

POLITICAL PARTIES IN A ‘NO-PARTY DEMOCRACY’

Hegemony and Opposition Under ‘Movement Democracy’ in Uganda*

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-1980s, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) established in Uganda what it claimed was a new type of electoral politics, which soon came to be known as ‘movement’ or ‘no-party’ democracy. While party activities became subject to strict limitations, the NRM tried not to exacerbate political opposition by letting parties ‘exist’ as independent entities. Thus, in what is best conceived as a hegemonic system, minor political organizations are allowed a minimal presence so long as they do not constitute an effective challenge to the ruling Movement organization. This article investigates empirically the state of Uganda’s historical political parties – the Uganda People’s Congress and the Democratic Party – and shows that the specific organizational forms and strategies that the two parties have adopted are a direct response to the no-party framework and the hegemonic context.

KEY WORDS ■ Africa ■ party system institutionalization ■ Uganda

Introduction

In January 1986, Yoweri Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM) finally took power in Uganda and formally established what it claimed was a new type of democracy, which soon came to be known as ‘movement’ or ‘no-party’ democracy. During a five-year civil war aimed at ousting President Milton Obote, Museveni had restored community-level political participation in the areas under NRM control. With the end of the war, the holding of local elections was extended to the whole country and regularized, soon becoming the platform for an indirectly elected national

legislature. Then, direct elections for a Constituent Assembly took place in 1994 and, under the new constitution, presidential and parliamentary elections followed in 1996 and, again, in 2001.

The foundation of Uganda's 'no-party democracy' is the principle of what is called 'individual-merit politics'. The latter was articulated by the NRM leadership as a reaction to a post-independence history of sectarian and ethnically based political parties, the alleged cause of sequential patterns of ethnic exclusion, political violence and chronic instability. After the country's independence in 1962, multiparty politics had only lasted a few years before Obote made his Uganda People's Congress (UPC) the only party allowed. General Idi Amin's military coup, in 1971, ushered in a violent and infamous dictatorship which protracted the practice of ethnic and religious exclusion. When Obote and the UPC were returned to power in 1980, political competition again turned violent, and an allegedly rigged election sparked the NRM's armed rebellion. On the grounds that parties inherently tend to exacerbate communal competition, the 'individual-merit' reform of 1986 aimed at transforming politics – and notably elections – into a game played by individuals only, rather than by political organizations. Thus, parties were 'banned' (or, in fact, marginalized) and all Ugandans were declared members of an overarching (if loosely structured) 'Movement'.¹ While party activities became subject to strict limitations prohibiting delegates' conferences, public rallies, local branches and the sponsoring of candidates for election, the NRM tried not to exacerbate political opposition by letting parties 'exist' as independent entities (for example, they are allowed to maintain a central office). Thus, since the early 1990s, politicians, public discourse and the country itself have been increasingly divided between 'movementists' and 'multipartists'.

While parties are hereafter conceived as organized political groups whose aim is to place and retain representatives in legislative and executive positions (Janda, 1970: 83), Mainwaring and Scully note that a group 'that *would* present candidates for public office, but is unable to do so either because it is proscribed or because elections are not being held, is also a party' (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995: 2). Accordingly, this article aims at identifying the strategies and organizational forms pursued by Uganda's two 'historical' political parties – namely, the Democratic Party (DP) and the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) – as a response to the no-party set-up. Before presenting an empirical account of the country's two main opposition forces, the next section examines the broader political setting in which the latter operate.

A Hegemonic Party System

The political landscape in late-1990s Uganda has been interpreted in different ways, notably with regard to the actual room permitted for

organized opposition. Some observers have suggested that the NRM has 'permitted a de facto, though unacknowledged, form of party competition to become the basis for the actual practice of Ugandan electoral democracy' (Kasfir, 1998: 58). The claim is that, in spite of the formal limitations on party organizations, the country 'in reality operates more or less as a three-party system, with the NRM increasingly taking on most of the characteristics of the other parties' (Ssenkumba, 1998: 179), i.e. the DP and the UPC. But opposite interpretations have been advanced as well, propounding, for example, that 'it is difficult to see the role of [the arrangements introduced by the 1997 *Movement Act*] . . . except as a form of partisan party structure normally associated with one-party states' (Human Rights Watch, 1999: 58); indeed, that 'the "new" Movement . . . is simply a state-supported political organization – a single-party in all but name' (Oloka-Onyango, 2000: 55).

