pattern started shifting when a bias towards urban areas and generally the western region became apparent, at the cost most especially, of the northern and eastern regions. There are also concerns about the continued deterioration of the balance of payments on export trade, with a trade deficit of US\$2.1 billion in 2010, up from US\$1.6 billion the previous year. The country is increasingly dependent on imports, mostly vehicles, motorcycles, lubricants, clothing, cement, unprocessed alcohol and cigarettes, which by far outstrip exports, mainly primary goods. Agricultural products, especially coffee, contribute 46 per cent of export earnings.

³¹ Imaka & Kalungi, 2012.

³² IMF (PSI Statement), 2012.

³³ Barkan, 2011.

China is becoming an increasingly important trade partner. However, the relationship seems to be contributing to embedding rather than transforming this trend. Uganda's import-export ratio with China stands at around 9:1. Although Chinese investment has targeted value addition significantly and involved the reduction of gaps in savings and investment, technology, knowledge, and management, it is also the case that China imports large volumes of non-value-added raw materials from Uganda³⁴. Nonetheless, the abolition of tariffs for Uganda's China-bound exports from June 2012 may bring about a degree of re-balancing. Failure to raise agricultural productivity and move to a higher-end productive economy is especially problematic given the country's high population growth rates³⁵. Nonetheless, employment has won recognition as a very critical issue, not least because of episodes of public disturbance in which unemployed youth have figured prominently³⁶. Indeed, the issue was a central point of campaigning in the lead up to the presidential elections of 2011. That said, concrete policy responses remain piecemeal and focused on training and doubtful incentives³⁷.

Uganda faces several political challenges in connection with the government's commitment to pursuing structural transformation. For example, attaining transformation requires the kind of developmental state it is not. There is also a lot of conflict within key policy-making circles about how the country can muster the necessary investments to bring about transformation while maintaining macroeconomic stability. It is generally agreed within the policy fraternity, among political and bureaucratic elites, and also external advisors³⁸, that major investments in infrastructure and energy are necessary to ensure continued economic growth and transformation. However, there is scepticism among dominant policy actors within economic circles about making such investments with large government resources or loans that breach strict macroeconomic ceilings. This has caused conflict among Ministry of Finance, Bank of Uganda, and the IMF officials. Conflict rotates around commitment to highly contested Washington Consensus-type ideas and approaches and 'new productivist' ones coming from the National Planning Authority and some Ministry of Finance officials.

The productivists lack the political weight and capacity to make the intellectual and strategic case for the said higher investments that could overturn the lingering institutional and ideological power of the neoliberal tendency. Consequently, they are not in position to prevail. Also animating the conflict are legitimate concerns within both camps about the capacity of the government to handle large-scale investments effectively and accountably. The greatest concern, though, remains the absence of a strongly institutionalised plan for modernising agriculture and promoting rural development. Recent research shows that such plans have been critical for the pursuit and achievement of structural transformation in agrarian societies³⁹.

³⁴ Ssenyange 2010: 60.

³⁵ The latest UNHDS data suggests that there has been a slowing down of the fertility rate in Uganda between 2006-2011, from 6.7 to 6.2, alongside increased usage of contraception.

³⁶ See, for example, Golooba-Mutebi, 2011b.

³⁷ Golooba-Mutebi, 2011a.

³⁸ "To date, Uganda's investment rate of around 20 percent has been considerably below that of emerging Asia which has mostly been above 30 percent. For Uganda to assume continued convergence with emerging Asia yet persist with an investment rate far below that of Asia would be to place too much reliance upon achieving a rate of return on investment well above global rates. The prudent course is therefore to raise the investment rate to above 30 percent as soon as practically possible. In turn, this implies that the initial savings rate out of oil revenues should probably be no lower than 30 percent." (Collier 2011: 5).

³⁹ Tracking Development, 2012.

Oil discovery, politics, and visions of the future

As already indicated, serious revenues from oil are unlikely to come on-stream for several years⁴⁰. However, debate about whether or not Uganda will avoid the proverbial resource curse and how best to avoid it, is already intense. At the centre of much of the debate are signs that the government is determined to pursue opaque agendas. Its behaviour has spawned suspicion that it will be business as usual once revenues start coming in. Observers fear that nepotistic networks within the ruling elite will benefit disproportionately⁴¹. Already fuelling further suspicion is the approval by parliament of the Petroleum (Exploration, Development and Production) Bill with its controversial clause (9) giving the Energy minister full power to “negotiate, grant and revoke exploration and production licences, to issue policy and regulations and to approve field development plans”⁴².

On paper, much of the legislation being passed to regulate and govern the operations of the nascent oil sector is as good as it could be. Few, however, feel confident that the government will abandon its now well-established conduct of paying lip service to best practices while violating every principle of accountability. While the parliament elected in 2011 has adopted a robust approach to holding the executive to account, it remains to be seen how far it can sustain the momentum. If managed well, resources from oil are expected to accelerate growth, adding 10-15 per cent to current GDP per capita. The potential to catalyse structural transformation is also said to be high. That said, there are strong grounds for remaining sceptical.