While both these interpretations have elements of truth, Uganda's political system, as it is currently working, is best conceptualized as something closer to a hegemonic party-state system. That is, it is neither a fully-fledged one-party state (or a situation of political monopoly) nor a three-party system (a pluralist political context), but a situation of political supremacy exercised by a single organization, with smaller opposition groups not able, so far, to put up any significant challenge. The evidence is persuasive that the Movement is a political partisan organization driven by the aim of placing its people in positions of power, rather than, as its leaders claim, a political 'system' (i.e. a set of governmental institutions and relationships, including the terms of participation and competition to access such institutions).

If party systems are defined as 'the set of patterned interactions in the competition among parties' (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995: 4), a key discriminatory criterion concerns the actual degree of competition that characterizes such interactions. Sartori provides the best synthetic description of the features displayed by hegemonic party systems. Such systems belong to a:

variety of arrangements that are *one-party centered* and yet display a periphery of secondary and indeed 'second class' minor parties. . . . [The latter] may be an empty façade . . . [or else] may be relevant in some substantive respect. . . . The pattern can be described as follows. The hegemonic party neither allows for a formal nor a de facto competition for power. Other parties are permitted to exist, but as second class, licensed parties; for they are not permitted to compete with the hegemonic party in antagonistic terms and on an equal basis. Not only does alternation not occur in fact; it *cannot* occur, since the possibility of a rotation in power is not even envisaged. . . . No real sanction commits the hegemonic party to responsiveness. Whatever its policy, its domination cannot be challenged. . . . A hegemonic party system is definitely not a multiparty system, but is, at best, a *two-level system* in which one party tolerates and discretionally allocates a fraction of its power to subordinate political groups.

(Sartori, 1976: 230–1)

The Freedom House prefers the term 'dominant party', rather than 'hegemonic', to describe 'systems in which the ruling party (or front) dominates government, but allows other parties to organize or compete short of taking control of the government' (quoted in Simkins, 1999: 50). Ultimately, however, hegemonic and dominant party systems are best understood as analytically different categories, where the first indicates a non-competitive regime, while the second points to settings where at least some meaningful competition may occur (Sartori, 1976: 283). Yet, the dynamism and fluidity of many dominant-party and hegemonic-party polities tend to blur the distinction from an empirical point of view. For both systems, in addition, the governing organizations' 'political survival is to a large degree due to the fact that even prior to the founding election they had staked a strong claim to represent the new nation (or regime, or dominant racial/ethnic group) with its particular historic project, and had managed to occupy a strategic position of power' (Giliomee and Simkins, 1999: 2). In particular, the instrumental role of no-party elections in securing the Movement's hegemony in Uganda compares strikingly with the emergence of dominant-party systems in Mexico, Taiwan, Malaysia and South Africa. In the latter countries, initial decisions concerning the kind of electoral system and competition had a profound impact on the nature of the emerging ruling group and on its control over its own members and over the oppositions and the society at large (Giliomee and Simkins, 1999: 13). In Uganda, the 'individual-merit' elections granted a degree of legitimacy to the system, while also enabling the Movement to co-opt a largely fragmented opposition.

In spite of the dynamism of the country's political-institutional arrangements, the current hegemonic status of the Movement derives from two enduring factors. First, there is the very absence of any seriously organized competitor, i.e. the atomization of the opposition that the principle of individual merit generates. Second, the Movement can count on a privileged relationship with the state, which further reinforces its advantage over all other political organizations in terms, for example, of access to patronage resources or opportunities to manipulate the opposition. The Movement can thus combine political hegemony with organizational fragility. The effectiveness that it retains in spite of a legacy of limited attention to internal organization is the result of exogenous factors, rather than a reflection of the Movement's own organizational strength. In other words, it is strictly a *relative* or contextual effectiveness.

The no-party regulations enabled the Movement to establish its political hegemony with a minimal organizational effort. In coping with this unfavourable political environment and in devising the possible responses to it, what were the factors that affected the strategies of opposition parties?

Organizational Strategies of Opposition Parties

Along with the legal or institutional restrictions currently in place, *strategic choices* also help to explain the kind of organization that opposition parties have been relying upon over the NRM years. Three broad options were available to existing opposition parties: integration, boycott and violence. Integration would provide the opportunity of working from within core institutions (whether at the central or local level), either with the aim of pushing for change or merely of monitoring the working of such institutions in the most effective manner. This strategy, however, would also favour the government's attempt to co-opt its opponents and lend some legitimacy to a regime to which multipartists were ideologically averse. A cohesive boycott, by contrast, would put political and moral pressure on the legitimacy-seeking efforts of a government that claimed to be democratic, participatory and 'broad-based'. The drawback was to renounce any constructive input to the governmental process and, possibly, to be left with an even worse and unreformed system. The third alternative was that of an armed reaction, following the NRM's own example. The rebel movements that have ravaged parts of the country in recent years demonstrated the incapacity of the regime to close the door to military challenges. But the regime's strong economic performance and popular exhaustion at the prospect of renewed civil conflicts may have proved a difficult hurdle in organizing a guerrilla struggle against the regime.

In addition to the legal restrictions in place and the strategic options available, *non-institutional factors* also influenced political parties in choosing and developing their organizational strategies. Such elements included the legacy of past conflicts, the availability of international and popular support, the resource gap between Kampala and the rest of the country, the sheer benefits of 'joining in', and the changing disposition of the Movement to co-opt, co-operate or negotiate with opposition groups. The uncompromising attitudes that oppose former President Milton Obote's UPC to the NRM, for example, are the result of the civil war of the mid-1980s that condemned Obote to exile.

Given the background of constraints and options briefly sketched, what have been the actual *organizational* forms and strategies adopted by the Democratic Party and the Uganda People's Congress in trying to retain influence and gain power? The remainder of this article is devoted to answering this question. The degree of organization of political parties is defined as 'the extent of regularised procedures for mobilising and co-ordinating the efforts of party supporters in executing the party's strategy and tactics' (Janda, 1970: 106). The empirical account of the state of the DP and the UPC focuses on each party's central organizational bodies, parliamentary group, local branches, special organizations (for the youth, women, etc.), membership size, effective written rules, maintenance of records, funding, party media, internal institutionalized groupings and external affiliation to/alliance with other organizations.

Continuity and Lack of Formalization in the Democratic Party

The Democratic Party was formed between 1954 and 1956 to oppose the prospect of another Protestant becoming *katikiro* (the prime minister of the Buganda kingdom of central Uganda). The party aimed at a general re-balance in the appointment of chiefs, on the ground that Catholics were a relative majority in the country, while Protestants were consistently over-represented in public offices. In this sense, the DP was thus 'a *Christian Democratic Party* . . . almost exclusively Roman Catholic in origin, inspiration and membership' (Low, 1962: 22–3). From the outset, the party raised a large following in areas that would guarantee the bulk of its support for decades to come, notably Buganda in the south and the northern districts where the Verona Fathers operated (West Nile, Acholi and Lango) (Apter, 1961/1997: 342). Yet, despite a short pre-independence spell in 1961 – when the party leader, Benedicto Kiwanuka, became prime minister – the DP had remained an opposition force from 1962 up to the mid-1980s.

With the co-optation of some prominent party members in Museveni's no-party 'broad based government', the Democratic Party became a *de facto* ally of the NRM in its first years in power. Since the late 1980s, however, a gradual but steady reduction in the number of DP ministers became evident, and, at the beginning of the 1990s, the party began to insist on ending the interim period with a complete lifting of the ban on party activities. The constitution-making process, which saw the no-party system inscribed in the 1995 constitution, prompted a complete U-turn by the DP leadership. First, the party leader, Paul Ssemogerere, who had been a minister up to the previous year, challenged Yoweri Museveni on a pro-multipartism platform in the 1996 presidential election. Then the party decided to boycott the subsequent parliamentary election – on the ground of rigging on the part of the Movement – and shifted to an extra-parliamentary opposition.

After the 1996 boycott, a so-called 'rejuvenation-of-the-party' scheme was planned and partly implemented by means of a youth wing, of an ancillary NGO, and of what may be termed the politics of *kakuyege* as discussed below. It is through these three elements that the DP, in spite of its fragility, has been showing a relative liveliness and a certain unity of purpose.

Central Organs and Party Membership

Despite having an extremely weak – at times and places a hardly detectable – presence, the DP in recent years has been the most prominent and organized political force in Uganda, barring the Movement. But what does the Democratic Party amount to, today? In tangible terms, it has a poorly furnished and severely underfunded office in central Kampala, a well-known

party leadership and thousands of supporters in the capital. In addition, the party has a largely inactive up-country membership – whether formally affiliated or only quietly supportive – which is scantily informed and often hardly interactive with the central organs.