Experience has shown that oil-producing economies tend to contract Dutch disease, with a sudden influx of foreign exchange leading to appreciation in exchange rates, which undermines competitiveness, especially in agriculture and manufacturing. Major investments of oil wealth in infrastructure, currently President Museveni’s priority, is ambiguous because while it offers public goods other sectors can exploit, it also has a tendency to drive up the exchange rate and increase demand for non tradeables. Other concerns are about oil production leading to only few benefits by way of employment creation for locals⁴³. Here, too, experience shows that the oil industry offers fewer jobs than other industries. While the sector’s development and construction phase promises to benefit large numbers of unskilled workers, the work available is necessarily temporary and not that well paid.

The extent to which Uganda will benefit from this wealth in relation to the profits the oil companies will make, depends on the character of the Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs) and the government’s capacity to extract tax revenue from them, both of which are debatable. There are two opposing views about the extent to which the PSAs President Museveni has negotiated favour the country. Civil society groups that are privy to the contents of the early drafts the PSAs and critical parliamentarians claim the oil companies will reap much higher profits than they might expect from what is a relatively low risk investment. They argue that the government will not benefit from

⁴⁰ See, also, Ssekika, 2012.

⁴¹ Interviews with various stakeholders, including civil society group representatives and Members of Parliament (December 10 to 15, 2012).

⁴² Mugerwa, 2012.

⁴³ The ‘Sharing the Growth in Uganda’ study makes the case for promoting “labour intensive, not capital-intensive, growth in the higher productivity sectors so that the large number of new entrants to the labour force will find remunerative employment” (Fox 2009: 3).

further increases in oil prices⁴⁴. Some critics see this as repeating the general pattern of failure to protect the national interest that has been apparent in agreements the government has made with private sector companies be it in the power sector or during the privatisation of formerly state-owned enterprises⁴⁵.

Evidence suggests that only countries with certain political and governance arrangements in place can best avoid the damaging economic and political effects of oil wealth. The arrangements comprise inclusive politics with ruling coalitions that are committed to promoting and safeguarding the national interest⁴⁶, strong and accountable institutions⁴⁷, and coherent and effective regulatory frameworks. Uganda's current ruling coalition shows all the signs of being inimical to the prospect of exploiting oil wealth in the national interest. Its determination to keep a firm and closed grip on things, with President Museveni personally supervising the PSA process and placing significant decision-making powers in the hands of the Minister of Energy⁴⁸ provides sufficient pointers to what the future may look like. Lucrative security contracts around oil installations have been handed to the President's brother and his associates. The Special Forces Group under his son's command provides additional backup. This is in line with the two individuals' influence within political and military circles. Regions where oil has been discovered have also undergone significant militarisation⁴⁹. This context seems to rule out incentives for the ruling coalition to develop strong and independent institutions to oversee oil exploitation.

There are, however, signs that oil wealth and the government's current handling of the sector have catalysed countervailing forces in the form of Members of Parliament and civil society activists determined to challenge the way the government seems to want to conduct business in the sector. There is now a highly vocal parliamentary forum on oil. As pointed out earlier, it remains to be seen how sustained their efforts will be, given President Museveni's divide and rule tactics that have served him well against groups of assertive legislators in the past. Civil society organisations have taken to organising public dialogues and provided the interested public with useful information.

Conclusions

It is too early to predict the direction all these developments will take in the medium to long term. The large-base party structure of the NRM faces enormous challenges in terms of the meaningfulness of its internal democracy. More broadly, it is clear that for now Museveni remains firmly in charge, aided in no small measure by a weak state that he is able to bend to his will. Under his tenure the regime has acquired significant neo-patrimonial characteristics with the growth of personal rule and efforts to monopolise resources (both institutional and economic) by a small but powerful elite. These characteristics explain in many ways why, despite generally good intentions and the championing of key reforms in almost every domain, their implementation has proved difficult. At the end of the day, while they conform to standard best practice, they do not

⁴⁴ PLATFORM 2010.

⁴⁵ On privatization, see, for example, Mwenda and Tangri, 2005

⁴⁶ Poteete (2009).

⁴⁷ According to one source, the resource curse is not inevitable "but very strong institutions of economic governance required to overcome this" (Collier 2011: 12).

⁴⁸ See Vokes 2012: 7 and also Kathman and Shannon 2011.

⁴⁹ Vokes 2012: 8.

fit the neo-patrimonial logic driving his and the regime's pursuit of the survival and self-preservation imperative.

The regime seems to have reached a point of no return where spaces for democratic politics and independent entrepreneurship and monitoring of development activities seem to have shrunk. The narrowing base of the regime's inner circle, formed by close allies and family, is counterbalanced by its increased tendency towards becoming a security state, within a general peaceful and stable context. The regime's protection rhetoric constitutes one of its ideological pillars. Issues of corruption are downplayed, in spite of growing public awareness. Though lower ranking officials might be blamed for malpractices, the regime's powerful stakeholders, with very few exceptions, seem to enjoy immunity from punishment. The scramble for the control over oil resources has already started and the ability of the regime to set rules for managing potential wealth redistribution is being questioned even before actual production has started.

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