The party headquarters and its inner bodies have succeeded in maintaining a tenuous organizational continuity, but they suffer from an extreme lack of resources, and meetings are irregular. The last Delegates' Conference was convened in 1980, when Ssemogerere was elected party leader. In the absence of a full-fledged conference, it is mainly through smaller organs such as the National Executive (meeting roughly every one-to-three months) and the National Council (never more than twice a year) that the party retains a degree of internal coherence and effectiveness.

Such semi-effective party activities, however, do not extend much beyond the headquarters. While aspiring members still have to go through an informal procedural screening 'to make sure they have good intentions',² a registration exercise planned for early-1999 was not carried out because of both the disorganization of the party and the general anti-party climate. As a result, aside from the central organs, a low degree of formalization permeates what is left of party activities. In part, this reflects the weak institutionalization and the marked reliance on individual leaders that are common to African parties even where conditions of political freedom prevail. In Uganda's case, however, the low formalization of party activities is brought to the extreme by the need to keep them undercover, by the decline over time of party structures, by the recourse to surrogate forms of political action and by the sheer lack of funding.

Branches and the Informal Politics of *kakuyege*

The low formalization of DP politics is most evident in what party officials refer to as 'doing *kakuyege*'. The word *kakuyege* is a diminutive form for the Luganda *nkuyege*, meaning 'termites'. In Museveni's words, '*enkuyege* are very small ants which operate in huge numbers. Once they invade an area, they are able to cover a large piece of ground, penetrating through every crevice in the grass' (1997: 211). The politics of *kakuyege* is therefore made of 'quiet work, like that of the termites: nobody notices it, but the job gets done'.³ *Kakuyege* is the secret politics of furtive individual contacts and the shrewd use of any social occasion – e.g. a funeral or a seminar – as an opportunity to meet members and followers. The aim is to keep active the party's 'silent' membership by building a fragile and intermittent underground network to link the top leadership with the grassroots, Kampala with the countryside. *Kakuyege* is both a complement to and a substitute for more orthodox, formalized, open and official politicking:

[P]arty organs are all run down, they are still down. None of them is functioning except the National Executive. The rest is *kakuyege*! . . .

Right now you can't say we have branches. But we have structures, people who are there and operate the way I said, through *kakuyege*, not openly.⁴

While parties are allowed to maintain a central office with leadership organs, local branches are in fact prohibited. Thus, if activities in Kampala are relatively easy to carry out as well as being more open and more frequent, it is at the local level that the party has to face the toughest resistance of a government which, far from the direct attention of foreign missions and backed by illiberal legislation, clamps down on the moves of party activists and followers. A long period of scant operation and recruitment, the repression at the hands of Resident District Commissioners and other local authorities, defection to the Movement, and lack of funding have produced a situation where, in several areas, the DP no longer has full-fledged branches but only individual adherents. Variations among districts do occur; however, due to different traditions of territorial presence of the party, the whims of local authorities and the capacity of local party leaders.

Party Surrogates: the Foundation for African Development and the Uganda Young Democrats

The porous definition of inter-organizational boundaries and the mixing up of roles is another sign of the largely informal character of party arrangements. This is best illustrated by the skilful use of the Foundation for African Development (FAD), a formally-independent NGO that was created by prominent DP leaders in 1980.

The relationship between the DP and FAD is a politico-financial one: while FAD is politically dependent upon the DP, financially it is largely the other way round. Most of the little funding that goes into the party coffers comes from domestic donations, with some foreign sponsors (including the Westminster Foundation and the British Labour Party) occasionally providing resources for conferences and seminars. But the substantial budget of FAD (roughly \$200,000 a year, entirely provided by the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation) is used, in significant part, to the benefit of DP activities. Party cadres, for example, are systematically invited to development workshops and political seminars organized by FAD, and they receive free copies of its *The Messenger* periodical and other written material on political issues. With the seminars, for instance:

we make sure that some of our members are invited, though not exclusively. Of 50 people that are invited on average, 2/3 might be party members. . . . We are very selective in recruiting presenters, to make sure that the message gets across.⁵

Seminar meetings have been so skilfully used as to become a surrogate – a weak surrogate, but an important one under existing circumstances – for

party branch activities. This reflects the elementary idea that 'when you don't have the branches to do the job, you need something else in place to do it! As a matter of fact, FAD has always organized seminars to call and gather party members'.⁶

A further component of the DP's 'rejuvenation project' was the creation of the Uganda Young Democrats (UYD), in 1995, 'to by-pass government restrictions and harassment'.⁷ The young democrats claim over 50,000 affiliates, with concentration peaks where the party itself is stronger (in Kampala, Gulu, Arua and Mbarara, for example). The radicalism and energy of the youth wing made it a key element in the broader attempt to revive the party. To preserve its dynamism under existing restrictions, the autonomy of the UYD goes some way beyond a formally semi-autonomous status, and the capacity to reach the populace that the DP retains – especially for 'quick electoral mobilization' – has depended in significant part on the activism of the youth wing.

The *kakuyege* strategy, the help of the Foundation for African Development, and the activism of the Uganda Young Democrats are the distinctive ways in which the Democratic Party has addressed the issue of surviving, acting in a co-ordinated manner, and playing an opposition role in Movement times.

Conflicts Over the 'Method of Work' in the Uganda People's Congress

The Uganda People's Congress was formed by the charismatic Milton Apolo Obote in March 1960 by merging his wing of the Uganda National Congress with the Uganda People's Union. The UPC rapidly took centre stage in the politics of independent Uganda. The party was a key antagonist in both cleavages that were shaping the country's politics. It 'was specifically an anti-Buganda party right from its inception and this was to remain throughout its history' (Karugire, 1988: 36), but it also took up a political identity as an anti-Catholic coalition, dominated by a Protestant leadership as well as based on Protestant associations. After the country's independence in 1962, the UPC ruled Uganda for nine years, until Idi Amin's military coup in 1971. It then took over power again between 1980 and 1985, when Obote was eventually ousted in the course of the civil war waged by Museveni's rebels.

When the NRM regime was established, the UPC denounced it as illegitimate and illegal, claiming that the party would not take part in coercively imposed and self-serving structures:

[Y]ou cannot say we are boycotting parliament, as, in fact, there is no room for parties to participate. And we could not swear allegiance to the NRM – which everybody is required to do before taking office – as a UPC member cannot swear allegiance to another political organization!⁸

Legal restrictions and internal political developments have combined to make the organizational set-up of the Uganda People's Congress quite intricate. The formal structures prescribed by the party constitution have been turned upside down as a result of several developments, including the divisions within the national leadership, the creation of several extra-constitutional organs, the accession to parliament of some influential party members, and the fact that Obote, the party leader, has remained in exile in Lusaka, Zambia.

The initial boycott strategy proved to be internally divisive. A group of younger leaders led by Cecilia Ogwal, the acting Secretary General and party leader in Kampala, increasingly clashed with the passive resistance policy followed by the old guard.⁹ The latter's resistance to participating in any of the new institutions reflected the party's long history of uncompromising and confrontational politics, shaped by such conflictual events as the 1966 Buganda crisis or the contentious election of 1980. The fact that the Congress was ousted from power as a result of the guerrilla war waged by the NRM, in particular, made the new ruling group unpalatable to most UPC leaders and activists.

Ogwal's group asked for a more pragmatic strategy or 'method of work' and, in doing so, questioned Obote's executive leadership and external control over the party. Ogwal and other UPC members had decided to run for the 1994 Constituent Assembly, to co-ordinate with other multiparty delegates through a regular caucus and to support Ssemogerere's 1996 presidential bid. All this represented a challenge to Obote's control over the party. After reluctantly conceding the UPC's participation in the presidential race, the party leader welcomed allegations of electoral rigging by the NRM and pushed hard for the party to pull out of the subsequent parliamentary contest. This precipitated the split. Ogwal and her followers challenged the party leader's decision to boycott the election, and they gathered the National Task Force to endorse a new Interim Executive Council.

'Improvisation' of ad hoc Party Organs

While the notion of 'rejuvenating' party structures is recurrent in DP language, UPC leaders frequently talk of 'improvisation', meaning that, in a restrictive context, the rigidities of the party statute have continuously required by-passing through the creation of ad hoc organs. Less officially, however, the term hides the party's need to adapt its structures to two key internal developments: Obote's absence from the country and the subsequent split of the party.

Obote himself started the whole process of 'improvising' new arrangements. Under pressure to appoint a new vice-president after Paulo Mwanga's death in 1991, he came up with the idea of a Presidential Policy Commission (PPC), i.e. a provisional executive that in theory and in name

allowed him to retain full control over the party. The commission was convened roughly 10 times a year between 1994 and 1999, with a peak of 21 meetings in the eventful year 1996. The 'improvisation' of extra-constitutional organs thus started well before the divide – the term is actually used by both factions – but, after the split, the process went even further. The National Task Force, set up in 1995 as a provisional structure in view of forthcoming elections, one year later became the permanent district representative body for Ogwal's faction, and was instrumental in legitimizing an Interim Executive Council. The following year, Obote's mainstream UPC replied by gathering district delegates in a Party Representatives Council.

State of the Branches

An attempt to revive the party's local branches apparently took place between 1991 and 1993, when veteran party members tried to reorganize local-level organs by holding internal elections and setting up ad hoc committees.¹⁰ But the relative momentum was soon followed by a slowdown in the party revival,¹¹ which was further affected, a couple of years later, by the impact of leadership rows upon lower organs. Yet, the general weakness of party branches contributed to minimizing the diffusion and impact among the grassroots of divisions at the centre: 'at the grass-roots level, there is no knowledge of this split. People have heard about it, but they haven't followed them'.¹² Only in a limited number of cases, such as in Mukono district, did the two factions try to share local members by duplicating party structures.

The presence of party local organs partly varies from region to region and even from district to district, but they are generally described as 'dormant' or 'in dead silence', 'non-formal' or 'occasional'. Since at least 1996, there are:

no organized groups . . . party members do meet and consult occasionally, but only in very small groups, not in large numbers. There are no regular contacts with local members, no reporting on a regular basis between them and us. It's a casual thing.¹³

Membership and Funding

The state of party membership does not differ much from that of the branches in that it is entirely informal. At present, party supporters can only show an old party membership card or merely claim to be UPC. Not even this is very frequent, given the commonly held idea that selling cards is illegal and the harassment that is likely to affect those exposed as UPC.

The absence of membership subscriptions has obvious implications for

party funding, which, aside from occasional private contributions, came to depend entirely upon the Milton Obote Foundation. As Ogwal puts it, the budget is 'flexible' and 'task-targeted',¹⁴ and – except during the 1996 electoral campaigns, when more substantial contributions were made – it does not cover much more than administrative expenditures.

Requests for foreign assistance have been systematically turned down. This may have more to do with the UPC's controversial past than with the legal prohibitions. In fact, the DP does get more or less direct assistance from external institutions. As the director of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation put it, UPC,

used to be our natural, logical partner up to 1984. But we took very seriously what happened under Obote in the early 1980s: that killed our potential co-operation. As long as Obote is there, there is no room whatsoever for us to work with them . . .¹⁵

The tarnished image of the party also increased the practical difficulties of organizing certain activities:

[W]e haven't organized seminars. It's the DP that does it, through their foundation. . . . You can't expect the Milton Obote Foundation to organize a seminar anywhere in the country: it's seen as too close to the party. . . . But, anyway, we didn't even try. . . . We just keep a low profile. You see, I think the government is willing to allow some activities of DP, but not of UPC. Actually, I believe they might even allow them any activities if we were not around.¹⁶

The pattern of discriminating treatment of opposition forces on the part of the authorities partly explains the strategic and organizational differences between the UPC and the DP. The Democrats, as pointed out, managed to surrogate their parliamentary role by developing access to alternative forums and opportunities for giving voice to the opposition (e.g. the activities of the youth wing and of FAD). The latter options were not available to the UPC (e.g. a much weaker Youth Congress was only launched in 1998). This contributed to the decision, on the part of a wing of the party, to go to parliament as well as to make use of 'external bureaux' (probably a few members with access to an on-line computer) in places such as Toronto, Nairobi or London.

Fragile Survival of Organized Oppositions

Comparative democratization studies have repeatedly stressed the importance, for the consolidation of democratic reforms, of political parties and party systems. The fragile democratic experiments that took place on the African continent in the 1990s are no exception: the political institutionalization of parties and party systems are in practice – if not in principle – a necessary component of any successful democratization process (cf. Bratton and van de Walle, 1997: 251; and Diamond, 1999: 71). In

particular, as Kuenzi and Lambright note, 'renewed party activity is a precursor, albeit an early one, to an institutionalised party system' (2001: 463). The individual-merit principle and the anti-party legislation currently in place in Uganda cannot but hinder the emergence of strong parties and an effectively institutionalized party system, and a loose organizational set-up is thus enough for the Movement to project its hegemony on the country's politics. The empirical investigation of the state of opposition parties confirms that, in spite of the continued existence of party traditions as political identities for many Ugandans, the Democratic Party and the Uganda People's Congress have been hit by the legal sanctions that limit their activities and have thus been prevented from strengthening their organizations. The organizations of both parties are critically run-down and, at best, characterized by improvisation and low formalization. Funding is limited and extremely precarious, and it is virtually only at the level of the core executives that party meetings retain some kind of regularity. Formal membership and local branches are largely notions belonging to the past. The UPC and the DP have not been allowed to take root among the citizenry, to re-gain full legitimacy, and to strengthen their organizational arrangements.¹⁷

Both parties, on the other hand, managed to respond to existing constraints by adapting their weak organizations to ensure their own political and institutional survival. The government's tough clampdown on UPC activities, for example, prompted the most progressive part of the Congress to challenge the 'method of work' that Obote had laid down and enter parliament. This was meant to provide a safer way of having their voices heard and of protecting, rather than exposing to repression, local party members. The decision to enter parliament, however, caused a rupture at the top of the party. The DP, by contrast, capitalized on the legacy of a largely co-operative and non-conflictual relationship with the NRM, and enjoyed the advantage of a relatively softer control by the government. The party was thus able to use its youth organization and the Foundation for African Development to keep a weak organization alive. These strategies and internal rearrangements allowed the UPC and the DP to strike a fragile balance between disputing the legitimacy of the regime and rejecting the most extreme ways of doing this, notably 'going to the bush' for an armed struggle against the regime. The country's political stability was thus preserved, while the existing system was left unable to secure an undisputed legitimacy.

In March 2001, Yoweri Museveni won a second mandate in a contentious presidential election. In spite of his 69.3 percent majority, the election was hard fought. The candidate trying to unseat the president, however, was not a representative of the historical political parties, which, as pointed out, are marginal organizations in the current hegemonic system. Instead, the challenge emerged from within Museveni's own organization. It was Colonel Kizza Besigye, a former friend of Museveni's and his medical doctor during the bush days, who mounted a very personal campaign against the president.

While Besigye belonged to the Movement camp and portrayed himself as a reformer operating from within the ruling group, he had long distanced himself from the most controversial aspects of the regime, notably the increasingly disturbing levels of corruption and nepotism. Unsurprisingly, the Movement *de facto* endorsed Museveni's candidature. But Besigye could still count on his Ankole origins (to attract votes in the south-west, the president's home area) and on the DP's and the UPC's informal support (to appeal to voters in Buganda and in the north). He also hoped that the remaining four opposition candidates would erode Museveni's support within their specific local constituencies. The possibility of a run-off was taken seriously by many.

An electoral campaign marked by multiple episodes of intimidation and violence, however, helped Museveni be re-elected with no need for a second round. With almost 70 percent of the vote, he was down only 5 percent from his tally in 1996, while Besigye, the main victim of government-orchestrated harassment, only took 28 percent. In the problematic effort to gauge the effects of violence and electoral malpractice, some election observers have estimated that around 10 percent of the president's vote might have derived from the improper conduct of the contest.¹⁸ This reflects the common perception that Museveni still enjoys significant support among Ugandan voters, and that he probably did not need to run such a contentious campaign to win. Adding to the military operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to the bickering with Rwanda, the presidential election seriously tarnished the image of the president, both in the region and among Western donors. The subsequent campaign for the June 2001 parliamentary election only made things worse. Museveni's systematic effort to support 'Movement candidates' was complemented by the over-zealous and illegal interventions of Movement structures, local authorities and security forces. There were numerous episodes of violence (notably in the south-western town of Mbarara and in Mbale, in the east of the country) in which some 15–30 people lost their lives. Election day itself was marred by several cases of alleged malpractice. As for the results of the election, the large number of first-time parliamentarians, combined with the absence of explicit party labels, does not allow for a clear-cut assessment of the aggregate outcome. The president reportedly counted some 230 pro-Movement MPs in the 292-member assembly.¹⁹ If this is the case, the new parliament includes around 60 MPs who are either multipartists or independents – probably twice as many as they were in the previous legislature.²⁰

The 2001 elections were formally held on a no-party basis. Yet, 'Movement democracy' seems unlikely to progress further towards institutionalization. As soon as the elections were over, the debate on whether multipartism should be introduced took off again. Jaberu Bidandi-Ssali, one of the Movement's most influential leaders, declared that he could not see a reason why the 'individual-merit' principle should be adopted again in 2006.²¹ Western donors said they saw no difference between the election

campaign mounted by the Movement and that of a fully-fledged political party.²² Uganda's political-institutional system, which has been fluid and dynamic since Museveni took over in 1986, may soon experience further crucial changes.

Notes

* The article draws on semi-structured interviews with Ugandan MPs and party representatives compiled in April–July 1999 and May–July 2000. The research was made possible thanks to funding from the London School of Economics, the Università degli Studi di Milano and the Central Research Fund of the University of London.

- 1 When Museveni took over power, the National Resistance Council – the main political body of the NRM – was installed as a provisional parliament and immediately issued *Legal Notice No. 1/1986*, banning party activities. With the 1995 Constitution, which constitutionalized the restrictions on political parties, the NRM was renamed 'the Movement'. As Pasquino observes: the 'movement' label is often adopted in reaction to party politics, and 'implies the non-institutionalization of an idea, a group, an activity . . . [Political movements] aim at criticizing all party organizations and stress their only partial involvement into institutionalized political life' (1990: 660–1).
- 2 Damiano Lubega, Organizing Secretary of the DP, interview (Kampala, 19 May 1999). The need to be more attentive to the intentions of prospective members was mainly prompted by the frequent public 'conversions' of alleged multiparty activists to the Movement. Such conversions are either used to attract the attention and the favour of the ruling group or they are employed as propaganda tools by the Movement itself (see, for example, 'Multipartists defect to Movement', in *New Vision*, Kampala, 8 May 2000).
- 3 Maria Mutagamba, Deputy Secretary General of the DP, interview (Kampala, 4 June 1999).
- 4 Mutagamba, interview (Kampala, 4 June 1999).
- 5 Lubega, interview (Kampala, 19 May 1999).
- 6 Robert Kitariko, former General Secretary of the DP, interview (Kampala, 13 May 1999).
- 7 Leander Komakech, President of UYD, interview (Kampala, 19 May 1999).
- 8 James Rwanyarare, chairman of the UPC Presidential Policy Commission, interview (Kampala, 5 May 1999).
- 9 Ben Wacha and Patrick Mwondha are prominent members of Cecilia Ogwal's faction, while Sam Odaka, James Rwanyarare, Badru Wegulo and Patrick Rubaihayo belong to Milton Obote's. The following extract is suggestive of the aging character of the latter group: 'the vice-chairman (of the PPC) shall be elected from among the Youth in the PPC. For this purpose only, *Youth is someone under 45 years*' (A. Milton Obote, *Message to the Presidential Policy Commission*, Lusaka, 9 June 2000, p. 13, emphasis added).
- 10 Patrick Mwondha, Secretary of the UPC Interim Executive Council (Ogwal faction), interview (Kampala, 22 June 1999).
- 11 *Weekly Topic* (Kampala, 28 May and 13 August 1993).

- 12 Mustafa Masaba, representative of Obote's UPC in Mukono, interview (Kampala, 28 June 1999).
- 13 Edward Ochwo, UPC Chief Administrative Secretary, interview (Kampala, 3 May 1999).
- 14 Cecilia Ogwal, chairperson of the UPC Interim Executive Council, interview (Kampala, 7 June 1999).
- 15 Hajo Lanz, head of Friedrich Ebert Foundation, interview (Kampala, 17 May 1999).
- 16 Patrick Rubaihayo, member of the UPC Presidential Policy Commission, interview (Kampala, 12 June 1999).
- 17 Mainwaring (1998: 70) adopts the stability of the patterns of inter-party competition, the social rootedness, the legitimacy and the degree of organization of political parties as indicators of party system institutionalization. Cf. Kuenzi and Lambright (2001).
- 18 BBC, website article, 14 March 2001. The majority of election observers have been relatively lenient in their condemnation of unlawful interventions in the election process, deeming the latter non-decisive with respect to the outcome of the election. The European Union, for example, claimed awareness of rigging, violence and intimidation in a few districts, but it declared the presidential election to be 'peaceful and ordered' and merely invited the government to ensure a better conduct of the subsequent parliamentary election. *Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the presidential elections in Uganda*, EU website, 21 March 2001.
- 19 *New Vision*, 29 June 2001.
- 20 According to the *Economist Intelligence Unit*, at least 35 multipartists made it to parliament (quoted by the UN *Integrated Regional Information Network*, website article, 28 July 2001). The Movementists suffered important defeats in urban centres, where President Museveni explicitly campaigned against prominent multipartists or independents. Cecilia Ogwal of the UPC, for example, again won her Lira constituency, Ken Lukyamuzi of the Conservative Party and Michael Mabikke of the DP gained their seats in Kampala, and critical Movementist Winnie Byanyima was re-elected in Mbarara.
- 21 *New Vision*, 29 June 2001.
- 22 The Danish Ambassador to Uganda, chairman of the Post-Referendum Support Group formed by Uganda's main foreign donors (quoted in *New Vision*, 1 July 2001).

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